EXCEPTIONAL WORKS OF ART IN

THE SOBIESKIS AND STUARTS,

THE SPLENDOUR AND SPECTRE OF THE CROWN

AT WILANÓW PALACE IN WARSAW

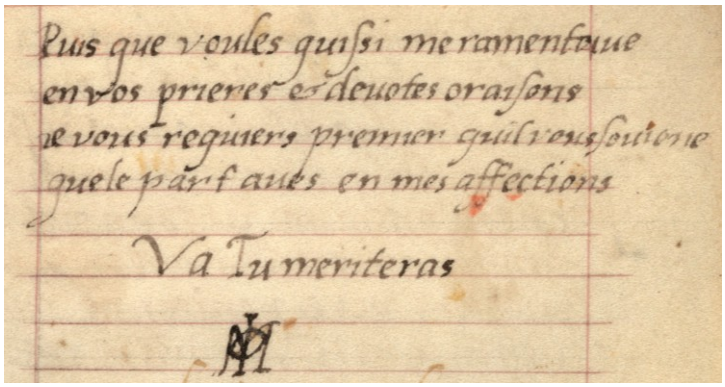
Piotr Piniński *

There have been many exhibitions dedicated to the Sobieskis and the Stuarts individually. But the exhibition at the Sobieskis' old palace of Wilanów in Warsaw, which opened on 24 October 2025, is exceptional as it presents both families jointly. In Scotland, there is too little awareness of the Sobieski family. In Poland the situation is only slightly better with regard to the Stuarts. Yet these two families are linked in many ways. Both gave their respective countries legendary heroes: King Jan III (1629-1696) and Prince Charles Edward Stuart (1720-1788). Both families became joined by marriage in 1719 when the teenaged Princess Marie Clementina Sobieska (1701-1735) made her politically dangerous and physically treacherous journey from Oława to Rome and married the exiled James III/VIII (1688-1766). Not long after, both families became extinct, the last generation of each represented by a daughter with the same name and title: Charlotte Sobieska, Duchess of Bouillon (1697-1740) and Bonnie Prince Charlie's daughter, Charlotte Stuart, Duchess of Albany (1753-1789). This is not an attempt to describe each of the exhibits in this exhibition, but to select just a few which are particularly rare, unusual, or unique.



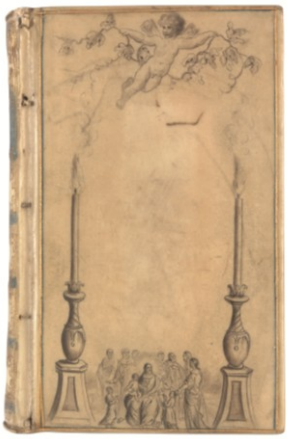
Louise de Bourbon-Vendôme in the black habit of a Benedictine, by the Master of Archbishop François de Rohan, Paris, 1534-40.

The first is Mary Queen of Scots' (1542-1587) book of hours, or prayerbook, which dates from 1534-40. It symbolically opens the exhibition, being the earliest exhibit, and because it is the work of 'The Master of Archbishop François de Rohan', one of the greatest artists working at the Court of the French king, François I. Paris was then the leading centre for such works on parchment which were extremely expensive and already being replaced by printed volumes. It also symbolically closes the exhibition. Because the only member of the last generation of the Stuarts was Charlotte Stuart, the father of whose children was Archbishop Ferdinand de Rohan (1738-1813), from the same great Franco-Breton family of sovereign princes as Archbishop François de Rohan (1480-1536).



Mary Queen's of Scots inscription, circa 1558.

Mary Queen of Scots' book of hours was commissioned by her maternal great-aunt, Louise de Bourbon-Vendôme (1495-1575), shortly after 1534 when she was appointed Abbess of Fontevraud. The book of hours not only contains tens of magnificent illuminations, but also a unique inscription written by the teenaged queen herself. She signed it with the monogram M combined with F (as Φ) for her husband. The inscription reveals that the book of hours was given to Mary by her great-aunt at Fontevraud around the time of her marriage in 1558 to François II who was crowned King of France in 1559, but died suddenly in 1560. It was his death which triggered the grief-stricken Mary's return to Scotland. And this book of hours travelled with her on that dangerous journey by sea from Calais to Edinburgh's port of Leith, where she landed on 19 August 1561. That marked the end of her happy youth in France and the beginning of the long tragic final chapter of her life which ended with her execution in 1587, orchestrated by her Protestant cousin Elisabeth I of England, who feared her potential claim to the English throne.



The book of hours rebound by the Edwards family of Halifax.

Mary's book of hours has another exceptional aspect. It was rebound in the late 18th or early 19th century by the famous English bookbinders, the Edwards family of Halifax, and the narrative scenes are painted *en grisaille* under vellum, rendered translucent by a special method patented by James Edwards in 1785.

There are only four other books of hours which can be said with certainty to have belonged to Mary Queen of Scots. But none were commissioned by her family and given to her as a wedding present. All were old when acquired, dating from the 15th century, and have origins unassociated with the queen. This one is also unique in being the only one of Mary's books of hours still in private hands. The other four belong to the Huntingdon Library in San Marino (California), the Ruskin Gallery in Sheffield (UK), the British Library in London, and the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg.

Mary's great-grandson, King James II/VII, lost the Stuarts' three thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland when his second wife, Mary of Modena (1658-1718), gave birth in June 1688 to a Roman-Catholic male heir, James Francis Edward Stuart, the future husband of Clementina Sobieska. That, and King James' unpopular policy of equal rights for Catholics, prompted his Protestant son-in-law and nephew, William of Orange, to invade England in November 1688 with an army of about 20-25,000 Dutch, German and French troops and 463 ships. There was little resistance in England, but that was not the case in Scotland and Ireland. In late December James II/VII fled into French exile and the protection of his cousin Louis XIV who provided the Stuarts and their court with his place of birth, the Château de Saint Germain-en-Laye. It was there that this portrait of the four-year-old future King James III/VIII was painted by Nicholas de Largillierre.

It was commissioned in the Spring of 1692 by the prince's mother to celebrate him having been made a knight of the Order of the Garter. It is the third of five painted by Largillierre during the period 1690–95, of which only three survive. Both of the main figures were painted in the studio. But to provide elements for his composition the artist made sketches from the gardens of the Château Neuf at Saint-Germain. The Stuarts themselves lived in the adjacent Château Vieux. On the left is the white retaining wall and stone balustrade of the upper terrace. At the left end of the parrot's body is the roof of the pavilion where Louis XIV was born. Below the wall is a statue of an antique figure and, in front, the tiny figures a horse and two men in court dress looking at the prince. They are almost certainly King James and King Louis. The youth beside the prince stands in front one of the baroque fountains on the gardens' second level. James appears as Prince of Wales, his white feathers being the heraldic crest of that title. He is also wearing the blue riband of the Order of the Garter. His right hand holds a poppy, two with seed pods, a symbol of sleep. Looking on is a parrot, symbolic of childhood, but also of the Virgin Mary, and thus Catholicism. In front of the older boy lies bindweed which represents loyalty.

The youth beside the prince is Walter Strickland (1675-1715), the eldest son of Winifred, Lady Strickland who accompanied Queen Mary with the newly-born Prince James when they fled England and crossed the Channel in December 1688 after William of Orange's invasion. The painting represents Lady Strickland's loyalty, as well as her duty as governess of putting the infant prince to sleep at night. Unusually, Largillierre enlarged the canvas on all sides. Proof of this is in the fact that the canvas pieces are all of the same date and the paint pigments are consistent throughout. In order to confirm that he was the painter, not only of the original central canvas, but also of the enlarged parts, Largillierre placed his signature over one of the seams joining the pieces of canvas.



The future King James III/VIII with his page Walter Strickland,
by Nicholas de Largillierre, 1692.

Infra-red reflectography reveals that the central rectangle of canvas was originally a portrait of James alone. This is confirmed by Gérard Edelinck's engraving of 1692 which shows only the prince. But immediately after, something made Queen Mary change her mind about the composition. The only element of significance on the enlarged part of the canvas is the figure of Walter Strickland. The reason why the queen suddenly wanted him included, was that in the late summer of that year Lady Strickland applied to leave court, which she did in October, to go and be with her ill husband, Sir Thomas, at the Convent of the English Poor Clares in Rouen. Therefore, Queen Mary instructed Largillierre to include Lady Strickland's son in the portrait, so she could give the painting to her friend as a memento.

To do this Largillierre had to enlarge the canvas. Yet he was limited in how much he could do so, as he could not allow the central figure of James to become disproportionately small. Yet Walter was a teenager and much larger. So, the artist positioned him snugly alongside

James, with his back to the viewer. This avoided drawing attention from the painting's principal subject, which was James. Walter's graceful pose of leaving is also a reference to the Stricklands' departure from court, and is balanced by a colourful parrot and sky. In reconciling these problems Largillierre transformed what had previously been the straightforward portrait seen in Edelinck's engraving, into a composition of real genius.



Gérard Edelinck's engraving of Largillierre's original portrait of the future James III/VIII as Prince of Wales, 1692.

Because so few have survived, the exhibition is exceptionally lucky to have on display not one, but two pairs of portraits of King James III/VIII with his queen, Princess Clementina Sobieska. The first pair was painted by the Scottish artist William Mosman in the Autumn of 1733 at the Stuarts' Palazzo del Re in Rome. It is copied from the originals of 1719 by Francesco Trevisani. We know that James liked his portrait, because in 1722 he gave permission to his court painter Antonio David to copy Trevisani's portrayal of his face and include it in David's own portrait of the king.

Originally, Trevisani made three pairs: one for the Stuarts, one for his patron Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, and one for John Erskine, the Jacobite Duke of Mar. Of them, none of the portraits of Clementina have survived. Mosman made his copies in 1733 for the distinguished Stuart supporter George Keith, 10th Earl Marischal.

Then, in 1735, Trevisani's pupil Francesco Bertosi made another pair. This time for a less important Jacobite, Captain John Urquhart of Craigston and Cromarty. Of Bertosi's pair, only the portrait of Clementina has survived, and is in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Therefore, Mosman's 1733 portraits are unique, because they are the only surviving pair. And, apart from John Smibert's copy of the 1721 portrait of her by Girolamo Pesci, Mosman's portrait of Clementina is the only one painted during her lifetime by a Scot.



King James and Queen Clementina by William Mosman, 1733 (after Francesco Trevisani,1719). James is wearing the robes of the Order of the Garter, England's highest order of chivalry.

Yet another aspect of Clementina's portrait is extraordinary. The exhibition has on display, not only her portrait with a gold watch on the table. It has the gold watch itself! The watch was made in London in 1718 by Isaac Duhamel. Its chased and repoussé gold work is replete with symbols. Its cartouches contain weapons, two flaming hearts pierced with arrows, two doves kissing, and fruit as a reference to hoped-for progeny. It was a present for the queen's wedding to James in 1719, from Frances Erskine, Duchess of Mar.



Clementina's watch, given as a wedding present in 1719 by Frances Erskine, Duchess of Mar.

On the back cover of the watch's outer case is the principal allegory. Set against an architectural backdrop, a cupid with wings holds a bow on the left. In the centre is a woman giving a flaming heart to the man on the right. He is wearing a sash which falls from the left shoulder and is fastened at the right hip where something is attached. It is the Order of the Garter, with the jewel known as the 'Lesser George' attached at the right hip. His left hand is reaching for the branch of the laurel tree behind, whilst his right hand is placed on a lance. Attached to the laurel tree are a helmet with a plume, a commander's baton, a sabre and a horse's stirrup. All are symbols referring to Clementina's grandfather King Jan III Sobieski who had earned his laurels battling against the Turks, who personally commanded the Polish heavy cavalry which defeated the Turkish army at Vienna in 1683, and whose principal weapons were the lance and sabre. The male figure in Duhamel's repoussé work is dressed in the same military attire as King Jan Sobieski can be seen wearing in portraits, displaying leather straps falling from the waist, and Polish *karacena* armour to protect the breast, with epaulettes, emerging from which can be seen the turned-up sleeve of the under-garment. These references to Sobieski's military achievements were especially appropriate at the time the watch was made. Because King James was about to launch another attempt to regain the Stuarts' thrones.

Attached to queen's watch are two seals. One is engraved on a white stone with a Scottish thistle with two flowers, one each for James and Clementina, a symbol of the Stuarts' right to the Scottish throne. It dates from 1718-19. The second is also on a white stone. It is set in gold with a royal crown and engraved with a rose and two buds. This is the Stuart emblem of the white rose, the flower in full-bloom being for James, the two buds signifying his sons Charles and Henry. It dates from 1725 or shortly after. Finally, there is the winder. It has a finial with a bloodstone engraved with an heraldic composition based on the Sobieskis' coat of arms, and on those of King Jan III's French wife, Marie-Casimire de La Grange d'Arquien (1641-1716).



King James and Queen Clementina by Antonio David, 1730 (after Martin van Meytens, 1725).

The second pair of portraits was painted in Rome by Antonio David in 1730. Appointed court painter in 1718, David's portraits of James and Clementina were copied from the lost originals by Martin van Meytens, painted in 1725 to celebrate the birth of the Stuarts' younger son Prince Henry Benedict Stuart, Duke of York, the future cardinal. In 1727-28 the Stuarts commissioned a number of copies of Meytens' originals by the minor English artist E. Gill. But they resigned halfway through, due to the poor and uneven quality of Gill's work. King James' finances were not then in good condition. But by 1730 they had improved considerably, so he ordered a small number of copies of Meytens' originals by David. The pair in the exhibition are the only surviving examples. And James and Clementina very much liked these images, because his hung in her bedchamber, and hers in his.

Described in 2008 by the David authority Dr Simona Capelli as 'marvelous portraits', Clementina's is the most beautiful portrayal of her ever made. For this there is a special reason. Triggered by her conflict with James, Clementina's health had been declining since 1726 and by 1730 her eating disorder had resulted in her looking thin, tired and haggard. David was the only artist who had known her closely since her arrival in Italy in 1719. Moved by the queen's damaged health and sad appearance, his portrait of 1730 restores to her the beauty and vitality of the once-brilliant charismatic queen whom he had known for over a decade. In fact, he made her look even more beautiful than on Meyten's original. This can be seen by comparing David's portrait with later copies made from the original. Lodovico Stern painted a copy in 1740, Louis-Gabriel Blanchet in 1741, and Domenico Duprà in 1742. Stern's version, which is also in the exhibition, served as the model for the mosaic by Pietro Paolo Cristofari (1685-1743) on the 1742 monument to the queen in St Peter's, designed by Filippo Barigioni (1672-1753) and sculpted by Pietro Bracchi (1700-1773). The *Registro degli Ordini della Fabbrica di San Pietro* records that the Vatican paid Stern 40 scudi for his copy. In fact, it differs slightly from the original. Cardinal Lanfredini considered Clementina's *décolleté* inappropriate for St Peter's. However, Pope Benedict XIV approved it. But only after the lace of the queen's dress had been turned up.



Queen Clementina by Lodovico Stern,
painted posthumously in 1740 (after Martin van Meytens, 1725).

Of exceptional importance, both with regard to artist and sitter, is Rosalba Carriera's stunning portrait of *Bonnie Prince Charlie* which portrays the sixteen-year-old future leader of the 1745 Jacobite Rising. Rosalba's pastel was exhibited in 2019 at the National Museum of Scotland, in 2022 at Scotland's West Highland Museum, and in 2023 at Dresden's Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister. It was also the subject of Professor Edward Corp's 2020 article in the *British Art Journal* entitled *The Recently Discovered Portrait of Prince Charles Edward Stuart by Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757)*. In it, Corp describes Rosalba as 'probably the best, and surely the most famous artist, male or female, who ever painted Charles' portrait'. The portrait is not only exquisitely beautiful, impressionistic in the brilliant rendering of the pastel, in such perfect condition that it might have been painted yesterday, but is of importance for several other reasons.



Prince Charles Edward Stuart by Rosalba Carriera,
Venice, June 1737.

The National Gallery in London writes that 'Rosalba Carriera's mastery of the pastel medium helped transform it into a serious and highly admired art form'. Washington's National Museum of Women in the Arts describes her as 'one of the most successful women artists of any era'. In the eighteenth century, Europe's fashionable elite was desperate to have a portrait by Rosalba. The Hanoverian King George III of Great Britain, admired her greatly and had an important collection of her work. So too did Clementina Sobieska's cousin, the

Habsburg Emperor Charles VI. But the largest collection of all was acquired by King Augustus II of Poland, Elector of Saxony, who created *Das Kabinett der Rosalba* in Dresden, which still has largest collection of her works in existence.

Rosalba painted Prince Charles in Venice in June 1737 during his extraordinarily successful tour of the northern Italian states. Charles and his chaperon, James Murray, Lord Dunbar, arrived in Venice on 28 May and left on 10 June. This dates the portrait to the first week of that month. It is unique as the only portrait of Charles, prior his departure from Rome to France in 1744, which does not have a companion portrait of his younger brother Henry. It is also the last portrait of him prior to the cutting off of Charles' hair on 3 August 1737, about which this sign of adulthood delighted him.

Charles' tour of the northern Italian states was politically very important. It was also the first time he felt himself to be his own man, not overshadowed by his patronizing father. His new-found confidence shines through in Rosalba's portrait. It was in stark contrast to the prince's spoilt childish behaviour in Rome, which was one of the main reasons his father sent him away, hoping the experience might make him might grow up a little. Contrary to his expectations, King James' hopes were exceeded beyond his wildest dreams and the impression the charismatic Charles made on all the courts of Northern Italy was sensational.



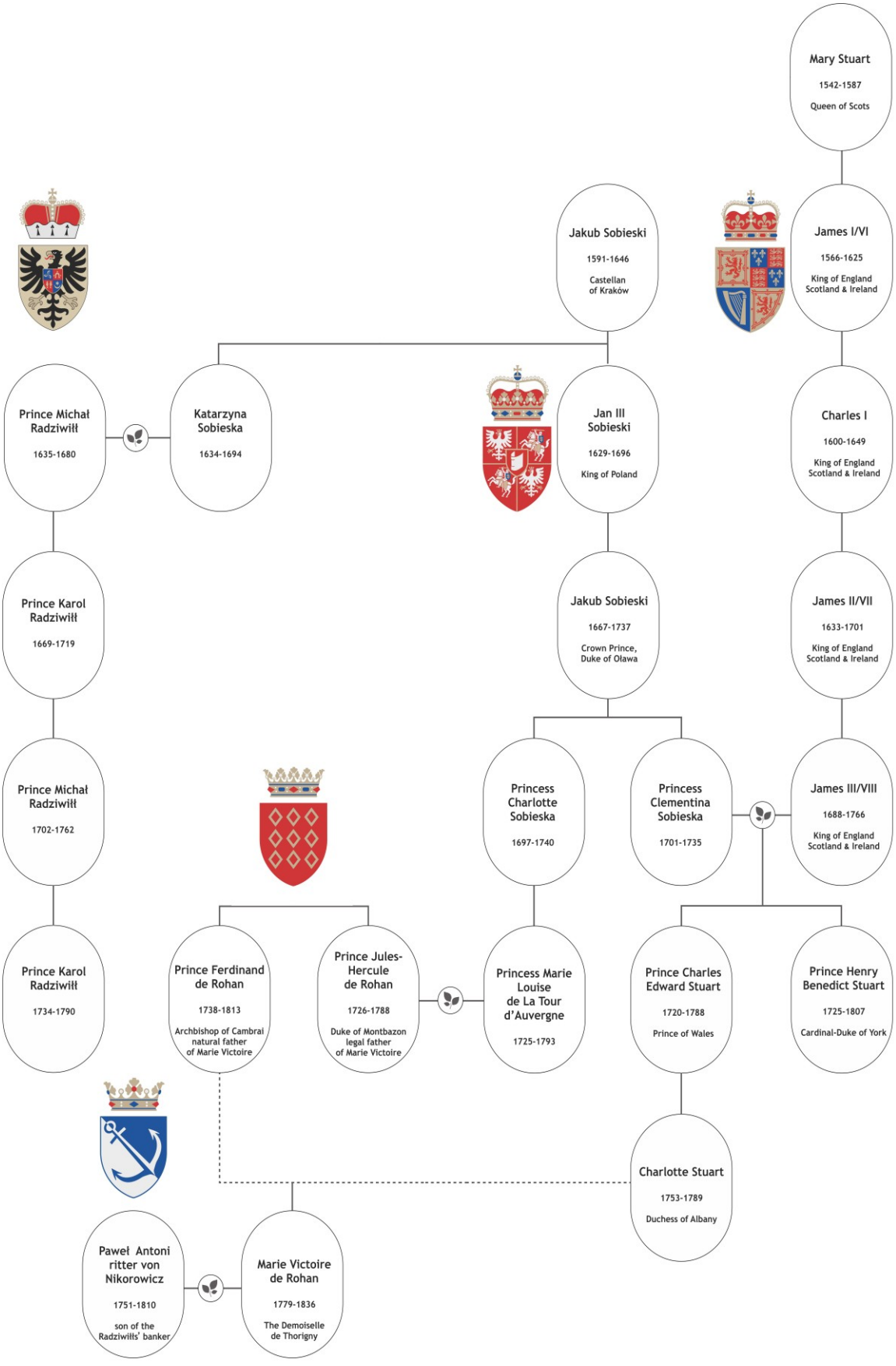
Prince Charles by Hugh Douglas Hamilton, Rome 1786.



Prince Charles by Allan Ramsay, Edinburgh 1745

It is relevant that Rosalba's portrait was not painted in Rome. As a result, it was free from King James' habitual influence over the artists he commissioned. This, and the fact that only the very best painters could be relied upon to capture the truest of likenesses, means that Rosalba's image of Charles is one of only three surviving portraits which we can be sure show the prince as he really was at the time. The other two are Allan Ramsay's oil on canvas portrait of late October 1745 at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh, and Hugh Douglas Hamilton's oil on paper of 1786 which is also on display in this exhibition. The latter portrait is important, because it is Hamilton's original painting, done from life, from which he copied all his subsequent versions in pastel and oil. And though Charles looks old and tired, his health damaged by alcohol, this portrait dates from the happiest years of his life since the traumas of 1745. That period began when his daughter Charlotte came from Paris to live with

him in October 1784, firstly in his palace in Florence, then from December 1785 until the prince's death in Rome in January 1788.



In Venice there were no portraits of the prince by other artists to influence Rosalba. She had only the sitter himself upon which to base her portrait. That was also true of the portrait of Charles painted hastily by Allan Ramsay in Edinburgh during the 1745 Rising itself, just prior to the departure of the prince's army for England at the beginning of November. This absence of comparative portraits is important, because of the instructions King James usually gave his artists. One example of this interference is the pair of portraits of Prince Charles and Prince Henry painted by David in 1729. In this case the king told David to age both sons by four years so the images would remain current for some time, allowing further versions, miniatures and engravings to be made and sent to Jacobite sympathisers. Consequently, David's 1729 portraits of Charles and Henry do not show them as they looked at the time. They show them as David imagined they would probably appear four years later.

In fact, James didn't like Rosalba's portrait. And while Charles was still away with Dunbar, the king ordered pastels of himself and Henry by Jean-Ėtienne Liotard which, though they lacked Rosalba's genius, he personally preferred. And when Charles returned to Rome, his father instructed Liotard to complete the set.

Why, we may ask, did James not like Rosalba's portrait of his son? Dunbar's correspondence reveals that Charles had put on quite a lot of weight during his time away from Rome. Was that the reason? On the other hand, the Getty Museum writes of Rosalba's 'interest in rendering the sitter's inner psychology'. Of herself Rosalba said 'I have so long been accustomed to studying features, and the expression of the mind by them, that I know people's tempers through their faces'.

Did her portrayal of the prince's confident posture and fearless gaze disturb the king, whose stoical patient character was so different to that of his dynamic proactive son? Did James feel something about Rosalba's portrait of Charles which intuitively worried him? Some harbinger of the dramatic and tragic events of 1745 which would soon unfold?

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* Piotr Pininski, with Professor Edward Corp, was a consultant to the exhibition at Wilanów Palace in Warsaw, *The Sobieskis and Stuarts, The Splendour and Spectre of the Crown*. He is a graduate of Sotheby's Institute of Art and has lectured internationally on the last Stuarts for institutions such as the National Trust for Scotland. He has been a guest speaker at the Edinburgh International Book Festival and is the president The Lanckoronski Foundation of Liechtenstein, a member of the advisory board of the National Art Gallery of Ukraine in Lwów, an advisor to the director of the Wawel Royal Castle in Kraków, and to the Ossolineum in Wrocław, both in Poland. He is also a member of the Biography Committee of the Polish Academy of Learning, co-curated the 2022 exhibition *The Return of the Stuarts* at the West Highland Museum in Scotland, and is the author of various publications on the Stuarts, his most recent book being *Bonnie Prince Charlie – His Life, Family, Legend*, published by National Museums Scotland in 2022.