

# Chair Upholstery Tapestry with a Bouquet of Flowers



- Author after a cartoon by an artist from the circle of Cornelis Floris and Cornelis Bos
- Date of production ca. 1555
- Place of creation Brussels
- Dimensions height: 57 cm, width: 77.5 cm
- Author's designation on the upper part of the border denotation: D
- ID no. ZKWawel 110
- Museum [Wawel Royal Castle – State Art Collection](#)
- Availability in stock
- Subjects [daily life](#), [nature](#)
- Technique [weaving](#)
- Material [wool](#), [silk](#), [silver thread](#), [gold thread](#)
- Collector collection of King Sigismund Augustus
- Object copyright Wawel Royal Castle – State Art Collection
- Digital images copyright public domain

- Digitalisation RDW MIC, Digitalisation of the most significant tapestries from the collection of Wawel Royal Castle project
- Tags [Wawel](#), [dwór](#), [renesans](#), [tkanina](#), [3D plus](#), [król](#), [rośliny](#), [domena publiczna](#)

This small tapestry belongs to a group of textiles intended as chair upholstery. It shows a colourful bouquet of flowers in a vase decorated with animal masks and small golden garlands. The flowers in the vase are probably large two-coloured irises interwoven with blooms of clematis with dark green leaves. The composition is complemented with blue periwinkles. In the corners of the tapestry, lion masks are placed on the border of interwoven ribbons filled with a floral ornament. The border ornament is characteristic of the entire collection.

Elaborated by Magdalena Ozga (Wawel Royal Castle), editorial team of Małopolska's Virtual Museums,



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## Textile Decoration of Interiors. Groups of Small Tapestries from the Collection of Sigismund Augustus and Their Function

Decorative textiles, such as tapestries, constituted a decoration for chambers of the Royal Residence, adding splendour and a stately nature thereto. All tapestries commissioned by King Sigismund Augustus, from large-format to quite small ones, had specific functions in the residence interiors, aside from their artistic value.

Forms and sizes of certain categories of textiles were adjusted directly to the place of their destination; therefore, they were closely related to architecture. These groups include small tapestries complementing the decor of the castle interiors, namely over-window, under-window, over-door and upholstery tapestries.

Textiles in a shape similar to a rectangle, ended with a segmental arch, could serve as over-window tapestries, mounted over the upper straight-ended window frame (see: [Tapestry with the Arms of Poland on a Landscape Background with Animals – a Dormouse and a dog-like Predator](#)) and over-door tapestries mounted above a doorway lintel (see: [Tapestry with the Arms of Lithuania on a Landscape Background with Animals – Spotted Hyena and Monkey](#)).

It was different in the case of over-window tapestries intended to hang “over arches”. These were the arcade tapestries (*in formam arcus*), which, being in the shape of a semicircularly-ended window frame, were cut in the form of an arc at the bottom and were straight at the top. At present, in the Wawel Royal Castle – State Art Collection there are only fragments (e.g. arch areas) of such tapestries, since the straps joining them into a whole were cut out in the nineteenth century during their stay in Russia (see: [Tapestry with Figures holding Cornucopias](#)). The only tapestry of this type preserved as a whole is now in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Its large spread (a width of 420 cm) lets one guess its function – it could have been a decoration of a span of an arcaded courtyard, a very wide portal or a pair of windows. However, researchers believe that among this group of textiles there were also smaller over-window tapestries with the width of a single window frame.

Narrow, elongated and rectangular textiles also constituted a window decoration, but they were a bottom adornment, hence their name – under-window tapestries (see: [Tapestry with Music-Making Figures](#)).

There is evidence to suggest that they could function as a cover for the sides of deep window frames. According to inventories, under-window tapestries were also used to cover benches or chests.

The last group is made up of upholstery tapestries, eleven pieces of which have survived to this day.

These tapestries were smallest in size and had a completely practical function, namely they formed coverings of seats or backs of chairs, as well as cushions (see: [Chair Upholstery Tapestry with a Bouquet of Flowers](#)).

Currently, only part of the collection of this kind of small tapestry, once numbering seventeen sets of

decorations of large windows alone, is in the Wawel collection.

Main narratives of this group of textiles was focused primarily on [grotesque](#) (under-window, over-window and furniture tapestries), on a decorative function, as well as on [heraldry](#) (over-window and over-door tapestries), having representative significance associated with the political agenda of the ruler. With reference to the latter, among furniture tapestries there are also monogram textiles, with the initials of the king – SA (*Sigismundus Augustus*).

Elaborated by Paulina Kluz (Editorial team of Małopolska's Virtual Museums),



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## The history of Sigismund Augustus's collection of tapestries

Sigismund Augustus probably ordered some of these fabrics around the year 1548. According to *Wychwalnik weselny [Wedding praiser]* by Stanisław Orzechowski (*Panagyricus Nuptiarum Sigimundi Augusti Poloniae Regis*, ed. 1553), the three series of tapestries: [the History of the First Parents](#), [the Story of Moses](#) and [the Story of Noah](#) already adorned the interiors of Wawel Castle on 30 July 1553, for the wedding celebrations of Sigismund Augustus and Catherine of Austria. It is assumed that after this year the king ordered further fabrics, and that around 1560, the entire collection was already in his possession. In his last will from the year 1571, the heirless Sigismund Augustus stated that his collection of tapestries would be redistributed to his three sisters: Sophie, Duchess of Brunswick; Catherine, Queen of Sweden; and the future Queen of Poland, Anne. According to the king's will, after their deaths, the collection was to become the property of the Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth. As early as 1572, the tapestries were deposited in the royal castle in Tykocin, and then they were split between the royal residences (Kraków, Niepołomice, Grodno, and Warsaw). In 1578, Anna handed part of the collection to one of the heirs in Stockholm — Catherine — and, by chance, the tapestries returned to Poland in 1587 or 1591, together with the son of the latter, King Sigismund III Vasa.

Traditionally, the tapestries were part of the artistic setting of the most important royal celebrations, even after the death of Sigismund Augustus. The tapestries were used during the king's funeral ceremony in 1572, as well as during the coronation of Henry III of France in 1574. After these events, they returned to their function in 1592, when they decorated the Wawel chambers during the first wedding of Sigismund III Vasa to Anne of Austria, as well as during his second — with her sister Constance of Austria in 1605. Sigismund's tapestries were also used as the decorations in St. John's Archcathedral and in the royal castle in Warsaw, during the wedding of king [Władysław IV](#) to Cecilia Renata in September 1637. During the Swedish Deluge (1655–1657), the collection was moved to an unknown location. Against the will of Sigismund Augustus, the tapestries were treated as private property by King Jan Kazimierz Vasa and became the subject of the political games of the abdicating ruler. The ex-king took a loan against the "Deluge Curtains" (as the tapestries were then collectively labelled), which was handed over to Francis Grattta, a banker and merchant from Gdansk. Then, in 1669, Jan Kazimierz — in order to secure the guaranteed commission for himself — ordered Grattta to hide the tapestries. In spite of this, in February 1670, the collection was borrowed from a "mysterious" storage place in order to decorate the monastery and the church of the Pauline Fathers at Jasna Góra, on the occasion of the wedding of Michał Korybut

Wiśniowiecki to Eleanor of Austria and for the decoration of the St. John's Archcathedral in Warsaw, during the coronation of Eleanor. The death of Jan Kazimierz did not solve the problem, because the Commonwealth and the heir of the ex-king both had claims to the tapestries being still subject of lien. In 1673, the Deluge Declaration was passed, according to which only the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania could claim the collection of tapestries, and it was the only entity which could redeem them, as it did in 1724. The recovered collection of fabrics was placed in the monastery of Discalced Carmelites in Warsaw. From then on, the tapestries belonged to the Crown Treasury, managed by consecutive treasurers. They were used, among others, during the Corpus Christi ceremonies, as well as for the decoration of St. John's Archcathedral and Warsaw Castle, on the occasion of the coronation of Stanisław August Poniatowski in 1768.

Since 1785, the collection was stored in the Palace of the Commonwealth, which performed the function of state archive. Ten years later, in November 1795, during the siege of Warsaw laid by the invader's army — on the orders of Catherine II — the fabrics were stolen and brought to the storehouses of the Taurida Palace in St. Petersburg. After 1860, the collection of tapestries was separated, some of which were used to decorate the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and the tsar's residences in Gatchina and Livadia in the Crimea, while others were transferred to the Museum of Court Stables, the collections of the Academy of Fine Arts, and the Theatre Office. Only after one hundred and twenty-six years — thanks to the Treaty of Riga in 1921—were most of the old tapestries recovered from the Soviet Union; the return of the collection was accomplished in instalments by 1928.

In September 1939, at the outbreak of World War II, a decision was made to move all the tapestries, along with other works from the Wawel treasury, outside Poland. The artefacts were moved to France through Romania, where they were repaired in Aubusson weaving centre. After the French resistance was crushed, the collection was transported by sea to England. The latter also turned out to be a dangerous place, because the Battle of Britain was about to begin. Because of this, the tapestries were transported to Canada on the Polish ship Batory, where they were stored in very good conditions. After the end of the world war, the Canadian authorities delayed returning the deposit, because they were concerned with the political situation in Poland after 1945. Maurice Duplessis, the guardian of the tapestries in Quebec, was the one who resisted that idea with particular vehemence. The threat of the appropriation of the tapestries by the Canadian government caused a huge uproar in the country and among the officials of the Polish government-in-exile. Only after the death of Duplessis in 1959, thanks to numerous interventions and the great efforts of leading Polish figures, were the tapestries reclaimed and returned to Wawel, in February 1961.

Two of the identified tapestries from the former collection of Sigismund Augustus are outside Wawel. The first fabric — *The moral decline of humanity* from series *the Story of Noah* — was found in the Kremlin and returned to Poland in 1977, as a gift of the Soviet authorities for the reconstruction of the Warsaw castle, where it is held to this day. On the other hand, the other one — the only tapestry intended for presentation above windows, preserved in its entire form — for some unknown reason, found its way from Russia to the antiquarian market. It was purchased by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and it has been part of their collection since 1952.

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## In a weaving workshop

Brussels weaving workshops worked for the wealthiest clients: popes and rulers. These were large enterprises, employing from a few to a dozen qualified weavers, capable of bearing the very high costs of making fabrics. Expensive materials — the best wool, often Spanish or English, silk and the most expensive threads of gold and silver — constituted a very serious expense, not only for the workshop, but also for the client.

Weavers reproduced the pattern — cardboard — which was previously made by specialized painters, the so-called cartoonists. Their task was to make a tapestry design in a 1: 1 ratio in a mirror image. If an arras such as [Anger of God](#) has a surface of 432 cm x 435 cm, the cardboard which was necessary to make it had to have the same dimensions. Cardboard was usually painted on thick paper, which was sometimes glued with canvas, for greater durability. Tapestries were woven on the left side. The weaver sitting at the loom had a cardboard hung behind him, which was reflected in the mirror placed in front of the loom and the weaver. In this way, the performer could see a pattern in the mirror that he was gradually weaving. Cardboard could be used by the weavers many times. Weaving workshops have performed even a whole series of tapestries several times on the same subject model, based on the projects they had, with smaller or larger changes. However, the most valuable was always *editio princeps*, i.e. the first model performance. An example of such a practice are three biblical series from the collection of Zygmunt August, made according to cardboard probably by [Michie Coxcie](#). They have many replicas: the cycle, [the Story of Noah](#), repeated nineteen times, [the History of the first Parents](#) five times, a [History of the Tower of Babel](#), twice.

Cardboard was treated purely for use, so it is difficult to find today in museum collections. One of the few examples is Design of a landscape and animal tapestry with a rhinoceros and an elephant by the artist from the circle of Pieter Coecke van Aelsta, preserved in the British Museum collection, which could serve as a model for the lost Sigismund tapestry in an analogous manner, depicting rhinoceros, elephants and monkeys on trees (mentioned in the inventories of 1669 and 1764).

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