

# Shards of memory

## Stanisław Olexiński, collector from Lviv



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Wersja polska – s. 119

Several months ago, at the auction of the Wójtowicz Antiquarian Bookstore in Kraków, I was proposed to purchase the first volume of Homer's Works, containing the *Iliad* translated by Franciszek Dmochowski, published in Warsaw in 1804. My attention was drawn to the bookplate identifying the volume as coming from the book collection of Stanisław Olexiński ("administrative secretary of the National Institute of the Ossoliński family in Lviv in the 1920s").<sup>1</sup> A preliminary query revealed that for several years, both books and engravings related to Olexiński's collection had appeared at various auctions.<sup>2</sup> Their descriptions also included in-

1 61st auction of the Wójtowicz Antiquarian Bookstore, 14 October 2023, <<https://one.bid/da/ksiazki-i-starodruki-homer-dziela-iliada/1883822>> (as of 3 October 2023).

2 I managed to trace down the *Ruines principales du Temple du Soleil a Heliopolis* engraving, with a provenience stamp at the back, "S.O." (see the offer of the Atticus Antiquarian Bookstore, <[www.atticus.pl/pl/product/rycina-xix-w-ruines-principales-du-temple-du-soleil-a-heliopolis-101693](http://www.atticus.pl/pl/product/rycina-xix-w-ruines-principales-du-temple-du-soleil-a-heliopolis-101693)>, as of 30 September 2023); engraving by Nicolas de Larmessin *Portrait d'Adolphe de Vignacourt Grand Maître de Malthe* of ca. 1729 ("Sygnatury inwentarzowe i proveniencyjne ołówkiem na marginesach podkładu: S.O. [Stanisław Olexiński, kolekcjoner lwowski]"); see the offer of the Atticus Antiquarian Bookstore, <<https://www.atticus.pl/pl/product/rycina-ok-1729-portrait-d-adolphe-de-vignacourt-grand-maitre-de-malthe-tableau-de-michel-angermerigi-dit-le-caravage-qui-est-dans-le-cabinet-du-roy-peint-sur-toile-grave-par-nicolas-de-larmessin-estampe-larmessin-nicolas-de-1684-1755-graveur-mistrz-104939>>, as of 12 April 2024, 15 March 2024; engraving of an evening landscape by the river of ca. 1770 by Maria Katharina Prestel (1747–1794), with a provenience stamp at the back: "Stanisław Olexiński Lwów" (see the auction of the Atticus Antiquarian Bookstore: Autografy, grafika i rysunek, plakat, rzeźba, varia (autographs, prints and drawings, posters, sculptures, various items), 17 December 2020, <<https://onebid.pl/pl/grafika-i-rysunek-maria-katharina-prestel-1747-1794-grafika-ok-1770-wieczorny-krajobraz-nad-rzeka/744967>>, as of 30 September 2023; as well as book items with owner's stamp: A. Pawiński, *Serbia. Zarysy historyczno-etnograficzne*, Warszawa 1874 (see the offer of the Poliart Antiquarian Bookstore, <<https://poliart.biz/ksiazki-czasopisma-kartografia-i-nuty/162859-serbia-zarysy-historyczno-etnograficzne.html>>, as of 30 September 2023; W. Łoziński, *Sztuka lwowska XVI i XVII wieku*, Lwów 1898 (see the 61st auction of the Wójtowicz Antiquarian Bookstore, 14 October 2023, <<https://onebid.pt/pt/livros-e-manuscritos-lozinski-wladyslaw-sztuka-lwowska-w-xvi-i-xvii-wieku/1884129>>, as



1. Wilhelm Wachtel, Stanisław Olexiński's Ex Libris. Private collection

formation that Olexiński was a well-known bibliophile and graphic collector from Lviv. As it turns out, the Olexiński collection itself had been described by Edward Chwalewik as: “A library in the field of theory and history of art. A rich collection of Polish engravings. The library has its own Ex Libris (bookplate).”<sup>3</sup>

The said bookplate (see: **Fig. 1**) is the signed work of Wilhelm Wachtel (1875–1942), a renowned Jewish-Polish painter and graphic artist.<sup>4</sup> Relatively small, with dimensions of 520 × 650 mm, it was made using zincography technique. The artist enclosed the composition in a frame consisting of two stylized columns on which he placed the bibliophile's name and surname, arranged vertically. There is an inscription “EX LIBRIS” on the base and next to it, in the left corner, there is the “W./Wach/tel” signature. The field between the columns was divided exactly in half, into two zones of the same size. In the lower zone, between the im-

age of an antiqued amphora (vase) and the female (?) herm bust, there is a wreath with a field for entering the inventory number of the collection's item. In the upper zone, against a landscape background, there is an image of a reclining man, resting his forehead on his hand, and reading a book. He is dressed in a dark dress with a white collar outside, and a cap on his head. A hand with wings at the wrists emerges from above, as if from the sky, leaning on the reader's shoulder.

It can be concluded that the image on the bookplate fits into the tradition of showing a learned humanist, dressed in a toga-like outfit, with a characteristic headgear – a cap covering the ears, and studying a book. It appears that the winged hand is making a gesture of support and care – or maybe it is a visible sign of inspiration? It could also be the hand of Hermes, the protector of traders. The herm bust is a clue to such an interpretation, although one gets the impression that this particular representation is a somehow cheeky and casual reference to Holbein's

of 3 October 2023; a luxury copy of a book by T. Mańkowski, *Galerja Stanisława Augusta*, Lwów 1932 – S. Olexiński's personal copy with a printed book dedication and a loose note card with a print: “Z prośbą o łaskawe przyjęcie od Autora” i.e. “the Author kindly requests Your gracious acceptance” (see the 49th auction of books and prints of the Lamus Antiquarian Bookstore, 29 November 2019, <<https://www.secretera.pl/aukcje/23-49-aukcja-ksiazek-i-grafiki/519-oprawy-luksusowe-i-artystyczne/12326-mankowski-tadeusz-galerja-stanislaw-augusta-opracowal-przy-wspo?start=0>>, as of 30 September 2023). Also the Ex Libris i.e., bookplate alone (numbered 242) was featured in an Internet auction on Allegro online marketplace (see: <<https://archiwum.allegro.pl/oferta/exlibris-stanislaw-olexinski-i14077165173.html>>, as of 8 June 2024) and in an internet collection: <<http://art-exlibris.net/exlibris/8589#>> (as of 14 April 2024).

3 E. Chwalewik, *Zbiory polskie. Archiwa, biblioteki, gabinety, galerie, muzea i inne zbiory pamiątek przeszłości w ojczyźnie i na obczyźnie w porządku alfabetycznym według miejscowości ułożone*, vol. 1, Warszawa–Kraków 1926, p. 426.

4 A recent paper on the artist was published by M. Puzio, *Wilhelma Wachtla “Pożegnanie z Golusem”* (Wilhelm Wachtel's Farewell to Golus), “Modus. Prace z historii sztuki” (“Modus. Art History Journal”), 20, 2020, pp. 241–267 (earlier literature on the artist therein).

woodcut from the 1530s, showing a thoughtful humanist with his hand resting on the head of the Terminus herm.

It turns out that this work is not completely unknown.<sup>5</sup> An incomparable researcher of Lviv history, the famous archivist Franciszek Jaworski, had published the bookplate in question, and provided some extremely interesting information. It is worth quoting his remarks *in extenso*:

Mr. Stanisław Olexiński is the co-owner of the so-called 'black tenement house' in the main town square, which is one of the most beautiful monuments of old Lviv; the director of a dairy company; the owner of a wonderful collection of engravings and books; and last but not least, he has his own Ex Libris, one of the most artistic ones we will find here in Lviv. Such competition between various property titles makes the person and his collection highly interesting, and that is why, while collecting materials for the present work, we went to Mr. Olexiński to ask for information. Alas, Mr. Olexiński is excessively modest! "My three bookcases, he says, do not even deserve the name of a library. I do not know if it is 1000 volumes in total. Mostly works relating to the theory and history of visual arts, especially painting and graphics. Additionally, a small collection of engravings and lithographs (approximately 2,000 pieces). Almost exclusively Polish things and works by Polish engravers. That is all. Not much, but collected piece by piece, with meagre funds, with a lot of searching, but with this makes the satisfaction even greater." This is what Mr. Olexiński proclaims, but in reality, it is apparently rather different, because these works by Polish engravers are ones by Falk, Norblin, Płoński, Orłowski; they are rare works, like white ravens, and paid for in their weight in gold. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to visually inspect the collection, so the owner's words will have to suffice. Mr. Olexiński says this about himself: "A shopkeeper, without his own business, even. From my mother I inherited an Armenian merchant's streak, and from my father I inherited a livelier Polish imagination, which protects me from falling into the path of an ordinary bread-eater... Hence these few books and a handful of folders with pictures." The answer to this information can be illustrated by a reproduction of the sign of Mr. Olexiński's library. The Ex Libris, drawn and conceived by the artist W. Wachtel, was published in 1904. The idea is truly original, this winged hand pressing upon the reader's shoulders, there is a lot of thought and artistic concept within it, a lot of sentiment for the collector.<sup>6</sup>

This image contrasts slightly with the Ossolineum memories of Stanisław Łempicki, who described the milieu thus:

Stanisław Olexiński, who looked at everything that was happening in the Publishing House with an Argus eye. [...] From a once landowner family, then a long-time official in the Lubomirski Estate of Przeworsk and the manager of the local dairy, having become the administrative secretary of the Ossolineum – after the

5 It is found, among other places, in the collections of the Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław and the National Library in Warsaw (see: <[https://omnis-zno.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma9910045977005606&context=L&vid=48OMNIS\\_ZNO:zno&lang=pl&search\\_scope=DiscoveryNetwork&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=JoinedCatalog&query=any,contains,Olexi%C5%84ski&offset=0](https://omnis-zno.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma9910045977005606&context=L&vid=48OMNIS_ZNO:zno&lang=pl&search_scope=DiscoveryNetwork&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=JoinedCatalog&query=any,contains,Olexi%C5%84ski&offset=0)>, as of 8 June 2024).

6 F. Jaworski, *Lwowskie znaki biblioteczne. (Uzupełnienia)*, Lwów 1909, pp. 19–21.

ephemeral phenomenon of Piotr Dziubański – Olexiński retained the pleasant, effortless manners of his forefathers, who lived somewhere in manor houses near Lviv. He was interested in books and art a little, he collected this and that. His polite smile under a beautiful noble mustache could strangely combine with malice and biting sarcasm. People from Ossolineum visited him in the mornings “for a bit of gossip” [...] Bernacki would come in with a nonchalant face, Tyszkowski would burst in like a bomb, always with sharp wit and laughter, always having a lot of business on his mind, and finally the smooth, elegant, introverted Museum curator Gębarowicz would visit Olexiński to look over some new art publication together, or listen to his mischievous comments about people and things.<sup>7</sup>

What more can be said about Stanisław Olexiński? He was born in Lviv in 1865, he died there on August 12, 1941, and was buried at the Łyczaków cemetery. In the scholarly literature, he is an almost completely forgotten figure, or at best he functions on the margins and in the footnotes of broader studies devoted to the history of the National Institute of the Ossoliński family in Lviv, and the history of collecting in Poland.

From the publications so far, there emerges an image of someone who is very much involved, both in the organizational activities and – or perhaps above all – in collector’s pursuits. The present paper can be treated as an introduction to a broader study devoted to him.

Mieczysław Gębarowicz’s monograph contains information that this distinguished Lviv researcher worked closely with Olexiński at the Ossolineum, and that they “shared a common passion for art – as Olexiński was a well-known and seasoned collector.”<sup>8</sup> He held the position of administrative secretary of the Institute from 1919, and from 1930 he also served on the management committee of the Aid Fund for Widows and Orphans.<sup>9</sup> In 1927, “he donated to the Institute’s collection one German-language print from the eighteenth century, a bookplate by Furmanowicz (Father Leon Formanowicz?), 153 photographs of the insurgents of the January Uprising, emigration activists and actors, and a jubilee medal of the actor Alojzy Żółkowski minted in 1882.”<sup>10</sup>

His organizational activity was appreciated in 1928, when he received the Silver Cross of Merit.<sup>11</sup> In 1929, due to his position, Olexiński participated in the acquisition of the Dąbski gallery of paintings from Rzeszów,<sup>12</sup> and in 1931 the Ossolineum decided to purchase from him a large collection of drawings and engravings from the eighteenth–twentieth centuries.<sup>13</sup> At that time, works by January Suchodolski,

7 S. Łempicki, *Wspomnienia ossolińskie*, Wrocław 1948, pp. 129–130.

8 M. Matwijów, *Mieczysław Gębarowicz (1893–1984). Uczony i opiekun narodowych dóbr kultury*, Warszawa 2013, p. 45.

9 A. Fischer, *Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich. Zarys dziejów*, Lwów 1927, p. 107, Act of appointment to the management committee of the Aid Fund for Widows and Orphans of the National Institute of the Ossoliński family, 20 April 1930.

10 M. Pękalska (ed.), *Księga darczyńców Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich*, Wrocław 2017, p. 73 – therein Olexiński is described as an architect (*sic!*) working on the renovation of Lviv tenement houses, among other things.

11 “Goniec Nadwiślański”, 131, 9 June 1928, p. 9, <[https://kpsc.umk.pl/Content/259110/EOD\\_OPEN\\_050\\_02\\_1928\\_nr\\_131.pdf](https://kpsc.umk.pl/Content/259110/EOD_OPEN_050_02_1928_nr_131.pdf)> (as of 15 February 2024).

12 M. Matwijów, *Mieczysław Gębarowicz*, p. 129.

13 *Ibidem*, p. 128.



2. *Rozbiór Polski* (Partition of Poland), anonymous drawing from late eighteenth century (?). After: *Sylwetki portretowe z czasów Stanisława Augusta. Album pięćdziesięciu dziewięciu sylwetek*, edited and published by M. Treter, Lwów 1923, fig. 33

Wojciech Grabowski, Jakub Prociński, Zygmunt Sidorowski, Leon Wyczółkowski (including the study *Głowa Hucuła* [Hutsul's Head]) and Stanisław Dębicki (a drawing originally from the collection of Erazm Barącz), as well as two drawing portraits (originally from the collection of the Januskiewicz family) were acquired. Earlier, the Ossolineum collection was enriched by a drawing of *Autoportret* (Self-portrait) by Stanisław Dębicki, obtained through an exchange with Olexiński.<sup>14</sup>

Works from Olexiński's collection have been exhibited publicly several times. However, we do not really know much about their nature, nor do we know the exact size of the collection. A preliminary query shows that it must have been a significant assemblage.

In 1909, eight works from Olexiński's collection were exhibited at the Old Masters Exhibition, described as: *Mojżeszowi podają ogień i złoto* (Moses Given Fire and Gold) (Flemish school, late seventeenth century), *Fête champêtre* (German school, eighteenth century), *Lukrecja* (Lucretia) (Flemish school), *Śmierć Lukrecji* (Death of Lucretia) (French school), *Portret zbiorowy na tle pejzażu* (Group Portrait Against a Landscape) (Dutch school, seventeenth century, "probably from the de Keyser school"), *Samuel pomazuje Saula na Króla żydowskiego* (Samuel Anoints Saul as King of the Jews) (Anton Franz Maulpertsch?, Viennese school), *Portret starej kobiety* (Portrait of an Old Woman) (German school, seventeenth century), *Popiersie młodzieńca z wzniesioną do góry głową* (Bust of a Young Man with His Head Raised) (unknown painter, eighteenth century).<sup>15</sup> In 1917, the Ossolineum exhibited memorabilia of Tadeusz Kościuszko, "collected around the houses of Lviv, and brought to Lviv especially for this purpose." The authors of the exhibition were collector Helena Dąbcańska and artists Marcelli Harasymowicz and Zygmunt Rozwadowski, and the curator was Olexiński, who provided some of the objects on

14 A. Soroko, *Rysunki artystów polskich z Muzeum Lubomirskich we Lwowie*, Wrocław 2020, pp. 31, 124, 154.

15 *Album wystawy mistrzów dawnych*, published by M. Treter, Lwów 1909, pp. 33–34, 78.

loan.<sup>16</sup> One of the works he owned, an ink drawing Partition of Poland, described as coming from “the end of the eighteenth century” (or rather the beginning of the nineteenth century), was published in 1925 in a book by Mieczysław Treter, in which he brought together portraits from the times of king Stanisław August.<sup>17</sup> In 1927, at the “Exhibition of Old Lviv Masters”, drawings owned by Olexiński were shown (Konstanty Dzbański’s *Dziewczyzna niosąca na talerzu masło* [Girl Carrying Butter on a Plate]; Aleksander Raczyński’s *Mysliwy z prawą fiolką wzniesioną w górę* [Hunter with the Right Vial Raised Up], *Naga dziewczyna* [Naked Girl], *Autoportret* [Self-Portrait]; Franciszek Siemianowski’s *Rewia wojskowa* [Military Revue] and Kornel Szlegiel’s *Aniołowie u Piasta* [Angels at Piast’s], *Ucieczka* [Escape], *Matka Boska* [Our Lady], *Głowa szlachcica* [A Nobleman’s Head], *Szkic do poloneza* [Sketch for a Polonaise]).<sup>18</sup> Olexiński developed collections of drawings displayed at the anniversary exhibition on the occasion of the centenary of the outbreak of the November Uprising in 1930.<sup>19</sup> Through his good offices, in 1935 or 1936, portraits of the Nikorowicz family: Dominik and Scholastica née Augustynowicz, as well as Grzegorz Idzi and Kajetanna née Bohdanowicz were deposited in the Historical Museum of the City of Lviv<sup>20</sup> (these were most probably family portraits).

It should be noted that Olexiński belonged to the Management Committee of the Ossolineum after the Soviet troops entered Lviv, and after being removed from the position of administrative secretary by the new director (Jerzy Borejsza, appointed in December 1939), he found support from Gębarowicz. In February 1940, he prepared the handwritten “Catalogue of prints from the collection of Andrzej Lubomirski.”<sup>21</sup> He started working at Ossolineum again after the German troops entered, but he died soon thereafter (August 12, 1941).<sup>22</sup>

The partially preserved personal legacy of Stanisław Olexiński, which remains in a private deposit, contains over 200 letters from the years 1891–1961 (addressed both to him and his wife) and various types of ephemera (mostly invitations and exhibition folders). The correspondence includes nearly 30 letters from scholars

16 *Katalog wystawy urządzonej ku czci Tadeusza Kościuszki w setną rocznicę jego zgonu, we Lwowie 15 października 1917*, S. Rossowski et al. (eds.), Lwów 1917; B. Kost, *Tadeusz Kościuszko we Lwowie*, “Rocznik Lwowski” 2020–2021, p. 82.

17 *Sylwetki portretowe z czasów Stanisława Augusta. Album pięćdziesięciu dziewięciu sylwetek*, edited and published by M. Treter, Lwów 1923, fig. 33.

18 *Katalog wystawy starych mistrzów lwowskich*, published by S. Zarewicz, Lwów 1925, pp. 6, 22, 26, 28 (see: <<https://pbc.rzeszow.pl/Content/16295/PDF/1116.pdf>>, as of 27 August 2024).

19 *Katalog wystawy Powstania Listopadowego urządzonej w setną rocznicę we Lwowie 29 listopada 1930 roku, z 12 ilustracjami*, K. Badecki, K. Hartleb (eds.), Lwów 1930 (elaborated by: J. Güttler and Z. Hartleb (painting), S. Olexiński (graphic art), M. Harasimowicz (sculpture), A. Bruchnalski i Z. Hartleb (militaria), R. Mękicki (historical mementoes), W. Wisłocki (manuscripts, documents, maps).

20 *Sprawozdanie dyrekcji Archiwum Miejskiego – Biblioteki archiwalnej, Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Lwowa, Muzeum Narodowego im. Króla Jana III [...] z działalności w latach 1935 i 1936*, Lwów 1937, p. 10. Probably the same as portraits of Grzegorz and Kajetana Nikorowicz, listed [in:] S. Bohdanov, *Portrait: Catalog, Lviv History Museum*, Lviv 2021, pp. 278–279.

21 M. Romeyko-Hurko, *Kolekcjonerzy, antykwarjusze i bibliofile. Z korespondencji Kazimierza Woźnickiego*, [in:] *Polskie kolekcjonerstwo grafiki. Ludzie i instytucje*, E. Frąckowiak, A. Grochala (eds.), Warszawa 2008, p. 88; manuscript preserved in the National Institute of the Ossoliński Family in Wrocław, Accession Number 17101/II. Also preserved in the Institute’s collection are Olexiński’s letters to Ludwik Bernacki and Mieczysław Gębarowicz, among others.

22 M. Matwijów, *Mieczysław Gębarowicz*, pp. 157, 160, 184.



who can be described as the intellectual elite of Lviv. Among the authors of the letters, it is worth mentioning the poet Władysław Bełza (1874–1913), one of the founders of the Lviv historical school Oswald Balzer (1858–1933), the outstanding economist Józef Supiński (1804–1883), the creators of the Lviv academic discipline of the history of art – Jan Bołoz Antoniewicz (1858–1922) and Fr. Władysław Żyła (1877–1925). The correspondence also includes several dozen letters from Warsaw researchers: Zygmunt Batowski (1876–1944), who in the years 1897–1915 was the curator of the University Library of the Jan Kazimierz University, Stanisława Sawicka (1895–1982), curator of the graphic collections of the National Museum in Warsaw, the Polish Library in Paris, the Polish Library in Rome, and the Print Room of the Library of the University of Warsaw, as well as Marian Morełowski (1884–1963) (letter regarding the restoration of Polish collections from Soviet Russia from 1924).

Much more interesting still are the letters from artists, shedding some light on the way Olexiński gathered his collections. At the same time, they indicate that in the 1890s and at the beginning of the century that followed, the collector was simply engaged in a regular antiquarian trade, with a scope far beyond the milieu of Lviv.

Among the senders, it is worth mentioning the painter Walery Eliaz Radzikowski (1840–1905), who corresponded with the collector regarding paintings suitable for “artistic trade” – and at the same time excused himself from the transaction “due to sad events that occurred in the family on account of the children falling ill.”<sup>23</sup>

The Bochnia painter, art historian and writer Ludwik Stasiak (1858–1924) reacted with little enthusiasm to Olexiński’s proposed purchase of his works.<sup>24</sup> He informed the collector that, yes, he had “a good picture, but he couldn’t sell it at the price that would be typical for Lviv.”<sup>25</sup>

In turn, Franciszek Daniszewski (1858–1922), founder of the artistic workshop of painting and photography “Sztuka” in Krosno and the artistic group of the same name,<sup>26</sup> gratefully acknowledged the confirmation of receipt of his paintings that he received from Olexiński.<sup>27</sup>

A letter from the now forgotten painter Władysław Bogumin Dietrich (1862–1914),<sup>28</sup> written from Kraków, comes from the same period. The artist “accepted Olexiński’s proposal and conditions,” although at the same time he emphasized that unfortunately he had “nothing bigger finished” to offer.<sup>29</sup>

Another Cracovian artist – a painter known mainly for his religious works – Antoni Gramatyka (1841–1922) was the most tough negotiator.<sup>30</sup> He drove a hard bargain with Olexiński regarding deposits and prices and authorized him to collect

23 Postcard from Walery Eliaz Radzikowski to Stanisław Olexiński, 28 February 1896.

24 T. Budrewicz, *Stasiak Stanisław*, [in:] *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 43, Warszawa–Kraków 2004, pp. 499–503.

25 Letter from Ludwik Stasiak to Stanisław Olexiński, 11 February 1895.

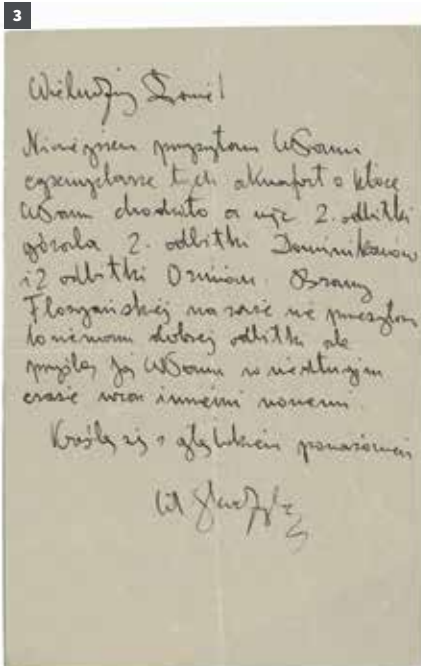
26 For information about the artist, see: A. Melbechowska-Luty, *Daniszewski Franciszek Ksawery Jędrzej*, [in:] *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających. Malarze, rzeźbiarze, graficy*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1975, p. 14.

27 Letter from Franciszek Daniszewski to Stanisław Olexiński, 28 February 1896.

28 For information about the artist, see: eadem, *Dietrich Bogumin Władysław*, [in:] *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych*, vol. 2, pp. 53–54.

29 Letter from Władysław Dietrich to Stanisław Olexiński, 6 February 1896.

30 See: *Gramatyka Antoni*, [in:] *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych*, vol. 2, pp. 455–457.



his works entitled: *Do kościoła* (To the Church), *Z Norymbergi* (From Nuremberg) and *Widok letni* (Summer View) from the Lviv Society of Fine Arts.<sup>31</sup>

The process of expanding Olexiński's collection is perfectly illustrated by later letters from Władysław Skoczylas (1883–1934), from the period immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I, written from Zakopane. In the first one, unfortunately undated, the artist reported:

Sir, I am hereby the sending you the etchings you wanted. Prices are listed on the back of each print. The sum for each of them is 270 crowns, but if you, kind Sir, choose to purchase them all, I would

reduce it to 230 crowns. I am sending the Dominican Church in two copies to choose from. Moreover, there is the head of a highlander with its eyes raised upwards, which I have been making in recent days and have not exhibited anywhere yet. I take this opportunity to add etchings for Doctor Tadeusz Pawlikowski at Chorążczyzna 8 to the portfolio, to whom I am also writing, and asking him to contact you, Sir, as I do not have another file suitable for posting. Apologizing for the delay, I remain at your service, Estimable Sir, yours sincerely, W[Władysław] Skoczylas.<sup>32</sup>

In the next letter (see: **Fig. 3**), Skoczylas let Olexiński know that he had dispatched:

three etchings that you, Sir, were interested in, i.e., 2 prints of a highlander (see: **Fig. 4**), 2 prints of the Dominicans (see: **Fig. 5**) and 2 prints of the Armenians (see: **Fig. 6**). I am not sending the Florian's Gate for now, because I do not have a good print available, but I will send it to You soon along with other works.

In his next correspondence, the artist reported:

Estimable Sir, I am sending as requested the print of the church in Zakopane (the best one that I currently possess), and on that occasion I am enclosing two

3. Letter of Władysław Skoczylas to Stanisław Olexiński, without a date. Private collection

4. Władysław Skoczylas, *Góral* (Highlander). National Museum in Warsaw, <<https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/pl/zbiory/456327>> (as of 8 June 2024)

5. Władysław Skoczylas, *Katedra ormiańska we Lwowie* (Armenian cathedral in Lviv). Private collection

6. Władysław Skoczylas, *Kościół dominikański we Lwowie* (Dominican church in Lviv). Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, <[https://muzeum.asp.waw.pl/collective/pawtucket/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object\\_id/2018](https://muzeum.asp.waw.pl/collective/pawtucket/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/2018)> (as of 8 June 2024)

31 Letters from Antoni Gramatyka to Stanisław Olexiński, 27 January 1896, 19 January 1897.

32 Letter of Władysław Skoczylas to Stanisław Olexiński, without a date.



prints of Armenians, one of an old highlander and two of my latest work, i.e., the portrait of Madame Solska. If Sir would like to supplement his collections, please make a choice. The price of Madame Solska's portrait for you, Sir, is 40 crowns. I do not have graphic works by other artists to offer, about which you inquired on one occasion. I received the last shipment as well as the money. In any case, I urge you to send back promptly the works that you decide not to keep.<sup>33</sup>

As one can conclude, Olexiński ordered works directly from their creators – some of those works certainly ended up in his collection, and others he simply sold to other people. He was somehow involved in the sale of Izydor Krzemicki's collection to the Warsaw university library.<sup>34</sup> Incidentally, Krzemicki's collection features a woodcut *Madonna with Child and Bishops* by Andreani from 1591, bearing a red stamp with the initial "S. O.", indicating that had previously been part of Olexiński's collection. As a bibliophile, Olexiński very actively corresponded regarding purchases of items (including foreign ones) with another bibliophile and collector, donor of the National Museum in Warsaw, Kazimierz Woźnicki (1878–1949).<sup>35</sup> Of course – just like every collector – he made transactions with other collectors: for instance, a copy with Olexiński's handwritten signature of *Die Kunstwerke vom Alterthum bis auf die Gegenwart* (Trieste 1850) found its way to Helena Dąbcańska's library.<sup>36</sup> We also know that he exchanged items with institutions, as evidenced by a letter from the aforementioned Mieczysław Treter: "we will gladly exchange the works of Waldow [?] and Klimasch [?] for selected engravings. However, we still need to check whether they are not in the Ossoliński Library section, find out the prices of these works, and evaluate the engravings in duplicates."<sup>37</sup> Olexiński's collection must have been significant indeed, since Franciszek Jaworski (1873–1914), quoted above, writes: "For my book about Lviv, currently published in the sheet supplement of 'Kurier Lwowski', I urgently need two illustrations: a portrait of Queen Cecilia Renata and a portrait of Marie Louise. I have no way of getting them, therefore I am rushing straight to you, Sir, to ask you to kindly lend me both of the above-mentioned portraits for a few hours."<sup>38</sup> The request contained in the letter is probably related to the book *Lwów stary i dzisiejszy* (Lviv of old and today), published in 1911, which contains reproductions of engravings by Hondius depicting the aforementioned monarchs.<sup>39</sup>

In this context, it is not surprising that the legacy includes two postcards from Wilhelm Wachtel, the author of the bookplate. In one of those, undated, written from Salzburg, the artist reported that he had gotten married, and in the second, sent from Vienna in 1907, he wrote: "My Dear and Estimable Sir, I am making a poster, and

33 Letter of Władysław Skoczylas to Stanisław Olexiński, 11 May 1912.

34 U. Dragońska, *Lwowska kolekcja drzeworytów światłocieniowych Izydora Krzemickiego*, [in:] Hinc Omnia. *Zbiory XIX-wieczne. Organizacja, terminologia, metodyka badań, konserwacja* / Hinc Omnia. *Nineteenth-Century Collections: Organisation, Terminology, Research Methodology, Conservation*, M.M. Kacprzak, J. Talbierska (eds.), Warszawa 2021, pp. 393, 400, 408.

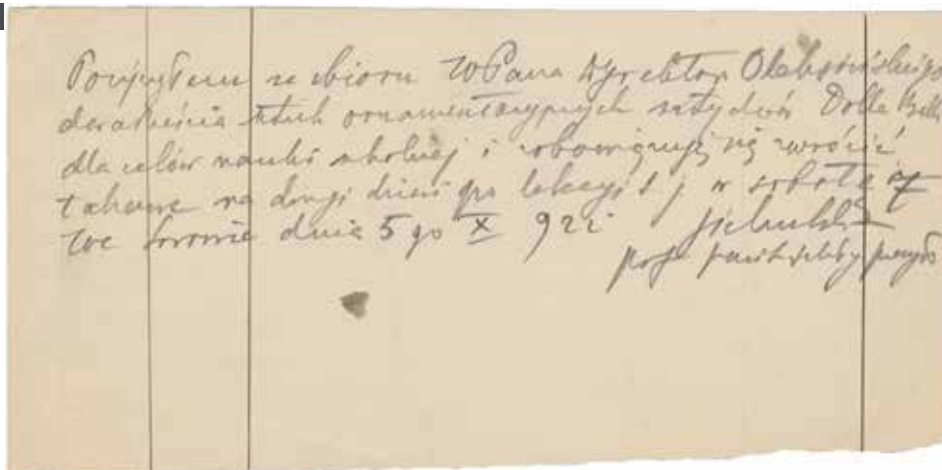
35 M. Romeyko-Hurko, *Kolekcjonerzy, antykwariusze i bibliofile*, p. 88.

36 I. Gruchała, "W tym streszczało się niejako moje życie." *Lwowski księgozbiór Heleny Dąbcańskiej (1863–1956) jako wyraz kultury książki epoki*, Kraków 2016, p. 234.

37 Letter from Mieczysław Treter to Stanisław Olexiński, 31 January 1911.

38 Letter of Franciszek Jaworski to Stanisław Olexiński, without a date.

39 F. Jaworski, *Lwów stary i dzisiejszy (szkice i opowiadania)*, Lwów 1911, pp. 119, 124.



7. Kazimierz Sichulski's  
I.O.U. for Stanisław Olexiński.  
Private collection

of office paper (see: **Fig. 7**) with the note: “I have borrowed twenty pieces of Della Bella’s ornamental engravings from the collection of the Honourable Director Oleksiński for the study purposes for the sake of Polish science, and I undertake to return them on the second day after the lesson, that is, on Saturday the seventh. In Lviv, on October 5, 2022. Sichulski, professor at the State Industrial School.”<sup>40</sup> Among the correspondence, we find a lot of small details that can be considered marginal or exiguous; some of those details we are unable to interpret precisely. In a letter from the landscape painter Marcel Harasimowicz (1859–1935),<sup>42</sup> curator of the Municipal Gallery (later the National Gallery) in Lviv, we find a mention of a portrait commissioned by Olexiński – dated November 7, 1913. A letter of July 8, 1912, from the sculptor Tadeusz Błotnicki (1858–1928), who asked Olexiński to send photos from his collection of the portraits of “Gucio” – the Lviv actor Gustaw Fischer, in connection with the bust being prepared for a tombstone at the Łyczakowski cemetery – also proves the collector’s close rapport with the circle of Lviv artists.

Of course, one might conclude that the above-mentioned examples of correspondence and collected references provide marginal information at best. In fact, though, it could be argued that they constitute interesting miscellanea illustrating the life of the Lviv artistic and scientific community in the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the interwar period. At this point we can only add that they concern a life that no longer exists and has mostly faded into oblivion.

Subsequent fate of Olexiński’s collection remains unknown. Based on two letters from the publisher Mieczysław Idzikowski, written from Warsaw in January and February 1941 (*sic!*), in which he proposed purchasing “four watercolors, allegedly made by Antoni Oleszczyński, which represent portraits of musicians: J. Nowakowski, A. Kąstki, F. Chopin (alleged) and another unknown artist” for the sum of PLN 1,500 – it can be assumed that the collection was partially sold.<sup>43</sup>

40 Postcard from Wilhelm Wachtel to Stanisław Olexiński, 11 July 1907.

41 I.O.U. from Kazimierz Sichulski, 5 October 1922.

42 About Harasimowicz, see: P. Łukasiewicz, *Harasimowicz Marceli*, [in:] *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających. Malarze, rzeźbiarze, graficy*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1979, pp. 30–31.

43 In an autograph preserved at the Instytut Badań Literackich: M. Idzikowski, *Chopin: katalog portretów: portrety z natury w/g opisów własnych, współczesnych i biografów*, [1943], <<https://www.rcin.org.pl/dlibra/publication/157058/edition/128663/content?ref=L3B1YmxpY2FoaW9uLzcyMTlxL2VkaXRpb24vMjM1MzMo>> (as of 10 April 2024), a watercolour is listed: “Oleszczyński

I greet you warmly. Please do not be cross with me for the delay.”<sup>40</sup> Judging by the familiar tone, the gentlemen must have been on friendly terms. It seems that Olexiński also had close amicable relations with Kazimierz Sichulski, as evidenced by the I.O.U. written on a fragment

Perhaps, after the owner's death, part of the collection found its way to the Ossolineum collection – and is currently in the collection of the W. Stefanyk National Scientific Library in Lviv.<sup>44</sup>

A singular, albeit sad summary of the times in which Olexiński – it seems – played an important, although perhaps not the leading role, is found in a short type-written note written just over a month after the German attack on Soviet Russia:

Przeworsk, August 2, 1941. Dear Sir. The way is opening. I hasten to welcome you warmly. I hope I will be able to come in a few days. I will come to you in the hope that I will be able to find a place to live either at your place or at the Institute. I am just looking for an opportunity to send you this card, and I hope that by the same opportunity or another you will be able to answer me and give me the information I am asking for. I do hope that your health is better, and I was very worried when I was informed that you, my dear friend, were ill. I am preparing cards for Mr Gębarowicz, Mr Wisłocki, Mrs Łukasiewiczowa and Mrs Witosławska in the hope that at least one of them will arrive safely. It would be a blessing if I could find with one of you such items as soap, tea, coffee or chocolate, which are completely lacking here, but apparently in abundance there. In the hope that we will see each other soon, I express my sincere friendship and special respect and esteem for you. A[ndrzej] L[ubomirski].<sup>45</sup>

We do not know whether the message from the last administrator and curator of the Ossolineum reached the addressee, or whether it was already received by Maria Olexińska<sup>46</sup> and found its way into the collection of memorabilia, which are like shards of memory of an extraordinary man.

## Abstract

### *Shards of Memory: Stanisław Olexiński, a collector from Lviv*

This article is devoted to Stanisław Olexiński (1865–1941), a person almost completely unknown, but – as it seems – rather important for the history of art and collecting in Lviv (now Ukraine). Olexiński was the administrative secretary of the Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich (Ossoliński National Institute) since 1919, as well as a well-known collector. His collection was focused mainly on publications on the theory and history of art, and he also gathered a sizeable portion of prints and drawings by Polish artists. Partially preserved correspondence and documents related to Olexiński reveal his passion for collecting and his commercial activities in the artistic community. Letters from well-known artists confirm his commitment

A./?/ watercolour with gouache, 100 × 145 mm. Chopin in his youth. Until December 1942 it was part of the legacy collection of the late S. Olexiński in Lviv.”

44 We know that this includes an album (a friendship book) with drawings by J. Peszke, A. Brodowski and A. Orłowski, with a note: “I bought this from J. Kołaczkowski's widow (with inscriptions cut out in 1911) S. O.” See: J.M. Michałowski, *Sztambuch w zbiorach lwowskiej biblioteki*, “Biuletyn Historii Sztuki”, 26, 1974, p. 397. It is possible, nevertheless, that the collection could have entered the Ossoliński Institute earlier than that, for instance, in an exchange or simply sold.

45 Letter of Andrzej Lubomirski to Stanisław Olexiński, 2 July 1940.

46 Incidentally, the presented collection also features a moving letter addressed to Maria Olexińska, written from the Wawel castle in Kraków, dated January 1968, sent by Stefania née Nikorowicz Mańkowska, Tadeusz Mańkowski's widow (it seems the two ladies had a family connection).

**KEYWORDS:**

Stanisław Olexiński,  
Wilhelm Wachtel, Ossoliński National Institute,  
collecting, Lviv

and testify to his sturdy activity in acquiring works of art, both by purchasing them directly from the artists. Olexiński exchanged works from his collection with, among others, the Ossoliński Institute, also donated some objects to the City Gallery or the Historical Museum in Lviv. Unfortunately, the fate of the collection remains unknown. After Olexiński's death in 1941, shortly after the German army entered Lviv, his collection may have been dispersed, sold or destroyed. The last piece of information relating to Olexiński is a letter from Andrzej Lubomirski, curator of the Ossoliński Institute, dated August 1941, indicating that the collector was still popular; nevertheless, it is uncertain whether letter reached him or his wife. The paper presented herein is an attempt to restore the memory of someone who played a relatively substantial role in the cultural life of Lviv's intellectual and artistic elite.

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