Imagining Christian kingship in Sigismund II Augustus's "Genesis" tapestries at Wawel Castle (1553)

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Introduction

In January 1547, Poland-Lithuania was one of the largest polities in Europe, both in population and territory, and one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse. For seventeen years, it had been ruled by two kings who ushered in the kingdom's so-called "Golden Age." The first, Sigismund the Old (1467-1548), was eighty years old and in poor health. His son, Sigismund Augustus, who had been crowned as co-regent in 1530, was about to commission one of the largest and most expensive tapestry series in Europe.

Fig. 1 Anonymous painter, *Portrait of Sigismund Augustus in Armour*, c. 1550, oil on canvas. Neuberg an der Donau, Alte Pinakothek.

When the old king died on 1 April 1548, Sigismund Augustus (1520-1572) was twenty-seven, and the last son of the Jagiellonian dynasty. He had no heirs, and was a controversial figure among the Polish nobility and clergy for his reforming sympathies,

lavish lifestyle, and romance with the Lithuanian noblewoman Barbara Radziwiłł. Now, as sole ruler of a decentralised monarchy, Sigismund had to establish himself as a worthy and capable successor to the Polish and Lithuanian thrones. His guiding principle, fairly consistent from the start of his reign until his death, was a general policy of conciliation, religious toleration, and strategic relations with various factions at court, in parliament, and in the Catholic and Protestant Churches. As a result, Poland-Lithuania remained an example of relative peace during the age of religious wars.

In the first decades of his reign, Sigismund's bountiful patronage of the arts reflected the flourishing of his kingdom. The tapestries commissioned around 1547, known today as the *Genesis* series, were the first twenty entries in a collection that would eventually surpass three hundred works by Sigismund's death in 1572. They also form the first part of a cohesive series of biblical tapestries, verdures, grotesques, and heraldry, one hundred and thirty-eight of which are extant. Together, they constitute the largest known tapestry series in Renaissance Europe, with *Genesis* being the most-copied series after Raphael's *Acts of the Apostles* cartoons.[1] The twenty works considered in this dissertation depict the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, and Moses in a monumental mannerist style inspired by Raphael's *Acts*. The cartoons were designed by Michiel Coxcie, the "Flemish Raphael," with borders designed by artists from the school of Cornelis Floris and Cornelis Bos. They were woven in workshops in Brussels using silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. Each tapestry is a landscape-oriented rectangle between 4.5 and 4.8 metres tall and between 5.3 and 8.9 metres wide, with the exception of one (*Fratricide Conceived*, a portrait-oriented rectangle, 4.7 metres tall and 2.5 metres wide). The twenty tapestries were first unveiled in 1553 in Wawel Castle, Kraków at Sigismund's wedding to Catherine

[1] Magdalena Piwocka, "Arrasy Zygmunta Augusta: 'The art of majesty' ostatniego Jagiellona," in *Patronat Artystyczny Jagiellonów*, ed. by Marek Walczak and Piotr Węcowski, 397-408 (Kraków: Societas Vistulana, 2015), 405-406.

of Habsburg, the daughter of the future Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I. The event was documented by the orator and rhetorician Stanisław Orzechowski in an *ekphrasis* of the tapestries, included in his panegyric of the wedding.[2]

Fig. 2 Titian, *Portrait of Archduchess Catherine of Austria*, 1548-1549, oil on panel. Ölsnitz, Schloss Voigtsberg.

From 1553 to the present, the Jagiellonian tapestries have been spaces of meaning-making for their owners and viewers. In his will, Sigismund Augustus bequeathed his collection to "the people of Poland," so that they would be treasured by the kingdom for ages to come. Used for over a century in royal ceremonies and celebrations, they were intrinsically linked to the Polish crown, even as it passed from the heads of the Jagiellons to other dynasties. The tapestries' plunder in 1795 by the Russian army during the Third

[2] Stanisław Orzechowski, "Panegyricus Nuptiarum Sigismundi Augusti regis Poloniae," reprinted in Jerzy Szablowski, ed., *Arrasy królewskie w Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1975), 51-55.

Partition of Poland made them a symbol of lost sovereignty and national resistance. Following their reclamation after the Polish-Soviet war in 1922, they became symbols of restored sovereignty and a hopeful future for the Republic of Poland. Today, they are the highlight of the royal art collection at Wawel Castle. Although it is important to understand how the tapestries have become increasingly loaded signifiers for Poland over the centuries, it is just as important to try and recreate their intended functions and meanings in 1553. There remains a common thread throughout the nearly five hundred years of the tapestries' existence, a thread that would have been visible to their earliest viewers at Sigismund's wedding: they tell a story of princely power, and of religion woven through it.

As art historians have shown, tapestry is an ideal medium to question and recontextualise notions of early modern kingship. Indeed, there is quite possibly no other artistic medium from the Renaissance that is so closely linked to kingship. Sixteenth-century European rulers frequently used tapestry as tools for conveying personal images and political/religious agendas. Tapestries were synonymous with wealth, power, and trans-European regnal legitimacy. As court art, they were intended to be showpieces for elite audiences, and were therefore in a prime position to be message-boards to courtiers and visitors. Made with international legibility in mind, they used a common iconographic lexicon that could be read by foreigners as well as locals. In other words, a tapestry was the most magnificent, prominent, and comprehensible artistic medium for broadcasting princely power to other elites.[3] Through their medium, materiality, narratives, style, and symbolism, a monarch's tapestry collection is fruitful ground for studying their visions of rule. Frances Yates's and Thomas Campbell's groundbreaking research into Renaissance tapestries has demonstrated that it was common for Sigismund's contemporaries in the

[3] See especially Thomas Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002) and *Henry VIII and the Art of Majesty: Tapestries at the Tudor Court* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Holy Roman Empire, France, and England to use the medium as their primary visual conveyors of personal image and ideology.[4] This is due in part to the connotations of tapestry with magnificence, as well as the medium's practical benefits, including its imposing size, materials, portability, and potential for narrative and iconographic detail.[5] The collections of Henry VIII, the Habsburgs, and the Valois have already been considered through the lens of "the politics of tapestry."[6] Sigismund's renowned collection has not, and is worth being brought into this discourse alongside these other collections.

Genesis is also worth studying because of its potential role as a new primary source to continue ongoing historical work on the religiosity of Renaissance Poland. Traditionally, Sigismund, whose religious convictions and policies seemingly defied confessional categorisation, has been treated as an anomaly to be reconciled within the Catholic metanarrative. In recent decades, historians have worked to deconstruct national myths of the innate Catholicism of the Polish people and monarchy in the early modern period.[7] In light of these studies that have illuminated the Polish Reformation and religious culture in all its nuance and complexity, it is worth taking another look at the tapestries as signifiers of Polish "Golden Age" kingship and its relationship to religion.

For both of these reasons, it is time for a re-examination of *Genesis* through new methodology, in order to reach a better understanding of Sigimund's kingship and its

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[4] Frances Yates, *The Valois Tapestries* (London: Warburg Institute, 1959); Campbell, *Henry VIII*, 103.
[5] Ibid., 336.
[6] See Campbell, *Henry VIII*; Iain Buchanan, *Habsburg Tapestries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015); Frances Yates, *The Valois Tapestries* (London: Warburg Institute, 1959).
[7] See e.g. Kazimierz Bem, *Calvinism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1548-1648* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Howard Louthan, "A Model for Christendom? Erasmus, Poland and the Reformation," *Church History* 83 (2014): 18-37; Natalia Nowakowska, "Forgetting Lutheranism: Historians and the Early Reformation in Poland (1517–1548)," *Church History and Religious Culture* 92, no. 2-3 (2012): 281-303; Maciej Ptaszyński, "Between Marginalization and Orthodoxy: The Unitas Fratrum in Poland in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Moravian History* 14, no. 1 (2014): 1-29.

religious dimensions. A combination of historical and art historical approaches is an ideal way to fully comprehend both the context and the content of the artworks.

This thesis studies the *Genesis* series in terms of how the medium, style, narrative, and iconography may have supported Sigismund's nascent kingship in a time of flux and instability. It considers the biblical content of the tapestries, the rise of the Polish Reformation at the time of their commission, the cultural significance of tapestry as the supreme medium of court art, and the grandeur of the series in materials, scale, style, and narrative. From this, the two major themes that emerge are religious leadership and magnificence. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to answer the question: what can the Jagiellonian *Genesis* tapestries reveal about the relationship between religion and power in Sigismund Augustus's kingship?

The *Genesis* tapestries

The following is a complete list of the twenty *Genesis* tapestries unveiled in July 1553. Apart from the lost Moses set and *The Moral Downfall of Mankind* (Royal Castle in Warsaw), all of the tapestries are in the possession of the National Art Collection at Wawel Castle in Kraków. All cartoons are by Michiel Coxcie, and all borders are from the circle of Cornelis Floris and Cornelis Bos. Each of the tapestries includes a short Latin inscription in the top border based on a Bible verse (see Appendix 1).

- *Paradise Bliss*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Jan de Kempeneer. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 480 x 854 cm.
- *Adam Cultivating the Earth*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Willem de Kempeneer. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 470 x 540 cm.
- *Abel's Sacrifice*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop unknown (stamp lost). Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 467 x 582 cm.
- *Fratricide Conceived*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Jan van Tieghem. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 470 x 246 cm.
- *Cain Kills Abel*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Jan van Tieghem. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 466 x 539 cm.

- *Cain Flees the Wrath of God*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Pieter van Aelst. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 467 x 526 cm.
- *The Moral Downfall of Mankind*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop unknown (stamp lost). Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 452 x 612 cm.
- *God Converses with Noah*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Pieter van Aelst. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 467 x 525 cm.
- *The Building of the Ark*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshops of Pieter van Aelst and Willem de Kempeneer. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 484 x 790 cm.
- *The Animals Enter the Ark*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Pieter van Aelst. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 475 x 792 cm.
- *The Flood*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop unknown (stamp lost). Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 482 x 842 cm.
- *The Animals Exit the Ark*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Jan van Tieghem. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 477 x 885 cm.
- *Noah's Thanksgiving Sacrifice*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop of Pieter van Aelst. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 481 x 713 cm.
- *God Blesses Noah's Family*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshops of Jan van Tieghem and Jan de Kempeneer. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 479 x 612 cm.
- *Noah's Drunkenness*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshops of Pieter van Aelst and Willem de Kempeneer. Silk, wool, and silver and gold thread. 481 x 610 cm.
- *Moses Sent to Egypt*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop, materials, dimensions unknown.
- *Moses Speaks with Pharaoh*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop, materials, dimensions unknown.
- *The Crossing of the Red Sea*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop, materials, dimensions unknown.
- *The Ten Commandments*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop, materials, dimensions unknown.
- *The War with the Amalekites*. Brussels, c. 1550. Workshop, materials, dimensions unknown.[8]

One question which must be answered at the onset of this study is: why analyse the *Genesis* series among all of Sigismund's other tapestries for this thesis? Firstly, the

[8] It is worth mentioning that the title given to the series by modern tapestry scholars at Wawel Castle, "the *Genesis* series," is a misnomer if one includes the lost Moses pieces in discussions of the set as a whole, as this dissertation does, because the story of Moses is not found in the Book of Genesis. It is therefore unlikely that the series was referred to as *Genesis* while in the possession of Sigismund Augustus. However, it is an accurate title for the extant pieces at the castle, which include only the Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Noah stories, all of which are found in the Book of Genesis.

scriptural subject matter of *Genesis* makes them the most literal choice for an exploration of religion and kingship. Secondly, they are the only extant narrative tapestries in the Jagiellonian collection, the rest of which comprises verdures, grotesques, and heraldry, all of which should be studied separately due to their different genres. However, they certainly warrant their own examination, especially of their symbolism, and this would certainly be an avenue for future research. The *Genesis* tapestries are also considerably larger and more iconographically rich and complex than the others, providing more material for close readings. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the *Genesis* series was commissioned and unveiled at a particularly crucial and precarious time in Sigismund Augustus's reign: a time we can also specifically pinpoint based on primary sources. By contrast, we do not have records of the exact dates of the commissioning or unveiling of the verdures, grotesques, and heraldry, making a study of their relationship to their historical context much more difficult. Because of the known timing and primary sources related to the *Genesis* tapestries, they are perhaps the only choices from the Jagiellonian collection for which a study with my chosen methodology would be possible.

The location of the tapestries within Wawel Castle at their unveiling is a matter of some controversy, discussed at length by art historian Marcin Fabiański.[9] While Fabiański presents two main theories regarding the rooms in which *Genesis* hung, in this thesis, I have adopted one of them as the more likely: namely, that the Adam and Eve/Cain and Abel subsets hung in the Eagle Hall, the Noah subset in the Senators' Hall, and the Moses subset in an antechamber between them. In Appendix 3, I have included maps of these hanging locations, using Fabiański's work on the dimensions of the rooms, as well as the

[9] See especially Andrzej Fischinger and Marcin Fabiański, *Dzieje budowy renesansowego zamku na Wawelu około 1504-1548* (Kraków: Zamek Królewski na Wawelu, 2009); Marcin Fabiański, *Wokół wawelskiego dworu Jagiellonów: Cztery studia o sztuce renesansowej* (Kraków: Zamek Królewski na Wawelu, 2020).

argumentation for my theory. In general, two major takeaways emerge from these visualisations. Firstly, they allow us as modern readers and viewers to more clearly imagine how the original wedding guests would have viewed and received the tapestries, both in terms of their narrative flow and of their visual/material power. This is particularly relevant for the discussions of style, materiality, and affect in Chapter Four. Secondly, these maps reveal the odd chronology of the series, according to Orzechowski's account: the Moses subset was displayed in between the Adam and Eve/Cain and Abel and Noah subsets. In the Bible, the story of Moses occurs some time after Noah and the Flood. The narrative and didactic implications of this achronological presentation of *Genesis* will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Historiography

This dissertation is located at the intersection of several fields of study, the most important of which are studies of the Jagiellonian tapestries, of Renaissance tapestry more broadly, and of Sigismund Augustus's reign and its relationship to sixteenth-century Polish religious culture.

1. Renaissance tapestry and the Jagiellonian collection

The modern historiography of the Jagiellonian tapestries began after their repatriation in the 1920s, spearheaded by the writings of Marian Morelowski, one of the scholars responsible for their recovery, but was then impeded by the outbreak of the Second World War and the evacuation of the tapestries to Canada. During this time, there were a few short articles published in French, most notably by Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, which gave the tapestries some scholarly exposure across the continent.[10]

[10] Marian Morelowski, *156 arrasów flamandzkich Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Warsaw: Marian Morelowski, 1922); Ibid., "O arrasach flamandzkich Zygmunta Augusta." *Prace Komisji Historii Sztuki*,

After 1939, there were essentially no studies on the tapestries in Poland or otherwise, with the exception of a few articles published in the 1960s, coinciding with the beginning of the return of the collection from Canada to Poland.[11] One of these was a study by Maria Markiewicz (1961) on the symbolism of the *Paradise Bliss* tapestry, perhaps inspired by the work of Yates on the Valois collection.[12] This is one of only two iconographic studies of a Jagiellonian tapestry ever published.[13] I will build on Markiewicz's proposals in my own reading of *Paradise Bliss*, where I will put a particular focus on the elements pertaining to kingship, and will apply some of her methodology to the iconography of other tapestries in the series.

In 1972, scholarship on the Jagiellonian tapestries reemerged with the publication of *Les tapisseries flamandes au château du Wawel à Cracovie* in Antwerp, translated into English, Polish, Dutch, and German.[14] This volume, edited by this period's foremost scholar of the Wawel tapestries, Jerzy Szablowski, included an article on *Genesis* by Anna Misiąg-Bocheńska. This text offers significant insight into the stylistic genealogy of *Genesis* (e.g. Greco-Roman models and *cinquecento* sacral art), but avoids discussion of the tapestries in relation to Sigismund's persona and motivations in his patronage, as well as any didactic or symbolic readings. Unfortunately, Szablowski's volume did not ignite a

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no. 3 (1923): iii-xiv; Ibid., "Arrasy wawelskie Zygmunta Augusta, ich wartość i znaczenie w dziejach sztuki." *Sztuki Piękne*, no. 1 (1924/1925): 293-338; Ibid., *Arrasy wawelskie Zygmunta Augusta* (Kraków: Drukarnia Narodowa, 1929). Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, "Les 156 tapisseries bruxelloises du Château royal de Cracovie et leur importance dans l'art flamand du XVIe siècle," *Revue de l'Art*, no. 27 (1926): 1-7; Ibid., "Tapisseries de la Genèse d'après Michiel Coxcie," *Bulletin de la Société Royale d'Archéologie de Bruxelles*, no. 1 (1938): 5-17; Ibid., "Une tapisserie bruxelloise de l'Histoire de Noé." *Bulletin des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire*, no. 1-3 (1947): 20-25.

[11] See e.g. Janina Ruszczyc, "Au sujet de l'iconographie des tapisseries aux éléments grotesques," *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* 2, no. 4 (1961): 103-114.

[12] Maria Markiewicz, "Iconography of the Paradise Tapestry in the Old Polish Royal Collections," *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* 3, no. 1 (1962): 9-18.

[13] The other is Janina Ruszczyc's study of a grotesque (1961), cited above.

[14] Jerzy Szablowski et al, eds., *Arrasy flamandzkie w Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1972).

new wave of studies on the Jagiellonian tapestries, save a couple of articles by art historians who had previously written on the topic in the 1960s.[15]

With the end of the Cold War, Polish researchers were able to reexamine the Wawel collection in light of scholarship from Western Europe and North America. At the time, perhaps the most influential work remained Frances Yates's *The Valois Tapestries* (1959), which revolutionised the study of the medium by providing a political reading of a tapestry set. In addition to her detective work in establishing the identities of the artist, weavers, and figures depicted in the textiles, Yates presented the Valois tapestries (c. 1580) as a deftly-crafted piece of propaganda for the House of Orange. Moreover, she used the tapestries to analyse the politics and image-creation of the two major figures involved with the provenance of the set: William of Orange and Catherine de Medici. In her readings of the eight tapestries, Yates drew on a wide body of sources related to art history, politics, religion, court culture, literature, and more.[16] Although her conclusions have been questioned and rebutted by subsequent scholars, Yates's work established a methodology for studying the "politics of tapestry" that has been adopted and modified by subsequent scholars.[17] For this thesis, I have been particularly influenced by Yates's use of a variety of interdisciplinary sources, and her use of tapestries in decoding both the image and politics of specific figures (here, Sigismund Augustus).

Following in Yates's footsteps, around the turn of the millennium, a new wave of art historians (most notably Thomas Campbell, Guy Delmarcel, Iain Buchanan, and Elizabeth Cleland) surveyed the commissions of the major princely and aristocratic houses

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[15] See, for example, Maria Markiewicz, *Landscape in the 16th-17th Century Flemish Tapestries*, trans. Jerzy Dunker (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 1979).
[16] Yates, *The Valois Tapestries*.
[17] Most notably, Pascal-Francois Bertrand, "A New Method of Interpreting the Valois Tapestries, through a History of Catherine de Médicis," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 14, no. 1 (2006): 27-52; Ewa Kociszewska, "Woven Bloodlines: 'The Valois Tapestries' in the Trousseau of Christine de Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany," *Artibus et Historiae* 37, no. 73 (2016): 335-363.

of Renaissance Europe, and mapped the development of the medium across the continent and the period. They highlighted the importance and ubiquity of tapestry as a trans-European luxury commodity, a universal signifier of wealth, power, magnificence, and legacy. They also outlined the process of commissioning and patronage. Delmarcel in particular has explored the religious, emblematic, astrological, and mythological iconography of the Habsburg sets. Most importantly for this study, like Yates before them, they used the collections of Henry VIII and the Holy Roman Emperors to argue that tapestry was a core tool for princely image-creation and political messaging.[18]

In addition to the aforementioned scholars, another relevant work to my study from this movement is that of Pascal-François Bertrand, whose 2006 article presents a multi-layered analysis of the Valois tapestries' political significance based on the relationship between their crypto-portraits of the royal family and the background festival scenes, as well as the commissioning process, materials, and function of the series in the court context. Bertrand's assertion that mid-sixteenth century art commissions could be (and often were) intended to have plural meanings is an important complication that I will be considering in my research. I will also emulate Bertrand in his innovative diversion from older studies of the politics of tapestry (especially Yates): the ideological implications of space in tapestry, and the interpellation of the viewer through composition.[19]

However, this thesis is most indebted to Campbell's monograph *Henry VIII and the Art of Majesty: Tapestries at the Tudor Court* (2007), the only major work focusing

[18] See especially Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance* and *Henry VIII;* Guy Delmarcel, *Flemish Tapestry* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000); Ibid., *Los Honores* (Ghent: Vermeulen, 2000); Buchanan, *Habsburg Tapestries*; Elizabeth Cleland et al, *Grand Design: Pieter Coecke van Aelst and Renaissance Tapestry* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014). For more recent work on the "politics of tapestry," see Bertrand, "A New Method;" Kociszewska, "Woven Bloodlines;" Katja Schmitz von Ledebur, *Die Planeten und Ihre Kinder: Eine Brüsseler Tapisserienserie des 16. Jahrhunderts aus der Sammlung Herzog Albrechts V. in München* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

[19] Pascal-Francois Bertrand, "A New Method," 27-52. Kociszewska follows a similar methodology in "Woven Bloodlines."

primarily on the politics of a tapestry collection since Yates. Campbell coined the titular term "the art of majesty," referring to the use of visual art (i.e. tapestry) to convey magnificence, which I will apply to Sigismund's tapestries. In many ways, Campbell has laid the methodological foundations for my research. His core thesis, that Henry VIII used tapestry as the main visual vehicle (a "tool of suggestion") to communicate magnificence and a nuanced political/religious programme, is precisely what I will assess in Sigismund's collection.[20] Campbell explains how patrons played vital roles in crafting the visual and didactic programmes of commissions. Most relevantly to the *Genesis* series, he shows how Henry used biblical imagery as allegory for his own image and contemporary events. In these tapestries, as in Sigismund's, Old Testament patriarchs frequently featured as avatars and role models for the king. Campbell also argues that the biblical tapestries reveal the complex relationship between religion and kingship, both for Henry personally and for the English Crown as an institution. This is precisely the relationship that this thesis will examine. In order to construct his close readings, Campbell contextualises the commissions, as I will do, among other written and visual media from the period.[21] Other areas in which Campbell has inspired my study are the inclusion of borders in discussions of the tapestries' narratives and morals, the links between the tapestries' imagery and the events at which they were displayed, the understanding of tapestries as moral and didactic instruments for owners and their families, and the treatment of sixteenth-century patrons and audiences as sensitive viewers both to overt allegories and subtler analogies. On the whole, Campbell's approach can address one of the main methodological issues that necessarily arise in any study of *Genesis*: the establishment of Sigismund's leading role in

[20] Campbell, *Henry VIII*, 79.

[21] Bertrand also relies on contemporary treatises and other literature in his readings of the Valois tapestries. Thus, I consider a reliance on these external sources to be fundamental in the current methodology for the politics of tapestry.

the commission and its messaging, based on the examples of his peers in their own patronage.

On the other hand, I also consider that Henry's early patronage is not a direct parallel to Sigismund's, as the former inherited a more secure claim to an increasingly-centralised throne, and therefore focused mainly on increasing his own splendour. While Henry's divorce and excommunication eventually necessitated more obviously propagandic themes, Sigismund acceded on more precarious political footing. Therefore, I will adapt Campbell's methodology, an exploration of the commissions of an established ruler, to examine how this may differ for a king striving to solidify and promote his own nascent kingship.

To a certain extent, Polish scholars of the Jagiellonian tapestries have been inspired by the work of Campbell and his colleagues, particularly in the most recent decade. While Western researchers have only mentioned the Wawel tapestries tangentially, Polish art historians have applied some of their methodology to the Jagiellonian collection. Nevertheless, many of the most important scholarly interventions have focused more on the provenance, stylistic content, and material splendour (all of which, however, are topics that Campbell et al do mention in their works on other series). In 1990, Hennel-Bernasikowa convincingly argued that *Genesis* was an original design (*editio princeps*) for Sigismund, as opposed to a pre-made design from a workshop's catalogue, which was the more popular method for commissions.[22] Twenty years later, Marek Janicki discovered the most relevant document for establishing a timeline of the commission and Sigismund's personal involvement in it: a 1547 Royal Treasury record for an order of designs (*imagines*) for the Adam and Eve and Noah series, which solidified Hennel-Bernasikowa's claim. This

[22] Maria Hennel-Bernasikowa, "Sprawa *editio princeps* arrasów Zygmunta Augusta," *Rocznik Krakowski*, no. 56 (1990): 95-102.

helped to answer the question voiced by previous scholars of Sigismund's interest in the actual content of the series beyond its aesthetic merits and overall grandeur.[23] Studies such as Hennel-Bernasikowa's and Janicki's may not be in direct dialogue with the politics of tapestry *à la* Campbell, but their work in uncovering key evidence of the commission, especially with such a dearth of surviving records, has provided key groundwork for this study. Based on the work of these two scholars, we are able to estimate a timeline of the commission, thereby allowing us to examine its historical context. We are also able to argue for Sigismund's personal involvement in the creative process of the commission, and to appreciate the many levels on which *Genesis* was a groundbreaking enterprise for the European tapestry market. Using this information, it is possible for this thesis to take studies of the *Genesis* tapestries several steps further, especially regarding the tapestries' place within Polish court culture and political significance.

In one respect, Polish scholars actually have been able to go further in their analysis of the Jagiellonian collection than researchers of other European collections. This is thanks to one incredibly crucial primary source: the *ekphrasis* by Stanisław Orzechowski in his wedding panegyric for Sigismund. Indeed, part of the reason why there has been a dearth of tapestry studies since the early 2000s may be that the core question asked by Yates and later Campbell et al, that of Renaissance tapestry as princely "propaganda" (in the words of Jeffrey Chipps Smith), was quite definitively answered.[24] What these scholars were unable to discuss in great depth, most probably (and understandably) due to a lack of sources, is the reception of this "propaganda" by contemporary viewers.[25] In this study, I

[23] Marek Janicki, "Imagines biblijne, alegoryczne, i historyczne zamawiane dla Zygmunta Augusta w świetle kilku zapisów rachunkowych z lat 1547-1548: Przyczynek do genezy królewskiej kolekcji arrasów," in *Amicissima: Studia Magdalenae Piwocka oblata*, ed. Grażyna Korpal et al, 139-152 (Kraków: Fundacja "Nomina Rosae" Ogród Kultury Dawnej, 2010).
[24] Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "Portable Propaganda: Tapestries as Princely Metaphors at the Courts of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold," Art Journal 48, no. 2 (1989):123-129.
[25] The notable exception to this would be the collection of Henry VIII, for which there are some extant sources on their reception, as discussed by Campbell, although none as descriptive as Orzechowski's

want to propose a new method for reading tapestry as a didactic vehicle for rulers. I want to move away from the previous top-down approach that sees the "meaning" of tapestry as the manifestation of the patron's agenda. I also want to avoid considering tapestries as "propaganda" altogether, which has remained largely unchallenged since Yates's work many decades ago. Instead, by including the reception of the tapestries, which is equally as important in the outcomes of image-creation efforts, tapestry becomes a space of negotiation, not merely projection, of power. By expanding the methodological framework, we find that there are, in fact, still many unanswered questions about the politics of tapestry, which warrant a return to the medium.

Although documents on the contemporary reception of tapestries are extremely scarce, *Genesis* scholars have the rare opportunity to delve into the viewers' reactions and their associations between the tapestries and the patron's vision. Thus, we are able to at least partially resolve another major methodological issue in any study of *Genesis*: whether the audience perceived the same messages that, we hypothesise, were "intended" by the patron. For many other famous series, this remains a matter of pure speculation, but the *ekphrasis* makes an analysis of *Genesis*'s messaging even more fruitful ground for study.

Despite its generic conventions (discussed in Chapter Three), the *ekphrasis* is the most important primary source for this thesis. However, the only art historian in the past century who has analysed the *ekphrasis* is Marcin Fabiański, who has published two articles

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ekphrasis. Most of the documents to which Campbell refers are rather laconic in their descriptions, listing titles and locations in contrast to Orzechowski's vivid, affective rhetoric and detailed descriptions of the scenes. Perhaps the prime example of this is an excerpt from a description of the "arrasses" decorating Bridewell for the visit of Charles V in 1520: in the author's words, "my witte is too dull to describe them." Campbell also mentions two eyewitness accounts of the *Battle of Pavia* in 1549, "detailed accounts" of the *Furti di Giove* at Genoa in 1553, a piece of correspondence describing the same tapestries from 1536, and a record of a conversation between Francis I and the Venetian ambassador to the French court comparing the *Acts* tapestries and *The Triumphs of Scipio*. Other than Orzechowski's text, the best potential source for studying the responses of contemporary viewers would be the description of the iconography of Mary of Hungary's *Seven Deadly Sins* (c. 1544), a manuscript of which survives in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. However, to the best of my knowledge, these texts have not been examined in depth in a reception context. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance*, 264, 270, 355, 410.

on the tapestries' unveiling at the 1553 wedding via close readings of the text.[26] Fabiański provides some valuable background regarding Orzechowski's motivations for writing the panegyric, as well as the history of panegyric and *ekphrasis* at the Polish court. He also aptly analyses the text for its descriptions of the tapestries' affective power, and includes his own aforementioned map recreations of the unveiling. I will, in part, be basing my own discussions of affect and audience response on Fabiański's contributions, especially regarding the lifelike (or larger-than-life) nature of the images, and the intensity of the characters' emotions and physicality. However, I will be taking his reflections further by delving deeper into the material affective qualities of the tapestries beyond the images they contain, including the manipulation of sight and sound during the unveiling and the impact of the borders.

To date, only two scholars have attempted a reading of the Jagiellonian collection in terms of Sigismund's persona and agenda, thereby adopting some elements of the most recent waves of tapestry scholarship, specifically the "politics of tapestry." The first (and only one writing in English) is Carmen Cramer Niekrasz, whose doctoral dissertation on natural history in Flemish tapestry (2007) presents Sigismund's collection as an expression of magnificence via science, wisdom, and the bounty of creation, inspired by the early modern interest in overseas exploration.[27] It is possible that Sigismund may have wanted to evoke mastery over the natural world and scientific wisdom (especially through the figures of Noah and Adam). However, there is no evidence that Sigismund was particularly interested in the natural sciences or overseas exploration. Moreover, at the time of the

[26] Marcin Fabiański, "On King, Priest, and Wanton Girls: Looking at Flemish Renaissance Tapestries in Kraków," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 29, no. 2 (2010): 8-14; Ibid., "Renaissance Nudes as *Materia Exercendae Virtutis*? A Contemporary Account of the Royal Tapestries in Cracow," *Artibus et Historiae* 32, no. 64 (2011): 243-276.

[27] Carmen Cramer Niekrasz, "Woven Theaters of Nature: Flemish Tapestry and Natural History, 1550-1600," PhD diss. (Northwestern University, 2007).

commission, seminal works in early modern natural history such as Conrad Gessner's *Historia animalium* had not yet been fully published. We also know from library inventories that Sigismund did not have many zoological texts as compared to other subjects, and was generally more interested in history, philosophy, and politics than the natural sciences.[28] Overall, I would argue that this reading would be better applied to the verdures (which Niekrasz also discusses) than the biblical tapestries, and I will present what I believe to be a more likely reading based on the series' political and theological context.

The second scholar, and the only Polish art historian to explicitly engage with the "politics of tapestry," has been Magdalena Piwocka, who adopted Campbell's term of "the art of majesty" and applied it to *Genesis* in a 2015 article.[29] In addition to claiming that *Genesis* is an overall statement of magnificence due to its medium, Piwocka briefly posits that Sigismund's use of nonviolent biblical patriarchs in the tapestries may have reflected his commitment to peacekeeping and tolerance, as opposed to military conquest over heretics.[30] I want to expound Piwocka's arguments and go several steps further by considering the use of the tapestries as tools of magnificence, and any other possible aims, in greater depth. I will also delve into the materiality of majesty in tapestries, discuss the implications of style, narrative, and iconography, and provide a didactic reading of the series beyond the reflection on toleration. In this thesis, I argue that we must view luxury consumption not just as an index of power but as a tool of power. The question, then, becomes *how* the tapestries convey power, and to what end. In order to answer this question, we must contextualise Sigismund's kingship in terms of the events surrounding his early reign, as well as primary sources related to the commission, content, and reception

[28] Alodia Kawecka-Gryczowa, *Biblioteka ostatniego Jagiellona* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988), 49, 123.
[29] Piwocka has referenced Niekrasz's work in publications subsequent to the latter's thesis, most notably in Maria Hennel-Bernasikowa and Magdalena Piwocka, *Katalog arrasów Króla Zygmunta Augusta* (Kraków: Zamek Królewski Na Wawelu, 2017).
[30] Piwocka, "Art of majesty," 397-408.

of *Genesis* (especially the *ekphrasis*). Moreover, one aspect that Piwocka ignores and that this thesis seeks to explore is the religious angle of a reading of *Genesis*, due to the centrality of religion both in the artworks and in Sigismund's kingship. As Campbell touched on in his study of Henry VIII, the politics of tapestry are inextricable from religion in an age where kingship itself was a religious institution. Thus, by building on the groundwork laid by Piwocka, we arrive at the foundation of the historical/art historical methodology proposed in the opening of this thesis.

In general, while Campbell and his colleagues resurrected Yates's political approach to Renaissance tapestry for the new millennium, very few scholars have continued to study the politics of tapestry in the past two decades, even though the use of tapestry as loci for negotiations of power and ideology has been well-documented and remains fairly non-controversial among scholars. In this thesis, I want to revisit this approach and apply it to a series that has not received sufficient attention from English-language research, despite its importance for the development of the medium in the early modern period. In fact, this dissertation is one of the few works on the *Genesis* series in English (apart from museum catalogues) in the past several decades.[31] Giving *Genesis* a similar scholarly treatment to the Tudor, Valois, and Habsburg collections will bring the Wawel tapestries in closer scholarly contact with the wider world of European tapestry, and address significant gaps in the current discourse surrounding the collection, especially by making a necessary political and religious intervention. Simultaneously, it may shed more light on the tapestry medium itself through a new interpretive methodology.

[31] Since their repatriation, only a handful of aforementioned articles have ever been published in a language other than Polish, most of which appeared in the period between the 1920s and 1970s. Two catalogues of the tapestries have been translated into English (1972 and 2017, the latter available only through the Wawel Museum), but no monographs have been published originally in English.

2. The reign of Sigismund Augustus and religion in the "Golden Age"

In Polish historiography, research on the "Golden Age" has been fairly prolific throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As opposed to studies of the Jagiellonian tapestries, historical research on sixteenth-century Poland was never necessarily limited to its home country. During the Cold War, especially from the 1960s onward, a few German, French, and American historians wrote important monographs and articles on the Polish Renaissance and Reformation, although the history of Poland was and remains significantly underrepresented in Western historical scholarship overall.

While Sigismund the Old has, on balance, received more attention than Sigismund Augustus, especially in Polish research, the past several decades have produced two major biographies, both of which analyse Sigismund's religious and political programme in exhaustive detail.[32] In particular, the first, a 1988 monograph by Stanisław Cynarski, provides a nuanced examination of Sigismund's complex relationship with religion and purposely-ambiguous political and ecclesiastical manoeuvring.

In comparison to his father, whose reign has essentially become synonymous with prosperity, cultural and intellectual flourishing, and political strength, Sigismund Augustus has often been approached with a more critical eye. While his successes at domestic peacekeeping, patronage of the arts and architecture, and landmark achievement of the 1569 Union of Lublin (formally uniting the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) are universally recognised, the area that has caused the most controversy among historians is his relationship to religion. For decades, scholars have remained divided on the extent of

[32] Stanisław Cynarski, *Zygmunt August* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988); Anna Sucheni-Grabowska, *Zygmunt August, Król Polski i Wielki Książę Litewski, 1520-1562* (Warsaw: Krupski i S-ka, 1996).

his interest in theology, his piety, his reformed inclinations, and the motivations behind his religious policies.

In the 1960s, two major scholars concluded that Sigismund was not particularly interested in religious matters beyond their political significance. He was a conservative at heart, his Protestant leanings were surface level at best, and his conciliatory policies indicated a lack of political resoluteness and personal conviction. In 1960, Joseph Lecler wrote that "he was easy-going and conciliatory; without showing any definite inclination toward the Reformation, his Catholicism was somewhat tepid."[33] Gottfried Schramm's landmark study, *Die polnische Adel und die Reformation* (1965), similarly argued that Sigismund was "more of a prudent than a deeply religious Renaissance man."[34] Six years later, Wiktor Weintraub echoed these conclusions, stating that Sigismund merely "flirted with Protestantism."[35] In 1984, Janusz Maciuszko added a touch of nuance to these assessments, but nevertheless cemented this general view in his monograph on the Warsaw Confederation. While, he argued, it is "difficult to characterise the stance of Sigismund Augustus" in terms of religion, and while it would be "injurious" to make a generalised statement of his "indecisiveness," it would appear that Sigismund's reluctance to take a strong stance on Protestantism or Catholicism stemmed either from his disinterest in religion, or his irresoluteness when faced with political pressure.[36]

It is interesting that all of these studies emerged in the aftermath of a "religious turn" in worldwide Reformation scholarship. In Poland, the state-sponsored materialist Reformation historiography of the 1950s and 1960s had led to the enormous success of

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[33] Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, 1960), 386.
[34] Gottfried Schramm, *Der polnische Adel und die Reformation, 1548-1607* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1965), 294.
[35] Wiktor Weintraub, "Tolerance and Intolerance in Old Poland," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 13, no. 1 (1971): 37.
[36] Janusz Maciuszko, *Konfederacja Warszawska 1573 r.: Geneza, pierwsze lata obowiązywania* (Warsaw: Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, 1984), 29.

monographs by Engelsian historians writing for the journal *Renaissance and Reformation in Poland* (most notably its editor, Janusz Tazbir), who posited that the Reformation was an economic and class enterprise with little to no religious motivation. Schramm's *Der polnische Adel und die Reformation*, published at the height of this discourse, was the first major monograph to question this metanarrative, and one of the first seminal works in the Polish "religious turn." In Schramm's estimation, the elites leading the Reformation were not merely cloaking class oppression in religious polemics, but appear to have been genuinely invested in their respective faiths, nor did the Polish Reformation ever take on a revolutionary character among the lower classes.[37] Since then, historians have centred the role of religion during the Polish Reformation instead of the purely material motivations presented by earlier works, yet this religious turn does not seem to have impacted research on Sigismund Augustus specifically.

However, in 1988, Stanisław Cynarski offered an alternative perspective: the ambiguity of Sigismund's stance toward religion was not an indication of apathy or tepidity. It was intentional, and, in fact, a brilliant strategy. His closer inspection of Sigismund's religious actions, both public and private, reveals that the king did have a genuine interest in theology, was a very pious individual, and espoused ideas on purgatory, the saints, devotional "superstition," clerical celibacy, and the primacy of Rome that were also found among Protestants at the time. Moreover, his indecisiveness on religious politics appears to have been a conscious and calculated strategy to preserve peace in a diverse kingdom with a precarious power base.[38]

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[37] The pioneering works in this regard are: Schramm, *Der polnische Adel und die Reformation* (1965); Maciuszko, *Konfederacja warszawska* (1984); Ambroise Jobert, *De Luther à Mohila: La Pologne dans la crise de la Chrétienté, 1517-1648 (*Paris: Institut d'Études Slaves, 1974).
[38] Cynarski, *Zygmunt August,* 85.

Nevertheless, after the publication of his monograph, Cynarski has continued to be in the minority in this regard, even until the present. In 2011, Paul W. Knoll stated that "although he [Sigismund] was open to new political and intellectual, even religious, currents, his traditionalism and conservatism ensured that he would remain firmly faithful to the Catholic church."[39] Pawel Kras has taken this a step further, claiming that Sigismund's personal piety was actually extremely conservative, including prayers to the Virgin Mary and the saints, pilgrimages, almsgiving, and the devotional cults of the Cross and the Eucharist.[40] Kras does not consider that many of these "conservative" elements of piety were actually shared across denominations during the Polish Reformation: it was not uncommon, for example, for Reformed groups to include Marian devotion or cults of certain saints, and devotions to the Cross and the Eucharist were not solely Catholic staples.[41]

On the other hand, there are two major scholars who have supported Cynarski's overall thesis in this same period. The first is Maria Bogucka, one of the most prolific Polish Renaissance historians of the past century. In a 2006 study on the piety of the last Jagiellons, Bogucka notes that Sigismund was raised in an environment where he was surrounded by theological discourse, including from his own parents, and in which daily masses, religious ceremonies, pilgrimages, and patronage were a constant, defining presence. At his father's court, the pomp and ceremony of religion took centre stage, including through sacral art and architecture commissions. The model of kingship for the sixteenth-century Jagiellons dictated that outward displays of religiosity were crucial for crafting the image of the

[39] Paul W. Knoll, "Religious Toleration in Sixteenth-Century Poland," in *Diversity and Dissent: Negotiating Religious Difference in Central Europe 1500-1800,* ed. Howard Louthan et al (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 34.
[40] Paweł Kras, "The Religious Policy of Sigismund I and Sigismund II Augustus in the Reformation Period: Status Quaestionis," *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis* 29 (2014): 58.
[41] Howard Louthan, "Multiconfessionalism in Central Europe," in *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World,* ed. Thomas Max Safley, 367-392 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 379.

monarch and setting an example for their subjects. On the other hand, Bogucka notes that there was no unified standard for Jagiellonian piety across the dynasty: while Sigismund the Old and his son tended toward extravagant expressions of courtly religiosity, Sigismund Augustus's grandfather, Casimir IV, was known for his asceticism. Overall, because of his strong religious roots, his understanding of religion as a core part of kingship, and his overt participation in religious life throughout his reign, Bogucka argues against the notion that Sigismund was an irreligious man. Based on his letters and court records, Bogucka also notes an increase in his expressions of personal and public piety during the illness of his second wife, Barbara, and after her death: a period which overlapped with the production of *Genesis*.

Still, Bogucka posits that the majority of Sigsmund's evocations of religion in court culture as an adult stemmed more from established familial traditions than personal piety.[42] In other words, Bogucka separates Sigismund's private and public relationship(s) with religion. This is the same dichotomy that a second historian, Agnieszka Januszek-Sieradzka, addresses in her 2013 study on Sigismund Augustus's beliefs. While lends more credence to Sigismund's private piety than Bogucka, citing his time in Vilnius (1544-1555) as a period of his intensifying interest in theology and religious politics, Januszek-Sieradzka focuses on the dualism between faith and Church that typified Sigismund's personal and public treatment of religion. Based on correspondences from 1548, the year of his full coronation, she sees this as a turning point from his treatment of religion as a merely personal issue to a political and very public matter. Here, we find direct confirmation of Sigismund's awareness of the power of religion for his persona and politics. Januszek-Sieradzka also notes that Sigismund's donations to churches and cloisters suggest a

[42] Maria Bogucka, "Renesansowa władca a religia: Kilka refleksji na temat pobożności ostatnich Jagiellonów," in *Ecclesia – Cultura – Potestas*: *Studia z dziejów kultury i społeczeństwa*, ed. Paweł Kras, 501-511 (Kraków: Societas Vistulana, 2006), 503, 506-507, 510-511.

personal investment in his patronage: there are clear patterns in the cults that he promoted, and he seems, for example, to have had a particular interest in supporting the Bernardine order.[43]

However, whether or not Sigismund was as personally pious as his public persona would suggest, and whether his personal convictions leaned toward Rome or Geneva, are of secondary importance for this study. Sigismund's personal doctrinal beliefs are not necessary for understanding the project of *Genesis*. Rather, the key point that Cynarski, Bogucka, and Januszek-Sieradzka have effectively made is that Sigismund's kingship cannot be discussed in without considering religion: in terms of the religiosity of the Polish Crown and court, of Sigismund's understanding of the importance of religion for crafting kingship, of the dynastic heritage of Jagiellonian piety (especially based on his father's court), and of the centrality of religion in his political manoeuvring and domestic policies.

It is difficult to say definitively why historians are so divided on the issue of Sigismund and religion, and why Cynarski and Bogucka's view is held by the minority. However, the answer may lie in the contentious politics of Polish religious historiography, especially after 1945. The importance of Roman Catholicism to Polish identity and resistance movements during the Cold War may have made a figure like Sigismund Augustus problematic for a national metanarrative. This is particularly pertinent considering the staunch Catholicism of the other "Golden Age" monarchs: Sigismund Augustus's father, as well as his successors, Stephen Batory and Sigismund III Vasa. In fact, every Polish king in history was (at least in public profession) Roman Catholic, with several converting to Catholicism from Lutheranism to secure their candidacy for the

[43] Agnieszka Januszek-Sieradzka, "W co wierzył Król Zygmunt August?" in *Rycerze, wędrowcy, kacerze: Studia z historii średniowiecznej i wczesnonowożytnej Europy Środkowej*, ed. Beata Wojciechowska and Waldemar Kowalski (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego, 2013), 278, 280-281, 283, 285.

throne, meaning that the very institution of the monarchy was indelibly Catholic. Sigismund Augustus's unorthodox Catholicism and tendencies toward the Reformed faith challenge the link between Catholicism and Polish kingship, sovereignty, and identity. As Sigismund does not fit the mould of a Polish Catholic monarch, there is a temptation to explain him away as an irreligious anomaly, or (like Knoll and Kras) to argue for his Catholicism, or to largely skip over him in dynastic studies of Jagiellonian piety (a historiographic trend that Januszek-Sieradzka points out in her 2013 study). In the end, there is little room left for ambiguity or complexity.

However, there is a more fruitful approach that has already gained traction among Polish Reformation historians since the aforementioned religious turn across early modern European history as a whole.[44] Especially in the past two decades, scholars have consistently demonstrated that the religious climate of sixteenth century Poland was anything but black and white. For example, Natalia Nowakowska and Howard Louthan have cogently shown that Polish religion, both prior to and during the Reformation, was incredibly complex and often defied categorisation, just like in many other polities across the continent.[45] In his monograph *Calvinism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1548-1648* (2020), Kazimierz Bem has demonstrated the diversity of belief and practice even within one religious group or even one family, and the frequency with which nobles vacillated between confessional camps. In short, it would be anachronistic to apply post-Tridentine confessional labels to the heterogeneous milieu of pre-Tridentine Poland—or, indeed, pre-Tridentine Europe in general. In this light, Sigismund Augustus is anything but an anomaly.

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[44] See e.g. Weintraub, "Renaissance Poland and 'Antemurale Christianitatis,'" *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3/4, no. 2 (1979-1980): 920-930.
[45] Nowakowska, "Forgetting Lutheranism," 298; Louthan, "Multiconfessionalism," 367-392.

The current generation of Polish Reformation historians have also placed much greater weight on the intellectual and theological depth of the Polish Reformation. Among the supporters of this theory, Bem challenges the thesis that "economics, politics, or a combination of both factors was the principal reason underlying conversion."[46] Louthan goes as far as to argue that the Polish Reformation was "primarily ideological, as religious leaders of all stripes argued and disputed key theological issues," including "the most creative and inventive discussions on the Trinity since the christological controversies of the patristic period."[47] In general, the religious impetus of the Polish Reformation can be seen in the widespread interest in theological and scriptural education, the focus on international religious exchange, and the amount of religious writing and publishing. In my study, I will adopt the view that questions of ecclesiology, doctrine, belief, and practice, however eclectic, were central to the sixteenth-century Polish cultural milieu. Religion was a major force in secular politics and lay society, including the highest rungs of government.

This allows us to formulate several hypotheses for a reading of *Genesis*. First, contemporary viewers were primed to consider religious content in the depicted narratives. Second, these artworks were intended for a confessionally-eclectic audience; therefore, an irenically-inclined patron such as Sigismund would have to ensure that they carefully navigated any controversial content. Third, Sigismund could not have conceived his kingship, whether in terms of image or agenda, in absence of religion. This stands in opposition to theories of Sigismund's disinterested and/or purely pragmatic approach to religion. While it is extremely likely that Sigismund's conciliatory agenda did stem at least in part from the material necessities of ruling such a large, diverse, and decentralised polity, I will argue in this thesis that this is only part of the picture. It appears from my research

[46] Bem, *Calvinism*, 166.
[47] Louthan, "Multiconfessionalism," 383.

that Sigismund's eschewing of force and religious absolutism were not only the result of the obvious futility of such endeavours in a kingdom such as Poland, or motivated purely by financial and political rewards, but stemmed from deeper considerations about the very nature of Christian kingship. Like most other sixteenth-century European monarchs, Sigismund chose to craft a meta-confessional princely persona for a multiconfessional polity.

While much of the religio-historical groundwork for this thesis has been set by the work of Nowakowska, Louthan, and their colleagues, Polish Reformation studies have rarely breached the boundaries of intellectual and print culture. In this dissertation, I would like to apply a similar methodology to material culture. I posit that the *Genesis* tapestries are just as important sources as texts on the nature of religion and kingship in Renaissance Poland. By studying the political and religious issues of Sigismund Augustus's early reign via artworks, I hope to shine a light on a need for an (increased) material and visual turn in Polish Reformation history.

Furthermore, much like the oversight of the Jagiellonian series in European tapestry studies, there is currently a palpable absence of Central-Eastern Europe in anglophone early modern historiography. Scholars such as Nowakowska, Louthan, and Bem have sought to remedy this by publishing in English. However, as Piotr Wilczek explains in *Polonia Reformata* (2016), Poland and its neighbours have been somewhat ghettoised in mainstream Reformation studies, and the few mentions of the Polish Reformation are typically based on outdated secondary sources (i.e. often from the 1940s-1950s) and only those written in English. The same can be said for the history of pre-twentieth century Poland in general, including its art history.[48] Remedying this, at least for studies of the

[48] Piotr Wilczek, *Polonia Reformata: Essays on the Polish Reformation(s)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 12-13.

sixteenth century, requires knowledge of Polish, both in its modern and early modern variations. Therefore, scholars writing in English with proficiency in Polish are best-positioned to undertake the necessary research to move Poland from the periphery to the core of early modern European history. As my own linguistic skills allow me to engage in this discourse, I am inspired by the work of Wilczek, Nowakowska, and their colleagues to continue pushing for an expansion of the traditional boundaries of Christendom beyond the Oder.

Discussion of key terms

In presenting the methodology of this thesis, it is necessary to define a few key yet contested terms that will be used throughout.

1. Dynasty

In 1547, the House of Jagiellon had been ruling Poland-Lithuania for 161 years. By 1500, members or direct descendants of the House ruled more land in Europe than any other royal family.[49] However, the term "dynasty" when applied to the Jagiellons, in contrast to other major ruling houses like the Habsburgs, has sometimes been seen as controversial by historians, as there was no official consensus in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources as to the members of the Jagiellonian family. Much like other "dynasties" of the Renaissance, the boundaries and structure of the family were porous and heterogeneous, far from a clearly-delineated family tree. As Natalia Nowakowska has deduced from depictions of the Jagiellons in contemporary texts, sources sometimes presented rulers as descendants of different Jagiellonian kings, as members of multiple houses at once (e.g. Jagiellon and Habsburg), or as members of a vast continental kinship

[49] Robert Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania: Volume I: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385-1569* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 278, 282.

network of inter-married monarchs, the "society of princes." On the other hand, Nowakowska's research shows that, by around 1510, humanist authors began referring to the "Jagiellon family" more frequently. Royal secretary Justus Ludwig Decius's (1485-1545) genealogical chronicle *De Iagellonum Familia* (1521) was the first to use the term in its title, while funeral elegies for the death of Sigismund I in 1548 truly popularised the term.[50] Thus, by the time of Sigismund Augustus's coronation, the concept of a Jagiellonian dynasty was established within the cultural consciousness.[51]

During Sigismund Augustus's reign, textual references to his father and comparisons between the two monarchs increased the sense of the Jagiellons as a continuous line of kings, and of Sigismund as a continuation of a familial tradition. One of the clearest examples of dynastic discourse can be found in Johannes Dantiscus's (1485-1548) poem "*Ad libellum, de turbatis nostris temporibus*" (1548):

> And indeed, only the land of the Sarmatian
> Is safe from these upheavals, and that is because of her two
> Kings, he who ended his life recently,
> Pious and saintly, and he
> Who remains alive so that he might more justly direct
> The affairs of state and wield the sceptre.[52]

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[50] Natalia Nowakowska, "What's in a word? The etymology and historiography of dynasty, Renaissance Europe and beyond," *Journal of Intellectual History* (2020): 9-13.

[51] For some of the most important works on the Jagiellonians as a "dynasty," empire, cultural force, and court, see *Remembering the Jagiellonians*, ed. Natalia Nowakowska (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); *Jagiellonowie i ich świat: Dynastia królewska w drugiej połowie XV i w XVI wieku*, ed. Bożena Czwojdrak et al (Kraków: Societas Vistulana, 2015); *Europa Jagellonica 1386–1572: Sztuka, kultura i polityka w Europie Środkowej za panowania Jagiellonów*, ed. Przemysław Mrozowski et al (Warsaw: Arx Regia, 2015); *Die Jagiellonen: Kunst und Kultur einer europäischen Dynastie an der Wende zur Neuzeit*, ed. Dietmar Popp et al (Nürnberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2002); *Theatrum Ceremoniale na dworze książąt i królów polskich*, ed. Ryszard Skowron and Maria Markiewicz (Kraków: Zamek Królewski na Wawelu, 1999).

[52] Johannes Dantiscus, "Ad libellum, de turbatis nostris temporibus," in *Carmina*, ed. Stanisław Skimina (Cracow: Academia Polonica Litterarum et Scientiarum, 1950), 293, in Harold B. Segel, *Renaissance Culture in Poland: The Rise of Humanism, 1470-1543* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 186.

In short, when examining the reign of Sigismund Augustus, it is not anachronistic to refer to the concept of a Jagiellonian dynasty. For the purposes of this study, the definition of "dynasty" is borrowed from Liesbeth Geevers and Mirella Marini's *Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe* (2015): a ruling group with a curated identity based on a family history, props memorialising this history (such as portraits and mausoleums), common social status and religious affiliation, and a dynastic name. This identity was not fixed, but could be moulded across time and space to serve the needs of the dynasty.[53]

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the dynastic prospects for Sigismund Augustus were considerably different than that of the Jagiellon kings at the height of the family's power in the late fifteenth century. From 1492, the Jagiellons had lost some territory to the Ottomans, Tatars, and Muscovites. In 1526, they suffered a severe blow with the death of Sigismund the Old's nephew, Louis II of Hungary (1506-1526), and the loss of Bohemia and their remaining territory in Hungary to the Habsburgs. By 1537, Lithuania had lost a third of its territory to Muscovy in a series of wars.[54] Furthermore, as the only son of the previous king, Sigismund Augustus was highly conscious of (and increasingly paranoid about) the extinction of his house if he did not produce an heir. Therefore, dynasty, past and present, would have been a present issue both in the cultural/intellectual milieu of the court and in the mind of the king himself.

2. Magnificence

When employing a nebulous term such as "magnificence" in reference to Sigismund Augustus's kingship, we must consider how the meanings and subtextual implications of magnificence changed throughout time and remained flexible as they were expressed in

[53] Liesbeth Geevers and Mirella Marini, eds., *Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe: Rulers, Aristocrats, and the Formation of Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1-22.
[54] Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 282-285.

various media. While today's definition of magnificence tends to refer to objects and their potential to elicit feelings of wonder or admiration, examining "magnificence" through the lens of *Begriffsgeschichte* reveals that this is a very modern understanding of the word. From ancient Greece to the Renaissance, magnificence was nearly always considered within a social context of power relations, and referred both to the occasion for which an object was created and the people who had created or commissioned it. It was, in other words, a virtue attached to a specific person: in the Renaissance, typically a secular or religious ruler. The creation of magnificence could combine elements from theology, philosophy, economics, politics, fine art, and literature.[55]

In part, Renaissance magnificence drew on Aristotle's definition from the *Nicomachean Ethics*: a "fitting expenditure involving largeness of scale." The key word here is "fitting," for magnificence must be evoked in a manner befitting one's social status and the occasion. One should have the means to afford magnificence, but it should be done tastefully and with a social purpose (e.g. the construction of a cathedral or a coronation festival), not merely to flaunt and amass luxury goods.[56] A man with means had a certain obligation toward magnificence, as it was appropriate to his station, and should not be miserly with his wealth. The patron had to find, in Gijs Versteegen and Stijn Bussels's words, "the golden mean between avarice and extravagance."[57]

Seneca understood magnificence in a more metaphysical sense. He saw magnificence in the beauty of nature and in a good man's soul, "pure and gleaming with

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[55] Gijs Versteegen and Stijn Bussels, "Introduction," in *Magnificence in the Seventeenth Century: Performing Splendour in Catholic and Protestant Contexts*, ed. Gijs Versteegen et al, 1-2 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).
[56] Ibid., 2; Guido Guerzoni, "Liberalitas, Magnificentia, Splendor: The Classic Origins of Italian Renaissance Lifestyles," in *Economic Engagements with Art*, ed. Neil De Marchi and Craufurd D.W. Goodwin, 332-378 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 345.
[57] Versteegen and Bussels, "Introduction," 3.

grandeur and calmness…all glowing with temperance and prudence."[58] Therefore, magnificence was not decadence, but emulation of the divine order and natural moral precepts. In the Middle Ages, magnificence became associated with elevation above the mundane, similar to Longinus's notion of the sublime. In the *Summa*, Thomas Aquinas gave magnificence a theological spin, equating it to imitation and glorification of the divine: "In fact no aim of human works is greater than honouring God, and for this reason magnificence principally makes great works in order to honour God."[59] Giles of Rome applied this version of magnificence to politics in *De regimine principum*, arguing that princes had a natural inclination toward magnificence by nature of their divine birthright, and therefore, their material splendour should mimic the splendour of the monarchy.[60] This was the intellectual basis for the magnificence of Renaissance rulers, who created or solidified claims to legitimacy through patronage, and was reiterated in treatises such as Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* (1452).

In this study, I will be considering all of these ancient and medieval elements of magnificence, as they comprised the definition that would have been understood at a mid-sixteenth-century European court. I will treat it as an established yet malleable imperative of Renaissance kingship, a transmedial concept encompassing nobility, eminence, largesse, political engagement, piety, and cosmic harmony. It will be most important in assessing the relationship between the magnificence of the patron, the court, the tapestry medium, and the biblical subjects. I will also consider the tensions and complications that arise when concepts interact with contexts, and ideas interact with media. In other words, it is not just

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[58] Seneca, "Letter 115," in *Selected Letters*, trans. Elaine Fantham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.6.
[59] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ques. 134, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3134.htm (accessed 13 December 2022).
[60] Graham McAlleer, "Giles of Rome on Political Authority," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 1 (1999): 21-36.

the artwork that gains new meaning through the lens of magnificence, but also our understanding of magnificence that can take on new dimensions through studying the artwork.

3. Authorship

The final term that requires explanation is the tapestries' "authorship." For a collective enterprise such as tapestry, involving multiple artists and weavers in addition to the patron, it is difficult (and perhaps erroneous) to point to a single "author." Instead of focusing on the role of the artist(s), this dissertation considers that the meaning of an artwork is constituted just as much through the patron's motives and vision, as well as through the audience reception. In other words, this is what we can term "situational authorship." While I will not be referring to Sigismund Augustus as the "author" of the tapestries, nor will I argue for his input into the minutia of their designs, I will consider him to be the progenitor of the overall project. In cases of situational authorship, the "meaning" intended by the artist (i.e. Coxcie) can become subordinate to the intentions of the patron, as well as to the interpretations of the viewers.

This does, however, raise one crucial issue: to what extent can we realistically attribute the creative vision of the tapestries to Sigismund Augustus, as opposed to their makers? Although much of the archival material surrounding the ordering of the tapestries was unfortunately destroyed during WWII, we do have records from the Royal Treasury on Sigismund's order of *petit patrons* for the Genesis tapestries on 14 January 1547.[61] Indeed, it was expected for clients funding entirely new tapestry designs to approve these

[61] "*Pro imaginibus*," 14 January 1547, ASK 1, RK 137, 20r/v, Central Archives of Historical Record, Warsaw, Poland.

detailed renderings (*petit patrons*) and the full-scale cartoons before the tapestry could be woven, as will be discussed .

During his youth, Sigismund would have seen this process countless times over: we have records of Sigismund I and his wife, Bona Sforza, ordering and assessing *petit patrons* for their own extensive tapestry collection.[62] We also know that Sigismund employed two tapestry merchants, Roderick Dermoyen and Jost van Mollenbrok, who acquired the Flemish tapestries for him and personally supervised part of their production in Brussels.[63] However, there is no record of these merchants at court during the production of *Genesis*; the earliest mention of them is a contract from 1559 in the Antwerp *Certificatieboek*.[64] If Sigismund only engaged tapestry merchants later, this would have required him to play a more direct role in the *Genesis* commission. In fact, as Thomas Campbell argues, the incredible cost of tapestries necessitated the monarchs's direct and continuous involvement in the commission. This was not a project that could be helmed by an intermediary, with little consultation with the patron.[65] Interestingly, in his panegyric written directly after their unveiling, Orzechowski equally centres the authorship of the tapestries on Coxcie and Sigismund, urging his reader to consider them as an expression "not only of the work of a remarkable artist, but also of the person of the noble monarch, which is most fully expressed through his love for such [artworks]."[66]

Sigismund Augustus had received a model of court culture and kingship from his father. In addition to patronising many humanist scholars, Sigismund the Old realised the

[62] Szablowski et al, *Arrasy*, 40. It should be noted that this was a fairly standard process of ordering tapestries from Flemish workshops by Renaissance courts, including Burgundy, France, England, and the Habsburgs.
[63] Mieczysław Gębarowicz and Tadeusz Mańkowski, *Arrasy Zygmunta Augusta* (Kraków: Rocznik Krakowski, 1937), 16.
[64] Hennel-Bernasikowa and Piwocka, *Katalog*, 20.
[65] Campbell, *Henry VIII*, 100, 117.
[66] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in Szablowski, *Arrasy*, 51.

importance of artistic patronage, both secular and religious, and the propagation of princely magnificence.[67] Crucially, he was not merely the financial patron of these projects: his heavy involvement in the creative process, especially in that of the Sigismund Chapel, has been well-documented.[68] Following his father's example, Sigismund Augustus made his first commissions early in his reign. From 1545, he employed the renowned hardstone carver and armourer Giana Giacoma Caraglia of Verona, whom he later naturalised into the Polish nobility (*szlachta*).[69] In the late 1540s, he also oversaw the reconstruction and redesign of the palace at Vilnius and his favourite hunting lodge at Niepołomice, created a painting gallery at Vilnius, and kept sculptors, medallists, goldsmiths, weavers, jewellers, garment designers, painters, and musicians on staff.[70] His court was renowned for its lavish festivities and tournaments, and he amassed a collection of miniatures, portrait medals, jewels, armour, textiles, silverware, and decorative wares.[71] According to papal nuncio Bernardo Bongiovanni, his collections rivalled that of the Venetian and papal treasuries.[72]

In general, Sigismund was heavily involved in the greater artistic project of his court, which surpassed that of his father in its productivity, dynamism, and splendour. Having fashioned himself as a philosopher-king, Sigismund surrounded himself with humanists and innovative artists of all media.[73] Based on his library inventories, we can deduce that he was familiar with the Italian aesthetic canon, with works such as Alberti's

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[67] Bogucka, "Renesansowa władca a religia," 503.
[68] Kenneth Lewalski, "Sigismund I of Poland: Renaissance King and Patron," *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967), 65.
[69] Fabiański, *Wokół wawelskiego dworu,* 180.
[70] Including pieces by court painters, international commissions by Lucas Cranach, and purchases from Titian and Paolo Veronese. Cynarski, *Zygmunt August*, 78.
[71] Niekrasz, "Woven Theatres," 121.
[72] Cynarski, *Zygmunt August*, 72-78; Sucheni-Grabowska, *Zygmunt August*, 169-170.
[73] Szablowski et al, *Arrasy*, 40; *Documenta ex archivo Ioannis Morone ad Poloniam spectantia, quae in Archivo Secreto et in Bibliotheca Vaticana asservantur, II pars: 1539–1579,* ed. Carolina Lanckorońska (Rome: Institutum Historicum Polonicum Romae, 1984), 5; *Źródła do historyi sztuki i cywilizacji w Polsce 1: Rachunki dworu królewskiego 1544–1567* (Kraków: A. Chmiel, 1911), 178-179, 269.

De pictura and *De re aedificatoria***.**[74] Furthermore, treatises from Sigismund Augustus's reign dedicated to the king echo his understanding of the centrality and nature of patronage at court. For example, in *De scholis seu academiis* (1551), Cracow University professor Szymon Marycjusz uses Alexander the Great, who was renowned for his artistic patronage and cultivation of learning, as an example for kings. As Marcin Fabiański mentions, Sigismund Augustus had been compared to Alexander the Great in past literature, making the implied connection between the two monarchs clear. In explaining the commissioning process, Marycjusz alludes to the role of the patron in the overall vision of the artwork:

> "They [the patron] must find a master (*artifex*) who appears superior to others and who can be safely entrusted with the work. They must then describe their concept| to him, that is, the idea of the entire work."[75]

The finished product, therefore, is the fruit of cooperation between patron and master. However, as Martin Gosman explains, in such cases, the creative agency of the artist is restricted by the political ideology of the patron and by existing court or dynastic iconography. The finished work must, first and foremost, reflect the patron's vision.[76] All of this supports the argument that Sigismund was the originator of the themes and overall agenda of the tapestries, and that we may therefore refer to them as a vehicle for his image-creation and didactic programme.

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[74] Kawecka-Gryczowa, *Biblioteka Ostatniego Jagiellona*, 293.
Based on his correspondence with his librarian, Łukasz Górnicki, it is possible to disprove an earlier thesis about Sigismund's library, propagated by Kazimierz Piekarski (1932): that he was a dedicated collector, not a reader, and that his intellect was more of a crafted persona than a reality. In fact, Sigismund was a voracious reader, and frequently ordered Gornicki to supply him with more titles for his consumption. Jan Pirożyński, "Royal Book Collections in Poland during the Renaissance," *Libraries & Culture* 24, no. 1 (1989): 29.

[75] Szymon Marycjusz, *De scholis seu academiis libri duo* (Kraków: Hieronim Wietor, 1551), B2v.

[76] Gosman lists numerous other examples of iconographic programmes at Renaissance courts, including Henry VII's at Richmond, Francis I's at Fontainebleau, and Catherine de Medici's Valois tapestries, in which the vision of the patron superseded the input of the artist. Martin Gosman, "Princely Culture: Friendship or Patronage?" in *Princes and Princely Culture, 1450-1600*, vol. 1, ed. Martin Gosman et al, 1-29 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 10.

Nevertheless, it is important to clarify which parts of the commission were likely to have been driven by Sigismund's input, and which were more likely under the creative control of the artists. While we can safely state that the patron had to make decisions regarding the genre and narratives of the tapestries, the choice of style and iconography was most probably Coxcie's. On the other hand, as Sigismund would have had to approve the entire commission before its completion, not only narratively but aesthetically, Coxcie had to choose a visual language that was appropriate for the aims of the series as stated by the patron.[77] Therefore, we may consider the narrative, the realm of the patron, as the foundation of a reading of *Genesis*, the most fruitful ground for its didactic content. Meanwhile, the visual content devised by Coxcie added detail, nuance, and support to the overall programme of the series.

4. The viewer

Finally, if we are to approach the *Genesis* tapestries both from the perspective of the patron and the viewer, then it is necessary to establish who this imagined viewer may have been.

As the reception context for this thesis is specifically the 1553 wedding, our viewer would have been one of the wedding guests present at the initial unveiling. While we do not have a complete list of attendees, Orzechowsk's panegyric does list some of the most notable figures who were present at the post-wedding festivities at the castle, including:

- Ferdinand II, Archduke of Further Austria (Catherine's brother)
- Albrecht Hohenzollern, Duke of Prussia (Sigismund's cousin)
- Bona Sforza, dowager Queen of Poland (Sigismund's mother)
- Izabella, Queen of Hungary (Sigismund's sister) and her son, John Sigismund Zapolya, King of Hungary

[77] The tapestry commissioning process will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.1.

- Katarzyna, Zofia, and Anna, Sigismund's other sisters
- Piotr Kmita, Grand Marshall of the Crown (highest-ranked minister)
- Stanisław Maciejowski, Crown Court Marshall (second-highest-ranked minister)
- Florian Zebrzydowski, Court Hetman and Hetman of the Mercenary Army
- Mikołaj Myszkowski and Mikołaj Radziejowski, Grand Treasurers of the Crown
- Walenty Dembinski, royal secretary
- Łukasz and Andrzej Górka, sons of the Starost General of Wielkopolska and Castellan of Kalisz
- Papal and imperial legates
- Other "princes" and "men of note."[78]

Extrapolating from this list, we can ascertain that our imagined viewer would have been an educated elite, likely a royal, magnate, or otherwise high-ranking noble. They would be very familiar with the biblical stories depicted, and would have viewed works of art with stylistic similarities to *Genesis*. In the case of individuals like Piotr Kmita, who spent his youth at the imperial court of Maximilian I, they may have viewed some of these works in person, or if not, then through the circulation of prints. According to Helena Kozakiewicz, the presence of Italian and German artists in Poland greatly accelerated the spread of new trends and styles. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, there was an increase in art patronage among the magnates and, in this same period, art appreciation began spreading from the highest strata of society to the middle *szlachta*.[79] As early modern Europeans, our viewer would also have been steeped in the propensity toward visual thinking, and therefore primed to seek out conspicuous uses of natural symbolism.[80]

For the purposes of this thesis, our imaginary viewer will be Polish-Lithuanian, as this thesis is most concerned with the negotiation of power and princely identity between

[78] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła w niektórych przedmiotach pisane Stanisława Orzechowskiego,* vol. 2, trans. Zygmunt Aleksander Włyński (Wrocław: Wilhelm Bogumił Korn, 1826), 129.
[79] Helena Kozakiewicz, *Renesans i manieryzm w Polsce* (Warsaw: Auriga, 1978), 67.
[80] See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966, reis., New York: Random House, 1994).

Sigismund and his own subjects. The reception of these tapestries by foreign viewers (e.g. from Coxcie's own Flemish context, or by Catherine Habsburg's entourage from Vienna, or from visiting royals from nearby kingdoms) is beyond the scope of this research, as *Genesis* in the context of various region-specific literary and visual cultures would be a study on its own. However, due to the universal knowledge of the Bible, the proliferation of important political and theological texts in Latin throughout the "Republic of Letters," and the familiarity of early modern elites with art trends through the circulation of prints and courtly art collections, it is likely that the general themes of *Genesis* would not have differed greatly among other European guests. The exception here would naturally be interpretations based on contemporary Polish politics and political writing, as well as any visual links drawn to Polish symbolic and visual culture.

The gender of our imagined viewer is a potential point of contention. We know that women were present at the wedding unveiling, as Orzechowski mentions many of them by name. In addition to the aforementioned relatives of Sigismund, it is very likely that other women Orzechowski mentions as distinguished guests who accompanied Catherine during the celebrations were also present, including Barbara Herbut-Kmicina, wife of Piotr Kmita, and Zofia Targowicka-Szydłowiecka, widow of the late Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki.[81] However, the question of whether the majority of female guests at the unveiling would have read the tapestries in the same way as their male counterparts is not an easy one to answer. In 1553, female literacy was certainly lower than male literacy in Poland. Based on Wacław Urban's research, by 1575 only around twenty percent of women in Kraków were able to sign their name, compared to between fifty and sixty-five percent of men. However, these figures were significantly higher for the nobility: by the end of the sixteenth century, ninety percent of magnate women and fifty percent of middle and lower

[81] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła*, 116.

noblewomen were literate.[82] Considering that any female guests at the wedding would have been members of one of these two groups, it is more likely than not that she would have been literate.

Indeed, a certain degree of female literacy and education seems to have been encouraged by contemporary Polish court culture. Aside from the popularity of Erasmus's writing, who advocated for female education, we find the treatises of Andrzej Glaber (1500-1555), a humanist professor of the University of Kraków who argued for full equal access to education among men and women.[83] Female intelligence was also praised in the primary sixteenth-century handbook for courtly behaviour, Łukasz Górnicki's *Dworzanin polski* (1566). Here, the author writes that the ideal woman should be able to hold her own in conversation with "everyone with whom she comes into contact," including men, with clever remarks and sharp ripostes. However, Górnicki also writes that a courtly woman must be able to read, suggesting that wit alone was not enough for an accomplished woman in elite circles.[84]

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that a female guest, unless she came from a royal or magnate family, would have been familiar with the same breadth of texts as the male guests. The majority of recommended reading materials for sixteenth century Polish women were religious and devotional, including psalmodies, prayer books, and the Bible. They were much less likely to have read some of the more academic exegetical and political texts used in this dissertation to analyse the tapestries. On the other hand, since the subject matter of the tapestries was religious, and covered well-known Old Testament stories, a female

[82] Wacław Urban, "Umiejętność pisania w Małopolsce w II połowie XVI w.," in *Przegląd Historyczny* no. 2 (1977): 245; Maria Bogucka, *Białogłowa w dawnej Polsce: Kobieta w społeczeństwie polskim XVI-XVIII wieku na tle porównawczym* (Warsaw: Trio, 1998), 171
[83] Ibid., 168.
[84] Ibid., 164, 169.

viewer would have been familiar with the events and characters depicted, and is likely to have read some theological writings referencing them. Naturally, women would have also heard the same sermons referencing these Bible stories as men. Moreover, it is worthy of note that private home education for noble girls often included Latin, meaning that women would also have been able to access texts not written in or translated into the vernacular (as is the case with many of the texts referenced in this thesis).[85]

Finally, the cultural literacy of a female guest would also have varied depending on her position within elite society. While women of the lower or middle *szlachta* did not necessarily receive a robust education in the arts, women educated at royal and magnate courts certainly did. These courts functioned as "academies" for young girls and women to learn languages, mathematics, etiquette, and appreciation of theatre, music, and fine arts.[86] Therefore, these women may have been able to engage in discussion about the tapestries' artistic merits on a fairly equal playing field with men. While they may not have travelled to Italy to see similar works as some of the male guests had done, they would have appreciated the skill, style, and influences that went into creating these artworks.

With all this said, it would be overly simplistic to state that a female guest would or would not have been able to appreciate the content of *Genesis* in the same way as a male guest. This would depend on their social situation and correlated educational background. However, it is more than likely that a woman present at the unveiling would have had the education necessary to read *Genesis* beyond the surface level in some capacity. She may not have been able to draw comparisons with patristic exegesis or recent political treatises, but she would have had enough theological background to understand the implications of the scenes and the morals they contained. In addition, those from magnate and royal

[85] Ibid., 173.
[86] Ibid., 174.

families would have possessed the cultural capital to view *Genesis* as spectacular and innovative artworks, perhaps even being able to draw comparisons between the tapestries and the Italian and Flemish works that inspired them.

The female viewing context of *Genesis* in comparison to that of men is a topic worthy of study on its own, but it is beyond the scope of this research. For the purposes of this thesis, I will not be distinguishing whether or not a female viewer is likely to have picked up on each element of my reading. Without records of the names of the guests, or of the texts in typical curricula for noblewomen, this would require too much speculation. When referring to "the viewer" in this thesis, I assume that the default viewer is male, as, most probably, the patron himself would have done. Because a primary focus of this research is how Sigismund tried to communicate to his viewer through tapestries, we must conclude that he was most interested in appealing to the political class, to people who held secular and ecclesiastical power: mostly, elite men. However, as discussed here, this is not to say that the majority of female guests would not have been able to appreciate *Genesis* in similar ways, both narratively and stylistically, even though they were not the target audience of the commission.

The viewership of *Genesis* in other display contexts is also outside the purview of this thesis. While we know that Sigismund's tapestry collection did travel with him to his various residences, we have no documented evidence of their use at other specific events, any information regarding their display locations within these residences, or any other primary sources like Orzechowski's detailing their reception on subsequent occasions. Based on mentions of tapestry repairs in Royal Treasury records, we only know that at least some of his collection hung in Vilnius at least as early as 1559, and in Krasnystaw in 1560.[87]

[87] These documents are noted in Birutė Rūta Vitkauskienė, "XVI-XVIII a. Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės valdovų rūmai istoriniuose šaltiniuose," in *Vilniaus Žemutinė pilis XIV a. – XIX a.*

From Sigismund's 1571 will, we know that many of the tapestries were at his beloved castle at Tykocin, where he spent much of the final years of his life and kept most of his most expensive treasures.[88] Beyond this, we have no information about the occasions or precise locations of the tapestries' display.

Finally, it must be mentioned that Michiel Coxcie's possible intentions behind certain choices in style and iconography, as well as a reading of the tapestries in the Flemish context, is also beyond the scope of this thesis. The aforementioned approach of situational authorship allows us to recentre the discussion on Sigismund and his viewers, which is more relevant to a reading of the tapestries in terms of Sigismund's image and agenda. However, the obvious Flemish style of the tapestries and its significance for Sigismund's image in the eye of the viewer is a relevant point for my analysis, and will be discussed in Chapters Four and Six.

Reading tapestry

1. Method

As I have alluded in the Historiography section, a full and holistic reading of a tapestry cannot focus only on materials, or symbolism, or expressions of a single theme, but must consider a plurality of potential meanings. The reading should, therefore, be multi-layered and interdisciplinary, using a variety of external sources to understand the tapestry, and considering both the potential vision of the patron and the various receptive contexts of the audience. I propose the following steps that add up to a political reading of Renaissance tapestry, which I will be applying in my thesis:

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pradžioje. 2002–2004 m. istorinių šaltinių paieškos, ed. Raimonda Ragauskienė, 72-242 (Vilnius: Lietuvos pilys, 2006), 226-228.

[88] Ieva Jedzinskaitė-Kuizinienė, *Tapestries of the Palace of The Grand Dukes of Lithuania*, trans. Albina Strunga (Vilnius: Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, 2012), 37.

1. The tapestry medium as a signifier of magnificence, wealth, elite social status, cultural capital, dynastic heritage, longevity, and stability of one's power.[89]
2. The intentions behind the timing of the commission, e.g. to celebrate wealth, victory, and prosperity, to herald a new reign or marriage, to support an image of power in unstable times, etc. In other words, the commission must be contextualised within the surrounding historical events pertaining to the patron and audience.[90]
3. The connotations of the chosen genre in a domestic/regional context and in the context of the European tapestry market: in this case, the biblical genre as an index of princely power, image-creation, and political/religious messaging.[91] Here, and in all of the following stages, we may also look for references to other popular tapestry series, either visually or narratively, to assess whether the work is in direct dialogue with its contemporaries at other courts.
4. The materiality of tapestry and its effect on audience reception, including its size, weight, colours, textures, impact on light and sound, display location, etc.[92]
5. The style(s) of the tapestries (e.g. for *Genesis*, mannerism and Netherlandish grotesque), its connotations in the courtly art sphere, and its affective and didactic potential for the viewer.[93]
6. The moral, political, and religious messages emerging from the narratives and protagonists of the series. Here, relevant external texts (literary, political,

[89] See e.g. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance* and *Henry VIII*; Buchanan, *Habsburg Tapestries*; Delmarcel, *Flemish Tapestry*.
[90] Ibid.; see also Bertrand, "A New Method."
[91] See e.g. Campbell, *Henry VIII*.
[92] See e.g. Susanna Burgharz et al, "Introduction: Materializing Identities: The Affective Values of Matter in Early Modern Europe," in *Materialized Identities in Early Modern Culture, 1450-1750: Objects, Affects, Effects*, ed. Susanna Burghartz et al, 23-54 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); Catherine Richardson and Tara Hamling, "Ways of Seeing Early Modern Decorative Textiles," *Textile History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 4-26.
[93] See e.g. Cleland et al, *Grand Design*; Piwocka, "Art of majesty," Ibid.,"Nie Tylko Rafael...O kilku rzymskich inspiracjach w projektach Michiela Coxciena do arrasów Zygmunta Augusta," in *Żeby Wiedzieć*, ed.Wojciech Walanus et al (Kraków: Lettra-Graphic, 2008), Anna Misiąg-Bocheńska, "Arrasy biblijne: Sceny z księgi Genesis," in *Arrasy*, ed. Szablowski, 73-188.

exegetical, theological, historical, etc.) should be used to contextualise the messages, and to assess whether the patron's intentions and the audience reception would have converged or diverged.[94]

7. Potential use of iconography in the tapestries and borders, either specific to the display location or within the wider European symbolic lexicon, and its implications for the overall messaging of the series.[95]

This seven-step process illuminates the need for an interdisciplinary reading of tapestry, one that combines methodology both from history and from art history. History sets the scene of the commission and contextualises it within the political, religious, social, economic, and cultural environment, whereas art history brings issues of style, iconography, and materiality to light. Both disciplines are required to fully answer questions of the patron's intentions and vision, and of the audience's reception.

With the exception of the first point in the method, we must remember that, in absence of external sources definitively stating the patron's or artist's intentions, any themes, references, or symbolism that a researcher may find cannot be regarded as absolute**.** However, depending on the nature of the series and the intellectual/cultural milieu of the patron's court, certain assumptions can be made: if not necessarily about intentional references, then about references that courtly viewers would have found themselves.

In the case of *Genesis*, although we do not have any surviving contracts or documents from the artists or workshops, and only have scant records of the commission from the patron's side (as will be discussed in Chapter 2.1), we do have the biblical inscriptions in each tapestry's top border. These give us some information as to the overall

[94] See e.g. Campbell, *Henry VIII*; Bertrand, "A New Method."
[95] See e.g. Markiewicz, "Iconography;" Schmitz von Ledebur, *Die Planeten.*

moral(s) of the episode, major narrative beats, or characterisation of the protagonists as imagined by the artists and approved by the patron. The inscriptions will be discussed in reference to the series's hermeneutic content in Chapter Five.

Regarding the audience reception, the only extant document is the *ekphrasis*, but it is important to note in general that the first two generations of sixteenth-century Polish nobles were, on the whole, well-educated, and many families had a profound interest in learning. At the turn of the century, there was an increased interest in rigorous education among the nobles stemming from the rising fashion of Italian humanism at the Wawel court, spurred by Sigismund the Old's Italian Neoplatonist tutor, Filippo "Callimachus" Buonaccorsi.[96] The vogue of humanist education and the conservatism and scholarly decline of Kraków University led to the popularity of studying abroad at prestigious schools, particularly in Italy (Padua, Bologna, Rome) as well as in Königsberg, Wittenberg, Nuremberg, Leipzig, and Basel, despite Sigismund the Old's repeated edicts prohibiting attendance at Protestant institutions.[97] As the Reformation gained momentum in subsequent decades, it took on an increasingly intellectual character on both sides, as can be deduced from the boom in publishing of religious polemics, catechisms, synodal acts, and confessions of faith around the time of the Council of Trent.[98] According to Gottfried Schramm, the intense theological debates among nobles in the capital region of Małopolska in particular were possible only due to the high level of religious and humanist education among the region's elites.[99]

[96] Jerzy Kłoczowski, *A History of Polish Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91.
[97] Bem, *Calvinism,* 18; Pirożyński, "Royal Book Collections," 21.
[98] Waldemar Kowalski, "'To jest owczarnia onego dobrego pasterza:' Pojęcie prawdziwego Kościoła w polskich szesnastowiecznych katechizmach," *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 60 (2016): 29-71.
[99] Schramm, *Der polnische Adel*, 41.

In the case of the *Genesis* tapestries, even more opaque exegetical nods would not have gone unnoticed by many viewers, considering the popularity of scriptural studies and hermeneutics during the Polish Reformation. As David A. Frick notes, Lorenzo Valla's *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum* (1443) and Erasmus's commentaries would have been cornerstones in the humanist education of elite religious actors of all denominations.[100] Instead of the dry and abstract scholastic approach, the humanists pushed for a return to intensive philological study (*philologia sacra*) of the original sources.[101] References to other texts, such as ancient literature, contemporary treatises, or emblem books would likely depend on the educational background of the individual audience member. However, the tapestries were commissioned as pieces of court art, to be displayed at royal palaces when the king was in residence and travel with him and his entourage. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the majority of viewers would have possessed the intellectual and cultural background to decipher their meanings, or posit their own interpretations, beyond the surface level.

2. Primary sources

In order to construct my reading of the tapestries according to the aforementioned methodology, I will use a variety of primary sources. The only eyewitness account of the unveiling is *Panegyricus nuptiarum Sigismundi Augusti regis Poloniae,* written by Stanislaw Orzechowski for the 1553 wedding. The text recounts their original placement within Wawel Castle, their chronology, the reactions of the guests, and the author's own interpretations of their themes and morals. Orzechowski's panegyric and the *ekphrasis* it

[100] David A. Frick, *Polish Sacred Philology in the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1989, 6.
[101] Tomasz Nastulczyk, "List dedykacyjny Mikołaja Radziwiłła jako program ideowy "Biblii Brzeskiej:" Wokół humanistycznych kontekstów i uwarunkowań studiów biblijnych," *Tematy i Konteksty* 4 (2014): 36-45.

contains is perhaps the most valuable source for this project, as it offers a window into the reception, affective potential, and audience readings of the series as they were first displayed.

The problems of using a text abiding by generic and rhetorical conventions as an "eyewitness account" will be discussed in Chapter Three. However, it must be mentioned that the use of panegyric for art history is itself somewhat controversial. In the eighteenth century, the term "panegyric" took on a pejorative meaning in English literary criticism, synonymous with exaggerated praise of any person or thing and used to ridicule poetry. Unfortunately, this connotation has endured to the present day. This is not, however, how sixteenth-century authors viewed the genre. In fact, one of its most vocal proponents was Erasmus, the most popular humanist in Poland at the time. Erasmus defined the panegyric as "exhorting to virtue under pretext of praise." He and other Renaissance authors understood the genre in its classical contexts: in ancient Greece, the panegyric was a speech delivered at a festival, and in the late Roman Empire, it was an oration in praise of a public figure, usually the emperor.[102] As opposed to eighteenth-century panegyrics, these texts were very much considered to be "serious" literature and given immense socio-political importance.[103] However, according to Erasmus, a panegyric should be aimed primarily at the instruction of the monarch, much like *specula principum*:

> Those persons who think panegyrics are nothing but flattery, appear not to know with what design this kind of writing was invented by men of great sagacity, whose object it was, that by having the image of virtue put before them, bad princes might be made better, the good encouraged, the ignorant instructed, the mistaken set right,

[102] James D. Garrison, *Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 18-21.
[103] Stijn Bussels, "The Wondrous Town Hall of Amsterdam: Laudatory Poems on the Impact of Art and Architecture," in *The Places of Early Modern Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander et al, 155-175 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 175.

> the wavering quickened, and even the abandoned brought to some sense of shame.[104]

Based on these contemporary definitions, the panegyric emerges as an incredibly fruitful source on the understanding of kingship at the Polish court. However, because of the necessarily laudatory nature of the genre and the possible political or didactic aims that may obscure the author's reports of the actual artworks, a panegyric cannot simply be taken at face-value as an objective "eyewitness" account of the proceedings. Still, the generic constraints and political involvement of panegyrics do not detract from the fact that their authors could provide perceptive insight into the artwork, courts, and personages they described.[105]

Orzechowski's panegyric is, in fact, an atypical case, as it was not commissioned by the king, and the author was not financially compensated. Orzechowski presented the text to the king as a gift in an effort to secure the vacant position of court chronicler. Therefore, Orzechowski used his *ekphrasis* of the tapestries as a commentary on the magnificence and princely virtues that he believed they depicted–or, on what he believed the king intended them to depict. It is important to remember that the panegyric is not the king's own expression of his magnificence via the pen of a hired author, but an articulation of Sigismund's kingship as perceived by an external actor. In this way, while the *ekphrasis* does not necessarily give us insight into the king's own vision behind the tapestries, it is an invaluable glimpse into how a guest at the unveiling may have viewed the series and understood their relationship to their patron.

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[104] Erasmus, "Epistle 177," *The Epistles of Erasmus*, trans. Francis Morgan Nichols, 3 vols. (London, 1901), I, 366.
[105] Bussels, "The Wondrous Town Hall," 175.

Alongside the panegyric, my reading of the narrative content of the tapestries will be based on the scriptural texts in the Vulgate as well as patristic, mediaeval, and Renaissance theology and exegesis. I will also draw on contemporary Polish political literature and primary sources such as parliamentary records and letters to situate the tapestries within the historical context of Sigismund's early reign and assess any potential references to current events or issues. The visual reading will be based on stylistic and iconographic comparisons to other artworks (ancient and contemporary, in Poland and abroad), symbolism in the Book of Genesis, mediaeval bestiaries, emblem books, and contemporary literature.

These materials form a diverse body of primary sources, but I propose that they are all relevant in an assessment of kingship and religion in Polish court art. They all address different aspects of the religious, social, and political context of the tapestry commission and unveiling. As primary sources, many of which were written by players in these events or observers at court, they bring us as close as possible to replicating the climate of Sigismund Augustus's early reign. They also all tie into different facets of kingship and magnificence, including wisdom, erudition, piety, wealth, political acumen, and esoteric knowledge. Furthermore, if we are to argue for situational authorship and plural meaning-making, then we must consider many bodies of knowledge with which the king and the original audience may have been familiar, and which may have informed the commission and its contemporary readings.

Having outlined my methodology, I will begin Chapter One by exploring the questions: why did Sigismund commission tapestry specifically among all possible media, and why make such an expensive commission at that specific time? I will consider the king's potential motivations for choosing the tapestry medium due to its cultural capital, the material and spatial qualities of tapestry in conveying magnificence, and the context

surrounding Sigismund that may have made such an extravagant purchase a wise strategy at that particular moment. This political and religious backdrop will also allow us to consider the context in which the viewer would have read the tapestries in 1553. In Chapter Two, I will expand the discussion from the domestic to the international context, and question the political significance of the *Genesis* commission in light of other tapestry commissions across Europe around the same time. Was Sigismund conforming to established models of kingship across the continent, or trying to set himself apart from his princely peers, or perhaps both? Moreover, what was the significance of the biblical tapestry genre for patrons at the time?

After establishing the motivations for the commission, in the following chapters, I will provide a layered reading of the tapestries. I will examine their methods of conveying princely power, facilitating Sigismund's image-creation, and communicating the new king's political and religious vision for his kingdom during his reign. In Chapter Three, I will embark on a close reading of the *ekphrasis*, which reveals much about the perceived messaging of the tapestries, and especially their relationship to Sigismund's princely persona. In Chapters Four through Six, I will analyse *Genesis* in terms of its style (specifically mannerism and Netherlandish grotesque), its narrative and exegetical content, and its iconography.