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## The Wettin Gallery

**A new permanent exhibition**

**Open from 26 April 2022**

**“When the Saxon king rules you can eat, drink and loosen your belt”, the Polish nobility used to say, referring with sentiment to the popular myth about the reign of the second of the Wettin dynasty’s elected kings. This enthusiasm was not shared by historiographers, who associated the Saxon era above all with the progressing decay of the state. The new permanent exhibition at the Royal Castle evokes the spirit of this ambiguous and therefore fascinating epoch in the history of the Polish Commonwealth.**

The Wettin dynasty, which originated in Saxony, was present on the Polish-Lithuanian throne in the person of Augustus II the Strong and his son Augustus III, although it did not write a golden chapter in Polish historiography. In fact, it could be said that the “Saxon era” has become a black legend. Is such harsh judgement deserved? From a purely political point of view, certainly yes. Mistakes in foreign policy and the lack of necessary internal reforms led to a weakening of the authority of royal power. This was accompanied by an increase in the position of magnate families, forming warring factions, capable of corrupting the nobility and pursuing their own policies, often contrary to the *raison d’état*. This resulted in a growing crisis of the state, which would eventually lead to the downfall of the Commonwealth.

It is worth remembering, however, that in terms of cultural development and customs the Saxon period was extremely colourful and interesting, and above all important - and as such certainly worthy of special commemoration.

Therefore, apart from the magnificent, richly decorated facade on the side of the Vistula River, as well as the Senator’s Room reconstructed in a manner reminiscent of the Saxon era, from now on visitors will also be able to admire a new permanent exhibition at the Royal Castle, relating to more than six decades of Saxon rule.

The Wettin Gallery is a room decorated in the style of a royal or aristocratic salon from the first half of the 18th century. Both the works of art and the furnishings bear the marks of the

dominant artistic styles of the time: Rococo and Regency.

The original period furniture present in the room was bought especially for this exhibition from antique shops in Paris, Madrid and Modena. The most prominent among them are a set of Italian consoles and mirrors in richly carved gilt frames and Parisian sarcophagus inlaid chests with preserved sets of original bronzes. The tabletops display, among other things, antique vases from the collection of Augustus III, which were donated by the East German government in the 1970s.

The set of “Radziwiłł” seats in the style of Louis XV is covered with 18th century embroidery on canvas depicting mythological and allegorical figural scenes, such as Apollo and the Muses.

The walls of the room are covered with paintings, mainly portraits of rulers and members of the royal family, but also scenes from court life. Most of the works come from the collection of Andrzej Ciechanowiecki.

The beginning of the reign of the Saxons in the Commonwealth is documented in the monumental painting *The Election of Augustus II in 1697* by Martin Altomonte (1657-1745), which depicts the nobility gathered on the electoral field deliberating over the election of a new monarch. In the background there is a panorama of Warsaw with the Royal Castle.

Among the effigies of Augustus II himself, the most interesting is his equestrian statue, rare in Polish collections, made before 1725 according to Guillaume de Groff (ca. 1676–1742). The portraits of two illegitimate sons of the monarch: General Fryderyk August Rutowski (1702–1764), who came from a relationship with a Turkish woman, Fatima, painted around 1724 by Louis de Silvestre the Younger (1675–1760) and Jerzy Saski (1707–1774), field marshal and governor of Dresden, from the relationship with dutchess Urszula Lubomirska, made by Anton Graff (1736-1813) around 1768, are of high artistry.

Among the paintings are as many as eight depictions of Frederick Krystian, son of Augustus III, future Elector of Saxony and would-be candidate for the Polish throne, as well as images of Frederick Augustus I, King of Saxony and Duke of Warsaw, son of Frederick Krystian, and his wife Maria Amalia Augusta Wittelsbach - so that the Wettin dynasty is represented in the Gallery in four generations.

The exhibition will certainly serve as an excellent background for many stories about this fascinating and turbulent chapter in the history of the Polish Commonwealth, which was the Saxon era, and will help to understand it in all its colourful complexity. Next to the Rooms of the Presidents of the Second Polish Republic and the Authorities in Exile, the Wettin Gallery will become another space revealing another historical epoch in the rich history of the Royal Castle.

The exhibition is available as part of the Royal Route ticket. **Buy a ticket>**

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