

The proposed project deals with the print collection of Jan Ponętowski (c. 1540-1598) – a Polish nobleman and abbot of the Premonstratensian Monastery Hradisko near Olomouc who donated it to the University of Cracow with other works of art, handicrafts, books and manuscripts in 1592. Many precious items from this donation are now lost. Nevertheless, over one thousand prints may still be found in the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow.

Almost all print albums bear their original 16th-century bindings and many of them have a date and an individual title referring to its content blind stamped on the covers. Few prints were pasted by the collector into his books. He also presented three, a few-meter long monumental printed friezes. It must be emphasized that Jan Ponętowski's print collection is one of very few early modern print collections which have been neither extensively enhanced nor later rebound. Moreover, it is the only well-preserved 16th-century collection related to the territories of the Kingdom of Poland and the region of Moravia. Despite its uniqueness, very few references regarding it can be found in the scholarly literature and both the collection and the collector have not been adequately reflected in the global scientific literature.

The aim of this project is to provide first in-depth study of Jan Ponętowski's print collection and to place it within the European context of strategies developed by print publishers as well as other European 16th-century collections preserved either partially or known only from their inventories. In order to achieve this aim, the collection needs a thorough analysis and the intellectual formation of its creator has to be identified. Therefore, it is crucial to elaborate Jan Ponętowski's collecting practices with a special emphasis on motivations and purposes for collecting prints and their arrangement within albums and among other donated items. The paucity of known archival records considering the biography of the collector, impels to conduct archival queries, especially on years 1576-1587 when Jan Ponętowski was an abbot of Premonstratensian Monastery Hradisko near Olomouc. The preliminary research has shown that he was the most active as a print collector back then.

Alongside the aforementioned studies, a catalogue of Jan Ponętowski's print collection in the Jagiellonian Library will be compiled. It will comprise basic data on all preserved prints from the collection. As it will describe extremely rare and previously unknown impressions, the catalogue will be a useful tool for researchers of German, Italian and Netherlandish prints as well as for scholars interested in art collecting. Moreover, the dates blind stamped on the bindings provide the latest possible date for some previously undated impressions and allow for placing them more precisely within the respective artist's oeuvre.

The magnitude, excellent state of preservation, original organisation system and completeness of Jan Ponętowski's collection of printed images provide an extremely rare possibility to carry out extensive research on a representative early modern European print collection. Furthermore, this ample research material may be confronted with the inventory of the donation, which should allow to establish books, works of art or handicrafts which are lost, and to evaluate the place and rank of the printed images among other objects donated to the University of Cracow in 1592. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the research will contribute to the general discussion on the role of prints in early modern European art and library collections.