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Gilt-leather wall hangings that have been identified in Venice are identical to those that adorn the interiors of Wawel Royal Castle in Kraków (Cracow)

ABSTRACT

Research carried out on the important collection of gilt-leather wall hangings at Wawel Royal Castle leaves a key matter unsolved, namely the exact provenance of the articles. In spite of the practice of repeating designs in works in this branch of craftsmanship, attempts thus far to find analogous pieces in Italy had not garnered positive results. A few indications in primary sources point to a large centre of gilt leather production – Venice. The main subject of this article is the presentation of identical gilt-leather articles that have been found in Venice, a factor which can be taken as proof of the Venetian provenance of the Kraków collection. The essay provides additional arguments supporting this thesis, citing analogous and characteristic features of the gilt-leather wall hangings in Wawel Castle and Venetian collections.

KEYWORDS: Gilt leather, cordovan, wall hangings, wall coverings, Venice, Palace (Palazzo) Vendramin Calergi (Non

nobis Domine), Museum Correr (Museo Correr),
Wawel Royal Castle in Kraków, interior decoration

STRESZCZENIE

Odnalezione w Wenecji złożone obicia ścienne identyczne ze zdobiaczami wnętrza Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu w Krakowie

W badaniach znacznego zespołu złożonych skórzanych obić ściennych, zdobiącego barokowe wnętrza Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu, podstawową kwestią do ustalenia nadal pozostaje miejsce jego wytworzenia. Dotychczasowe próby znalezienia analogicznych obiektów na terenie Włoch, pomimo powtarzalności tych dzieł rzemiosła artystycznego, nie przyniosły pozytywnych rezultatów. Nieliczne wskazówki w materiale źródłowym wskazywałyby na duże centrum wyrobu złożonych skór – Wenecję. Głównym tematem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie identycznych kurdybanów odnalezionych w Wenecji, co można uznać za dowód pochodzenia omawianej kolekcji z miasta na lagunie. W artykule podano dodatkowe argumenty za tą hipotezą, przytaczając cechy analogiczne i charakterystyczne dla złożonych tapet w zamku wawelskim i w zbiorach weneckich.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Złożone skóry, kurdyban, obicia ścienne, Wenecja, Pałac Vendramin Calergi (Non nobis Domine), Muzeum Correr, Zamek Królewski na Wawelu w Krakowie, wyposażenie wnętrza

Gilt upholstery, which is made of decorated leather, is a commodity that attained a high artistic value, and historically it was most often used to adorn walls and furniture. The production of such material requires finesse and varied skills. The hides (calf, goat or sheep) first undergo the process of vegetable tanning, before being covered with silver leaf, and they are duly coated with a layer of yellow lacquer, which gives the semblance of gold. Patterns are then painted onto the surface of the material, using both opaque paint and glazes. Regarding the treatment of the surface, two types can be distinguished: embossed or flat. The latter articles are enriched by being decorated with punches of various forms, thus attaining the quality of chiaroscuro. Owing to the application of multilayer techniques and suitable materials, the impression of deep and luminous

colour is achieved, and these colours are likewise variable, depending on the intensity of light. In Poland, gilt leather is also referred to as *kurdyban* (from the city of Cordoba, which was famed for the high quality of its leather goods), a word that is likewise used in Polish academic literature. However, in most languages, the preferred name typically pertains to the essential characteristics of the articles, such as the golden lustre. Thus, aside from the English name gilt leather, one finds *Goldledertapeten* (Ger.), *cuoio d'oro* (It.), and *cuir doré* (Fr.).

A broader definition of gilt upholstery was provided on account of the existence at Wawel Royal Castle of an exceptional collection, which constitutes the largest in Poland.¹ These historic examples were created during the Baroque era, in the 1720s, following a commission by Augustus II the Strong, scion of the House of Wettin, who was both king of Poland and elector of Saxony. The products were initially intended to adorn Moritzburg Castle, near Dresden.² They were only acquired by the Wawel residence indirectly, during the 1930s, in connection with the restoration and refurbishment of the edifice. This undertaking was carried out owing to the devastation that had befallen the castle during the partitions era, when the historic Polish lands were divided between Prussia, Russia and Austria.³ As it was, Wawel Castle served as an Austrian barracks for part of the 19th century. The gilt-leather wall hangings were ultimately mounted in the chambers that had been overhauled by Sigismund III Vasa, thus complementing the rooms' historic Baroque decoration. The Wawel interiors are adorned by wall hangings with a flat surface, with ornamental decoration, representing 6 of the 12 patterns (likewise small parts of the seventh) which were originally installed in Moritzburg three centuries ago.⁴

There is an additional reason why this subject is so interesting, for the historical technique of making gilt upholstery was revived in 20th-century

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- 1 O. Sieradzka-Malec, *Gilt Leather at the Wawel Castle: an Overview* [in:] *Parchment and leather heritage. Conservation – Restoration*, Toruń 2012, pp. 125-136; expanded version: O. Sieradzka-Malec, *Kurdybany wawelskie w świetle międzywojennych archiwaliów. Zarys problematyki*, „Studia Waweliana”, XV, 2013, pp. 61-77.
 - 2 O. Sieradzka-Malec, *Złoczone obicia ścienne w zamku Moritzburg i Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu – porównanie zasobów i stan badań nad proveniencją artystyczną dekoracyjnych skór* [in:] *Tendit in Ardua Virtus. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Kazimierzowi Kuczmanowi w siedemdziesiątolecie urodzin*, Kraków 2017, pp. 199-231.
 - 3 The first of three partitions took place in 1772, with complete sovereignty lost in 1795. Poland was reborn following the First World War (1918). Austrian troops garrisoned at the Wawel Castle until 1905.
 - 4 During the 18th century, the interiors of Moritzburg Castle were decorated with flat gilt leather in 12 patterns, and embossed in 11, and leather panels with painted figurative scenes – see footnote 2.

Poland by Waclaw Szymborski, the first conservator of the Wawel art collections.⁵ He launched a gilt-leather workshop, in order to create panels of leather for the hangings. These were to be identical to the historical ones, with the aim of supplementing the wall coverings of the Wawel chambers. Conservation work carried out on the gilt-leather wall hangings in the 1990s⁶ inspired specialists to continue the production of gilt-leather articles, using the traditional method.⁷

Kraków's possession of a precious collection of gilt leather has provided the impulse to carry out research and broaden our knowledge of this subject. Yet a fundamental question remains regarding the exact provenance of the collection of Augustus II the Strong.

An inventory of the Moritzburg residence was compiled following the death of Augustus II the Strong in 1733. The term "Venetian leather" was used, which one may view as a pointer.⁸ A letter dated 19 July 1722⁹, addressed to Baron Raymond le Plat (Leplat is also used), corresponds with this. Le Plat was the architect responsible for the interior decoration of Castle Moritzburg, during the renovation of the residence in the years 1723-33. It emerges from this that the king was interested in gilt-leather wall hangings made in Venice, and le Plat was instructed to work out the measurements in cooperation with Emilio de Villio (a count, and the ambassador of Saxony to Venice), and commission, in keeping with these dimensions, the production of the gilt-leather by a manufacturer. Although the name of the building where the articles were destined for was not actually mentioned, Andreas Schulze, a researcher into the Moritzburg gilt

5 O. Sieradzka-Malec, *Waclaw Szymborski. Pierwszy konserwator dzieł sztuki w zamku na Wawelu*, 'Studia Waweliana', XVI, 2015, pp. 187-210; eadem, *Szymborski Waclaw Józef [in:] Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 50/2, p. 205, Warszawa – Kraków 2015, pp. 221-224.

6 Documentation of work conducted by the company AC Konserwacja Zabytków s.c. A. Piotrowski – E. Kosakowski of Kraków, which can be found in the Archiwum Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu: AZK PZS-V-10, *Konserwacja obić kurdubanowych 1994-1996* and *Konserwacja obić kurdubanowych 1996-1998*; R. Kozłowski, J. Adamowicz, *Obicia kurdubanowe. Naciąg in situ*, 'Biuletyn Informacyjny Konserwatorów Dzieł Sztuki', vol. 8, nos. 3-4 (30-31) 1997, p. 28.

7 The Consiste workshop: www.kurdyban.pl

8 A. Schulze, *Der Bestand an ornamentalen Ledertapeten im Schloss Moritzburg einst und heute sowie die konservatorisch-restauratorischen Problemstellungen bei ihrer Erhaltung [in:] Ledertapeten – Bestände, Erhaltung und Restaurierung*, Dresden 2004, p. 53; A. Schulze, *Goldleder zwischen 1500 und 1800. Herstellung und Erhaltung*, Dresden 2011 (Arbeitsheft 17 Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Sachsen), p. 60; Sieradzka-Malec, *Złocene obicia...*, pp. 224-225.

9 Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden (SächsHStA Dresden), Loc. 02091/066, *Briefwechsel König August II. von Polen. Leplat, Raimund Baron, Architekt. 1715-1727*, no. 9 – I would like to thank Maria Szcześniak, who translated the letter from the French. In the article *Złocene obicia...*, p. 225, I referred to the interpretation of the letter provided by Schulze, *Der Bestand...*, pp. 53-54.

leather, associates the king's request with Moritzburg Castle, in relation to the planned refurbishment of that building.¹⁰ The reference to Venice is unequivocal, yet regrettably the name of the gilt-leather maker was not listed, nor was the workshop.

In Italy, the art of making gilt leather was extremely well developed. It is generally accepted that this particular craft reached the Apennine Peninsula from Spain, while some researchers likewise point to direct influences from the East.¹¹ It is difficult to determine precisely when the process of making gilt leather began in Italy. Extant sources enable us to point to the 15th century, and an additional corroboration is provided by the description in Italian of the entire production process, discovered at the beginning of the 16th century (in 1515) by the Swedish cleric and scholar Peder Månssons (or Månsson).¹² Information about this field of craftsmanship was recorded by several authors in publications printed in Venice during the 16th century. Giovanventura Rosetti (1548) focused on issues connected with the tanning of the hides.¹³ A broader description of the processes involved in making gilt leather was provided in 1564 by Leonardo Fioravanti, a medic and chemist, and likewise by the writer Thomasso Garzoni in 1585. It is believed that by that time, the centres of production were Venice, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Mantua, Ferrara, Milan, Florence, Siena and Sicily.¹⁴ Major advances in the art of making gilt leather took place in

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- 10 A. Schulze, *Der Bestand...*, p. 53; Sieradzka-Malec, *Złoczone obicia...*, p. 220.
- 11 A. Bender, *Złoczone kurdybany w Polsce*, Lublin 1992, pp. 88-90; A. Bender, *Dzieje złotych kurdybanów we Włoszech*, 'Summarium' KUL 1995-1996, nos. 24-25 (44-45), p. 155 – the authoress writes that the craft was brought to Spain by the Arabs, after they conquered part of the Spanish domains in the 8th century. However, she notes that the majority of the information on these products comes solely from the 14th century; F. Scalia, *L'arte dei corami: appunti per una ricerca lessicale* [in:] *Atti del Convegno Nazionale sui lessici tecnici del Sei e Settecento*, Pisa 1981, p. 357.
- 12 Bender, *Dzieje złotych kurdybanów ...*, p. 158; Peder Månsson, clergyman, writer, scholar, see <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/Sbl/Presentation.aspx?id=8088> *Dictionary of Swedish National Biography* (author: Anders Piltz) (accessed: 29.05.2018); G. Rossignoli, *Cuoi d'oro. Corami da tappezzeria, paliotti e cuscini del Museo Stefano Bardini*, Firenze 2009, p. 30, writes that Peder Månssons probably translated instructions of Bolognese origin.
- 13 Rossignoli, op. cit., p. 24, 30; A. Contadini, 'Cuoridoro': *tecnica e decorazione di cuoi dorati veneziani e italiani con influssi islamici* [in:] *Arte veneziana e arte islamica: atti del Primo simposio internazionale sull'arte veneziana e l'arte islamica*, ed. E.J. Grube, Venezia 1989, p. 234; G.V. Rosetti, *Plichto de larte de tentori che insegna tenger pani telle banbasi et sedi si per larthe comune come per la maggiore*, Venezia 1540.
- 14 L. Fioravanti, *Dello specchio di scientia universale*, vol. I, chapter 40: *Dell'arte de'corami d'oro...*, pp. 91-92, Venezia 1564. Leonardo Fioravanti, medic, chemist, alchemist, see also [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_Fioravanti_\(medico\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_Fioravanti_(medico)) (accessed: 11.06.2018); T. Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, e nobili et ignobili*, Venezia 1585. Tommaso Garzoni, Italian writer, studied law and logic, see <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

the 16th century, and the craft reached its apogee in the 17th century, followed by its gradual decline in the 18th century. Gilt leather was used in churches, and it likewise adorned the residences of popes, aristocrats and wealthy merchants. These articles were regarded as especially precious, testifying to the high social position and affluence of a given patron.

Venice was a significant and indeed probably the largest centre of gilt-leather production on the Apennine Peninsula. It is thus worth noting certain facts and figures in order to characterize the history of this craft within the lagoon city,¹⁵ particularly in the context of the aforementioned decision by Augustus II the Strong. Venice differed from its fellow Italian cities in many respects, such as its historical development, its political system, its commercial and artistic contacts, and the functioning of its social life. Likewise, the term used there for gilt leather (still operative today) has a slightly different sound and meaning. *Cuoridoro*, which is the word used in the local Venetian dialect, refers to both the products and the manufacturers. Its counterpart in Italian is *cuoio d'oro*, which however only relates to the product. The gilt-leather makers in Venice belonged to the guild of painters and artistic decorators (*l'arte dei depentori*),¹⁶ which

Tommaso_Garzoni (accessed: 25.07.2018). Bender, *Dzieje złotonych kurdynbanów...*, pp. 158-159; Scalia, op. cit., p. 357, 372; Rossignoli, op. cit., p. 26; A. Contadini, *Due pannelli di cuoio dorato nel Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna*, 'Annali di Ca'Foscari', XXVII (1988), 3, pp. 127-129. The archival material that has been recently studied confirms that gilt-leather makers were active in the cities listed above.

15 Italian gilt-leather upholstery was the subject of studies by Professor Agnieszka Bender: a chapter in the work *Złocene kurdynbany...*, pp. 100-105 and an article specially devoted to the subject *Dzieje złotonych kurdynbanów...* (earlier bibliography mentioned there), on which I base this part of the essay. These publications were supplemented by new academic literature: V. Tiozzo, *Cuoi dipinti a Venezia. La Carità* [in:] *Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia. Dipartimento tecniche e restauro. Seminari 2003*, Venezia 2003, pp. 51-61; M. Mazza, *I paliotti di cuoio dorato nelle chiese della Forania di Zoldo* [in:] *Tesori d'arte nelle chiese dell'Alto Bellunese. Val di Zoldo*, ed. M. Pregolato, Belluno 2005, pp. 157-173; G. Mazzucco, *I cuoi dorati o "cuoridoro" lavorati a Venezia* [in:] *Venezia e Istanbul in epoca ottomana*, [exhibition catalogue] Istanbul, 18 novembre 2009 – 28 febbraio 2010, Milano 2009, p. 200 (text G. Mazzucco), pp. 201-206 (catalogue descriptions edited by D. Cristante); Rossignoli, op. cit., pp. 28-30; *I Cuoridoro del Museo Correr*. Concluso l'intervento di restauro conservativo. Informazioni. Restauri. Dicembre 2010. Venezia, Fondazione Musei Civici; C. Tonini, D. Cristante, *L'arte dei cuoridoro* [in:] *Arti decorative a Venezia*, ed. Cincia Boscolo, news no. 24, The Venice International Foundation <https://www.yumpu.com/it/document/view/15200677/news-n-24-the-venice-international-foundation> (accessed: 29.06.2018); *Venezia, gli Ebrei e l'Europa 1516-2016* [exhibition catalogue], Venezia 2016, pp. 250-252, items 68, 69 (ed. M. Zanon). Of the older publications, I regard the following as of key importance on this subject: Contadini, *Cuoridoro...*, pp. 231-251; G. Tassini, *Curiosità veneziane, ovvero origini delle denominazioni stradali di Venezia* [1863], Venezia 1970, p. 197, 732.

16 The final composition of the guild (*arte*) came into being in the 16th century, after it was joined by the miniaturists in 1574. However, the painters left it in 1682 and formed their own union—see Archivio di Stato di Venezia (further: ASVe), Arti b. 97, 103; Contadini, *Cuoridoro...*,

encompassed a range of categories, or specialized professions (known as *colonnelli*), from painters who executed their works on canvas or in the fresco technique, and *depenitori*, namely decorators of objects of everyday use, such as furniture or plates, through painters of miniatures (*miniatori*), draughtsmen-designers (*disegnatore*), craftsmen who made playing cards (*cartoleri*), likewise those who made shields from *papier-mâché* (*targheri*), to gilders (*doradori*), including those who applied silver leaf or gold leaf to the surface of articles. Researchers have noted the relatively high status of gilt-leather makers, owing to the craftsmen's inclusion in the same guild as painters. It is believed that the gilt-leather makers only officially entered the guild in the 16th century (1569), when their statute of rights and obligations (the so-called *mariegola*) was set down.¹⁷ They were featured in an engraving that specified the professions of the guild in 1588, executed by Giovanni Tomini.¹⁸ Their emblem is likewise visible in a painting from 1729 that is associated with the school of Antonio Balestra, representing the *Arte dei depentori*.¹⁹ The first statutes of guild organizations were created in the 13th century, when there was an intensive development of production. In 1271, the regulations were codified for painters and artistic decorators, and indeed for the tanners who prepared hides for the production of various types of footwear, pouches, and decorated gilt upholstery.²⁰ Owing to the unpleasant smell associated with the tanning process, the so-called

p. 232; *Le insegne delle arti veneziane al Museo Correr* (historical texts: Maria Santin Anzalone), Venezia 1982, p. 90; B. Vanin, P. Eleuteri, *Le mariegole della biblioteca del Museo Correr*, Venezia 2007, pp. 87-88, 117-118, 156-157. The subject of the organization of guilds is covered among others in *l'Arte dei depentori* G. Chellini, *L'Accademia dei Pittori e degli Scultori di Venezia. Dalla corporazione medievale all'istituzione accademica*, 'Bollettino Telematico dell'Arte', 23 Dicembre 2013, no. 700, 2013: <http://www.bta.it/txt/a0/07/bta00700.html> (accessed: 7.05.2018) and http://www.veneziamuseo.it/terra/cannaregio/sofia/sofia_sp_depenitori_arte.htm (accessed: 25.06.2018) – the authors mentioned that the guild embraced several other specialist professions; I. Reffo, *Lingua e storia degli antichi mestieri veneziani*, under the supervision of Professor Maria Teresa Vigolo, Università degli Studi di Padova, 2017, p. 94. I would like to thank Silvia Bruni for her valuable linguistic consultation.

17 Contadini, *Cuoridoro*..., p. 232; Bender, *Dzieje złoconych kurdubanów*..., p. 161.

18 ASVe, Arti b. 97 – the engraving depicts St Luke, patron saint of artists, surrounded by emblems with the names of their specific specialization (*colonnelli*) and depictions of the appropriate tools for their work. Contadini, *Cuoridoro*..., p. 232, 240; Bender, *Dzieje złoconych kurdubanów*..., p. 161; Tiozzo, op. cit., p. 53.

19 The picture belongs to the collection of the Museo Correr, cl. I n. 2134 – the composition is similar to that of Tomini's engraving; *Le insegne*..., op. cit., p. 91; Contadini, *Cuoridoro*..., p. 240; Bender, *Dzieje złoconych kurdubanów*..., p. 161, fig. p. 162; Tonini, Cristante, op. cit., p. 36.

20 Vanin, Eleuteri, op. cit., p. 117-118; Reffo, op. cit., p. 38; Tiozzo, op. cit., p. 51; Contadini, *Cuoridoro*..., p. 234.

*scorzèri*²¹ (It. *cuoiari*) were allotted terrain on the island of Giudecca, where they set up their workshops. Leather that had undergone the thorough process of vegetable tanning was of key importance for the production of gilt upholstery, because it ensured the endurance and quality of the final article. The first known references to gilt-leather makers were made in the 15th century: 'Angelus magister coreorum aureatorum' (1484), and 'Marco dai cuori d'oro' (1496). Such references continued to be made in the 16th century, and a woman was also mentioned, 'Donna Ortensia fa cuorid'oro'. That century witnessed the extraordinary advancement of the craft of making gilt leather, as close to 70 workshops were in operation in the lagoon city, garnering a combined revenue of about 100,000 ducats per year.

Venetian gilt leather was used to decorate the residences of the Gonzaga family in Mantua, and was ordered several times by Isabella d'Este, wife of Marquess Francesco Gonzaga, and also by their son Federico II Gonzaga (for the Palazzo del Te). Other members of the d'Este family, such as Alfonso II, likewise purchased gilt leather in Venice for the clan's seat in Ferrara. *Cuoridori* was exported to Spain, and it reached France thanks to Catherine de Medici, wife of King Henry II of France. Within the context of the extensive trade between Venice and the East, the import of tanned and untanned hides was one of the main outlays of the Republic²². Leather from Constantinople was especially prized, owing to the high quality of tanning. It often returned there, having been converted into decorative products. In 1569, the beauty of Venetian gilt leather made such an impression on Ibrahim Bay that he repeated his order.

Of course, decorative leather wall hangings were also used to furnish buildings in Venice itself. In 1591, it was purchased by the procurators of St Mark (the office was known in Italian as *Procuratore di San Marco*), from the gilt-leather maker Piero. The craft of making gilt leather flourished in Venice, in spite of a law passed in 1536 that prohibited the purchase of luxury goods. Most likely this law was not rigorously observed. In the second half of the 16th century (1569), regulations were however adopted that protected local manufacturers, for example through prohibiting the import of goods from abroad that were intended to be sold on the domestic market. These regulations were gradually modified, allowing the import

21 In the collection of the Museo Correr in Venice one can find a painting depicting the work of the tanners, entitled *Arte degli scorzeri*, oil on panel, dimensions: 775 x 983 mm, cl. I inv. 2101.

22 Venice imported leather from Persia, Turkey, and also the Middle East, e.g. Lebanon. Evidence of imports from Lebanon can be found for example in a letter from the Venetian merchant Martino Merlini from 1509, concerning the method of protecting leather sent from Beirut, while it was being transported. One can add that trade in both directions between Venice and the East, to a large extent, went through Constantinople – see Contadini, *Cuoridoro*..., p. 233.

of goods, and also entitling foreign craftsmen to operate, probably for a limited period and under the condition that they paid higher taxes. Owing to the production technique, a variety of shields produced in the second half of the 16th century in Venice were classified as articles made from gilt leather. This production technique, encompassing shields (such as *rotelle*, *broccchieri*, *turcassi*), was not to be found in other centres of the manufacture of such armour, and although they have a western form, they are distinguished by the application of Islamic decorative motifs, demonstrating the idiosyncrasies of Venetian art.²³

Numerous examples of the use of gilt leather for the decoration of the interiors of private Venetian palazzos were mentioned in inventories, yet the material also featured in high-class brothels and gambling houses (casinos). The splendour of these products was described at the beginning of the 17th century by the British traveller Thomas Coryat.²⁴ Likewise, gilt leather was referred to in the early 18th century by Joseph Addison as being typical for covering walls.²⁵ Evidence of the continuing vitality of this artform in the first half of the 18th century, and how it was a distinctive part of the city's character, can be found in the depiction of a gilt-leather maker at work, executed by Giovanni Grevembroch (or Grevenbroch, Grewembroch, Grewenbroch 1731-1807).²⁶ The artist painted watercolour portraits of the city's inhabitants and their activities, leaving for posterity an exceptionally interesting iconographic document of the epoch (published in 1754). Exquisite leather wall hangings were also immortalized in the painting *Il Ridotto di Palazzo Dandolo a San Moisè*, executed in

23 Contadini, *Cuoridoro...*, p. 231, pp. 235-239. A group of 38 shields can be found in the collections of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, and several examples have ended up in the collections of other Italian museums, as well as in England and Germany; Bender, *Dzieje złotonych kurdubanów...*, p. 161, expresses the opinion that the technique of making these shields differed from that used in the production of gilt-leather wall hangings.

24 Thomas Coryat or Coryate (1577-1617), see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Coryat (accessed: 9.06.2018). In 1608, he undertook an educational journey across Europe, the description of which he published under the title: *Coryat's Crudities: Hastily gobled up in Five Moneth's Travels* (1611).

25 Joseph Addison (1672-1719) English writer, essayist and politician, regarded as a pioneer of modern journalism, see https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author:Joseph_Addison (accessed: 9.06.2018). He travelled through Italy in 1701, 1702 and 1703, and his account was published as: *Remarks on several parts of Italy, in the years 1701, 1702, 1703* [in:] *The works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq., in four volumes*, London 1721, vol. 2, p. 30 – <https://archive.org/stream/worksofrighthton02addi> (accessed: 9.06.2018).

26 Rossignoli, op. cit., p. 30, il. 4; G. Grevembroch, *Gli abiti di veneziani di quasi ogni età con diligenza raccolti e dipinti nel secolo XVIII*, vol. III, no. 139; *Fabbricatore di cuoia d'oro*, Venezia 1754.

the mid-18th century (c. 1746) by Francesco Guardi.²⁷ Regrettably, when one compares a subsequent canvas of the artist depicting the same interior twenty years later, one is struck by the poor state of the gilt leather, a factor which in all probability led to the material being removed in 1768.²⁸ One can say that this example is symbolic of the fate of gilt leather.

During the 18th century, the demand for gilt-leather wall hangings gradually waned, in line with new aesthetic tendencies in interior design, and a change in fashion. The decline of the art of gilt-leather making was particularly evident in the second half of the century, as evidenced by the significantly reduced number of workshops. Around 1760, only eight manufactories were still functioning, employing a total workforce of 50, and in 1773 there were just four workshops, with 20 employees. A document from 1788 reveals that the entire industry was in the hands of 12 manufacturers, including 4 merchants.²⁹ In spite of the unquestionable demise of the craft, works of a high standard were still created in Venice, for example the group of 6 antependia executed in 1760 for the Il Redentore church, with floral decoration, attributed to Francesco Guardi. Likewise of note was the execution of a large order of 1000 pieces of gilt leather for a patron in Spain at the close of the century (1790). The collapse of the craft in the Republic of Venice took place after the state was taken by Napoleon's army in 1806, with the attendant introduction of legislation that abolished the guild system that had been in place there in art and craftsmanship. Henceforth, the skills required for making gilt leather were only known to a few craftsmen, such as Domenico Rouechi in the mid – 19th century, and Pietro Michieli in the 20th century.

In Venice's urban space, the activities of craftsmen of various specialties was reflected in nomenclature. Initially, the term *cuoridoro* referred to the courtyard and arcades (*Corte* and *Sottoportico*³⁰) adjoining the San Fantin Church,³¹ where the workshops were located, and also to the adjacent alley (*Calle del Cuoridoro*). Owing to the subsequent privatization of this area, in 1956 the name *cuoridoro* was added to that of an already existing bridge near San Fantin: *Ponte dei Barcaroli o del Cuoridoro*, in order to

27 This painting is in the collection of the Museo del Settecento Veneziano (Cà Rezzonico) in Venice; Rossignoli, op. cit., p. 36, il. 11: dated 1746; on the internet dated 1740-50: <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/444378688202349430/> (accessed: 18.06.2018).

28 Rossignoli, op. cit., p. 36, il. 2 – painting in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

29 Ibid., p. 30.

30 The Venetian form is: *Sottoportego del Cuoridoro*.

31 <https://venipedia.it/luoghi-di-culto/chiesa-di-san-fantin> (accessed: 15.06.2018): San Fantin – this is the Venetian form of the name San Fantino. Restoration of the building got underway this year.

preserve the memory of this important artistic craft.³² One can also find examples of gilt-leather makers being recorded, such as Antonio Rossi, who rented a flat and workshop in 1713 from N.U.Toderini, the owner of a house on the *Sottoportico del Cuoridoro*. Around the first half of the 18th century, another gilt-leather maker named Angelo Ceseletti lived in this area, on the groundfloor of the Palazzo Molin del Cuoridoro on the *Calle del Cuoridoro*.³³ Meanwhile, the seat of the guild was located in another part of the city, near the Church of Santa Sofia (on Strada Nuova).

In spite of the long-lasting and flourishing activity of the makers of gilt leather in Venice, only a few examples of their work have survived until the present day in the lagoon city. Gilt-leather upholstery adorns a small room (*Sala dei Cuoi*) in the Palazzo Ducale,³⁴ as well as the library in the Palazzo Papadopoli, two rooms in the Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi, and a *panneau* in the Palazzo Labia.³⁵ It is characterized by large, elaborate floral motifs, realized in gold on a red background in the case of the Palazzo Ducale, and at the Palazzo Papadopoli on a gold background (dated to the 17th century), while in the Palazzo Labia flowers in various colours appear against a grey or silver background (dated to the middle of the 18th century). In the Church of Il Redentore, one can find the aforementioned antepedia, while the Museo del Settecento Veneziano has chairs in its collection with upholstery that has identical floral decoration.³⁶ An 18th-century overdoor has survived from the Complesso della Carità (currently Galleria dell'Accademia).³⁷ An overview of Venetian gilt leather is completed

32 Reffo, op. cit., p. 97; Contadini, *Cuoridoro*..., p. 232 gives the Venetian form of the name: *Ponte del barcarol*.

33 <http://www.palazzomolin.com/palazzo/mozart.php> (accessed 15.06.2018). Palazzo Molin, address: S. Marco 1823, Frezzaria.

34 This room is part of an ensemble of two rooms named the *Sala Magistrato alle leggi*. In addition, there is a large piece of an ornamental wall hanging made from gilt leather.

35 The *panneau* is composed of several panels of gilt leather, and it constitutes a sort of picture that is framed by stuccowork. It has been dated to the mid 18th century – see Jean-Pierre Fournet, *Les cuirs dorés anciens en France*, 2004, vol. 1, p. 149, this PhD dissertation was made available to me in electronic format.

36 Bender, *Dzieje złoczonych kurdubanów*..., p. 166, 168, 171, includes a brief profile of the examples of Venetian gilt leather, with the exception of the Palazzo Labia.

37 Tiozzo, op. cit., 2003, pp. 51-61 this item was found in a chest in the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, and duly underwent conservation. The small piece was exhibited at the show *Venus Devoille*, Bruxelles, Palais des Beaux Arts, 10 October 2003 – 10 January 2004 – see <https://digilander.libero.it/accademiaverestauroricerca/Cuoi/Seminari%20Dipartimento%202003.htm> (accessed: 14.05.2018). Following conservation of all parts of the overdoor, it was installed in

by the collection in the Museo Correr, which possesses about 90 varied examples in the form of antepedia and other pieces of leather.³⁸

Searches for gilt-leather upholstery that is comparable to the Moritzburg-Wawel examples took place in several regions of the Apennine Peninsula, but did not result in any positive findings, in spite of the fact that a characteristic of the craft of gilt leather making was the repetition of works.³⁹

However, one can find gilt leather identical to that which decorates the vestibule leading to the Senators' Hall of Wawel Royal Castle in the Venetian palazzo known as Ca' Vendramin Calergi.⁴⁰ The Venetian mansion boasts splendid, eye-catching gilt-leather upholstery in the room the *sala dei Cuoridoro*. It has four different kinds of ornamentation, enriched by borders. The lack of uniformity only becomes apparent after one has looked at it intently. One is principally struck by the impression of gold ornamentation – with vegetal and bands motifs, fancifully intertwined – against a background of deep red. Equally beautiful wall hangings can be found in the following space, which is known as the *sala del Caminetto* (with a fireplace). On one example, flowers and broad bands are used with flourish, executed in mute shades of silver and gold, enlivened by red lines against a gold background. The second example differs in that it has smaller motifs and a green background.

In the *sala dei Cuoridoro*, a hanging that is identical to the Wawel example adorns the wall on both sides of the large window looking onto the Grand Canal. Moreover, the fireplace room (*sala del Caminetto*) has a border with this pattern (in both short and elongated versions), used in the fire screen (fig. 5).

The decoration of the gilt-leather upholstery (fig. 1) was composed of large floral motifs, placed in frames that are similar to ovals in shape. This module, which constitutes the entire pattern, required here four panels of gilt leather. The dominant element is a large bouquet of acanthus leaves and flowers, arranged asymmetrically. At the sides one finds bellflowers, and at the bottom the principal element is supported by two floral calyces.

2013-14 in the library of the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice – see https://www.accademiavenezia.it/upload/docs/docenti/file/Tiozzo_Vanni.pdf (accessed: 14.05.2018).

38 I warmly thank the director of the museum, Andrea Bellieni, as well as Valeria Cafà and Sabina Collodel, for showing these items, which are kept in the storerooms and valuable discussion.

39 A presentation and profile of the historical material from Italian territory is provided in the essay: O. Sieradzka-Malec, *Charakterystyka włoskich kolekcji złoconych skór jako wstęp do badań nad pochodzeniem obić kurdubanowych w Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu* – forthcoming.

40 *Ca'* is the Venetian equivalent word for palazzo. This building currently houses the seat of the Venice Casino (Casinò di Venezia). I would like to thank Annalisa Bacchin for providing me with access to the rooms with gilt leather.



Fig. 1. The pattern of the gilt leather of the Vestibule to the Senators' Hall, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)



Fig. 2. View of the Vestibule to the Senators' Hall, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)

Above the main motif, one finds two smaller ones arranged so as to mirror each other. These motifs are of leaves and flowers, which are placed within foliate bands in the shape of the letter C. The entire composition is framed by a broad band, consisting of curving decorative elements and the lambrequin motif, and the midsection is decorated with geometrical-vegetal elements. The floral ornamentation is mainly silver in colour, and the leaves and frame gold, while the background is deep red.

At the Venetian edifice, the sections of wall adorned with gilt leather are limited to a breadth of 2.5 panels. In the royal residence in Kraków, these gilt-leather hangings decorate the four walls of the large space of the vestibule leading to the Senators' Hall, encompassing about 200 m² (fig. 2), which provides a complete visual effect. The ornamentation over the entire wall, composed of a continually replicated motif, is consistent, and makes the impression of being well organized, in spite of the abundance of elements and the mixture of both symmetry and asymmetry in the motifs. The decoration forms a net-like composition. This arrangement at Wawel was realized by elements in rows that unfurl vertically over each other and alternate diagonally. In Venice, however, the panels were arranged differently, with strong vertical and horizontal lines, without the diagonal rhythm (fig. 3, fig. 4).



Fig. 3a. Section (3 panels) of the gilt leather of the Vestibule to the Senators' Hall, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)



Fig. 3b. Section (3 panels) of the gilt leather – simulation of the pattern of the gilt leather in the Sala dei Cuoridoro, Ca' Vendramin Calergi, Venice

This fact highlights an extremely interesting characteristic of this type of wall hanging, namely the possibility of varying the arrangement of leather panels and the attainment of different visual effects. Such diversity had to be taken into account during the preliminary design phase, with consideration given to the entire pattern and individual panels. The creation of a composition required a precise arrangement of the panels that were to make up the overall pattern, like piecing together a puzzle, and it simultaneously provided the possibility to be creative, particularly over large surfaces.

The Wawel borders encompass all the walls, like a frame, completing the design in an elegant manner. Meanwhile, the border strip in the Venetian palazzo only runs along one side. It has a repeated geometrical-vegetal



Fig. 4a. Section (8 panels) of the gilt leather of the Vestibule to the Senators' Hall, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)



Fig. 4b. Section (8 panels) of the gilt leather – simulation of the pattern of the gilt leather in the Sala dei Cuoridoro, Ca' Vendramin Calergi, Venice



Fig. 5a. Short border of the Vestibule to the Senators' Hall, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)



Fig. 5b. Long border of the Vestibule to the Senators' Hall, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)



Fig. 6. The pattern of the gilt leather of the Eagle Room, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)



Fig. 7. Border of the Hen's Foot Tower, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo Dariusz Błażewski)



Fig. 8. The punches and the outlines of motifs executed in coloured paint, Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków (photo. A. Stankiewicz)

motif, alluding to the form of a cabochon, between which small leaves are discernible. The panels differ in size: they are shorter at the bottom and the top (horizontally), and at the sides they are longer (vertically) (fot. 5).

Summarizing the characteristics of the gilt-leather wall hangings, it is worth adding that this same pattern appeared in various colours, sometimes giving a final effect that seems so different that even the trained eye only recognises the identical ornamentation after inspecting it for some time.

Returning to the intriguing subject that concerns us, namely the identical gilt-leather upholstery in both residences, its occurrence in the lagoon city has provided hope of accessing source material that could prove conclusive regarding the matter of provenance. The most recent monographic work on the Ca' Vendramin Calergi, a palazzo also known as *Non nobis Domine*, was written by Filippo Pedrocco.⁴¹ He described the building's history, architecture and decoration in particular centuries, yet he mainly focused on the paintings. The author treated gilt leather as a peripheral subject⁴². However, the references to archival sources are valuable. The inventory of 1664⁴³, which contains a list of goods and chattels belonging to Zuane (Giovanni) Grimani Calergi, includes 19 examples of gilt-leather upholstery.⁴⁴ Each entry on the list specified the number of pieces, which in total came to 4831. If we assume that the number refers to panels of gilt leather, and we likewise assume the average size of a rectangular panel to be 40 x 50 cm, we have a combined surface of gilt leather of 970 m², in other words a great deal.⁴⁵ The descriptions of

41 F. Pedrocco, *Ca' Vendramin Calergi*, Venezia 2004. The name of the palazzo Vendramin Calergi recalls the name of one of the families that owned it; in addition, some of the other owners were: firstly Andrea Loredan (1450-1513), while in the 17th century the residence passed into the hands of the Grimani family, and in 1844 it was purchased by Marie-Caroline, duchesse de Berry, and from 1937-1947? it belonged to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, while in the late 1940s it was bought by the city (Comune di Venezia). The Renaissance design of the mansion and the façade was the work of the architect Mauro Codussi. M. Luxoro, *Il Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi (Non nobis Domine)*, Firenze 1957; G. Mariacher, *Ca' Vendramin Calergi*, Venezia 1978.

42 Luxoro, op. cit., p. 88, noted only that this artistic craft was characteristic of Venice.

43 ASVe, *Inventario descritto di tutti li Mobili esistenti nel Palazzo Non Nobis Domine*, 28 May 1664 [in:] *Giudici di Petizion, Inventari di eredità tutele, curatele, oppure richiesti in causa* (entry 372), nos. in the inventory: 575-593; Pedrocco, op. cit., p. 72 (information about the inventory).

44 In addition, individual items of gilt leather feature in the inventory, nos.: 264, 472.

45 It can be compared with the largest collections: in Italy, the Palazzo Chigi in Ariccia (near Rome), has a collection of gilt leather that covers 11 rooms, amounting to about 1100 m²; and the Royal Castle in Kraków – about 1360 m² (about half of this comprises gilt leather created in the 20th century); while about 1000 m² remained in Moritzburg Castle (near Dresden) – see Sieradzka-Malec, *Charakterystyka włoskich kolekcji...* (forthcoming); Sieradzka-Malec, *Złoczone obicia...*, p. 221.

gilt leather are enigmatic; some of them are hard to read or understand. In spite of this problem, it emerges from the entries that there were wall hangings in gold and blue, gold and black, and others in the Spanish style, and yet more with motifs of crowns or putti. Some were decorated with a pattern of small tulips, while others with tulips were referred to as 'old'. 'New' upholstery was also mentioned, with flowers and animals. The most frequently cited colour scheme took in gold, silver and blue. Unfortunately, the 18th-century will of Vettore Grimani Calergi, drawn up in 1738,⁴⁶ does not include any information about gilt-leather upholstery. After Vettore's death (13 February 1739), the next owner of the *Non nobis Domine* palazzo was Nicolò Vendramin (Calergi), who set in motion the refurbishment of the interiors.⁴⁷ The rearrangement likewise included two rooms with gilt leather, the *sala dei Cuoridoro* was once again fitted with gilt-leather wall hangings.⁴⁸ It appears that none of the gilt-leather upholstery from the 17th century survived in the *Non nobis Domine* palazzo, taking into account the terse descriptions in the inventory, as well as the style of those *in situ*. Only the examples with a green background could be associated with the 17th century.⁴⁹ The majority of the gilt leather that decorates the rooms of this residence on the Grand Canal can be dated to around 1700, judging by its ornamentation. However, the gilt leather identical to the Wawel wall-hanging, bears elements of Régence decoration typical for the 1720s. One cannot fail to mention that Titian's painting *The Flight Into Egypt*, which was one of the artworks that belonged to the palazzo in the times of Grimani-Calergi, was sold before 1738, and in the mid-18th century it was a part of the collection of Prince Brühl, the prime minister of Augustus III Wettin. This fact could suggest artistic contacts between the Saxon court and the owners of the Venetian residence.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in spite of the exceptionally interesting research material, it has not

46 ASVe, Notarile testamenti, *Registra cum alphabeto. Testamentorum rogatorum per Hectore Maffei, Notarium, Cedularum Liber*, pp. 33-43: will of Vettore Grimani Calergi, drawn up by the solicitor Ettore Maffei, 13 December 1738; Pedrocco, op. cit., p. 75, 89.

47 Pedrocco, op. cit., p. 90; Luxoro, op. cit., p. 61.

48 Pedrocco, op. cit., p. 94, fig. on p. 91, 93 – not only was gilt leather mounted, but also for example a frieze from the late 16th century or early 17th century, which had been brought from another building.

49 Pedrocco, op. cit., p. 72 – includes a photograph of gilt leather, without a comment, in the chapter concerning the 17th-century furnishing, fig. on p. 76; Mariacher, op. cit., [without numbering], mentions these examples of gilt leather as hailing from the 17th century. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Magdalena Piwocka for our fruitful discussions on stylistic analysis.

50 Pedrocco, p. 90 – Titian's painting then entered the Tsar's collection in Gatchina, near Saint Petersburg.

been possible to find a document that would enable scholars to make an unequivocal, conclusive attribution to a particular gilt-leather maker.⁵¹

The collection of the Museo Correr has just two pieces of gilt leather that are identical to the Wawel examples. One small, damaged panel⁵² is the same as the wall hangings in the Eagle Room at Wawel Royal Castle (fig. 6). The pattern is geometrical, with ornamentation that combines bands and foliate motifs. A broad, decoratively formed band creates a rectangular frame, with cut corners. One can see in the space within the frame a symmetrical ornament composed of intertwining bands. The decoration is completed by both stylized and naturalistic palmettes. In addition to this, a panel of the border has been preserved in the Museo Correr collection.⁵³ At Wawel, this type was used as part of the gilt-leather decoration in the so-called Hen's Foot Tower (fig. 7).

Unfortunately, as is the case with the museum collection, there is a fundamental problem concerning research into the gilt leather, namely a lack of information relating to provenance. It is rarely possible to link information from archival sources with specific objects, thus pinpointing their creators, the names of the relevant master or at the very least the workshop where a given piece was made, likewise the date when it was created. As far as dates are concerned, a precise designation of when an example was made is complicated by the fact that certain motifs continued to be used for long periods.

In spite of these limitations and problems, it should be acknowledged that the research carried out in Venice has been successful, and perhaps even of landmark importance, thanks to the finding of three different examples of upholstery which have identical counterparts in the Wawel collection, in terms of their ornamentation and colour schemes. This is highly significant, particularly in the context of the knowledge and understanding among the academic community in Venice that the preserved gilt leather in that city was the creation of local workshops. The collection of Moritzburg-Wawel gilt leather has features recognized by researchers as typical for Venetian *cuoridoro*. Floral ornamentation is used, connected with decoratively treated bands, creating large, fanciful patterns,

51 According to the information obtained, the Casino does not possess a historical archive. Thus far, it has not been possible to clarify where one might find an archive of this branch of the family.

52 Museo Correr, part of a gilt-leather panel and border, CI XXI n.0144e: <http://www.archiviodel-lacommunicazione.it/Sicap/opac.aspx?WEB=MuseiVE&LNG=ITA> (accessed: 17.02.2017). At present, access to the collection is limited.

53 Museo Correr, border panel, CI. XXI n.0277: <http://www.archiviodel-lacommunicazione.it/Sicap/opac.aspx?WEB=MuseiVE&LNG=ITA> (accessed: 17.02.2017). At present, access to the collection is limited.

executed in gold on a deep red background. As far as the production technique is concerned, the Venetian leather belongs to the category of flat gilt leather (as opposed to embossed), with the surface differentiated with the aid of small punches, and the typical method of painting the outlines of decorative elements with black, or green and sometimes red (fig. 8).

An additional indication of where the articles were made is provided by the inscriptions in Italian that can be found on the back of some pieces of gilt leather.⁵⁴ They appear on several panels (Moritzburg Castle, pattern 11⁵⁵), and the lettering is consistent with that of the 18th century. The inscriptions provide instructions on how to arrange the panels: *Prima lista di sopra Pelle* – ‘the first row of leather from the top’; *Seconda lista di mezzo Pelle* – ‘the second middle row of leather’; *Terza lista di sotto Pelle* – ‘the third row of leather from the bottom’. Aside from these phrases, which are easy to read and interpret, there are certain symbols (e.g. stars) and numbers.

The arguments put forward in this essay provide a significant contribution to the advancement of the thesis concerning the Venetian provenance of the gilt, punched leather wall hangings that adorn the interior of the royal residence in Kraków and the castle in Moritzburg. These articles constitute a high-calibre collection commissioned by the king of Poland and elector of Saxony, Augustus II the Strong. However, as of yet, it has not been possible to attribute the work to a specific workshop.

Transl. Nicholas Hodge

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54 I would like to thank Margitta Hensel, curator of Schloss Moritzburg und Fasanenschlösschen and Gabriele Hilsky, certified conservator at the castle, for providing me with information and photographs of the gilt-leather panels, with the relevant inscriptions.

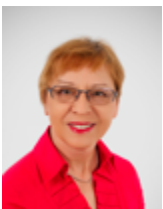
55 Numbering according to Schulze, *Der Bestand...*, p. 47, 49.

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