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A Chamberlain, a Diplomat and a Bankrupt. Nicolas de Montargon in the Service of Augustus II the Strong*

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When in May 1687 Duke Frederick Augustus, the future Elector of Saxony and monarch of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, commenced his educational *grand tour*, the political position of France was so strong in Europe and the royal court culture expanding from Versailles was so attractive that Paris was a mandatory place to visit for the son of Elector John George III. Frederick Augustus spent almost two years travelling; he returned to Saxony at the end of April 1689. Apart from France, he visited Spain, Portugal, Italian city-states, Hungary and the imperial court in Vienna. He visited Paris twice: at first, he stayed there from June to September 1687 and then from May to November 1688. Throughout both of his visits, the duke often went to Versailles where he personally admired the splendour of the palace and the royal court created and spread by Louis XIV.¹ The end of the 1680s was the pinnacle of the magnificence of the Sun King's residence. The Hall of Mirrors had just been completed and opened to the public (it was here when on 4 July 1687 Frederick Augustus was presented to Louis XIV) while the affluence of the French monarch had not yet been strained by the War of the Spanish Succession of 1702–1713.

Frederick Augustus' stays in Paris and Versailles were by no means initiating the French influences in Dresden; they were rather an indication of a pan-European trend of an increasing tendency visible in the second half of the 17th century and at the beginning of the 18th century. Interestingly enough, this trend was discernible regardless of a quite consistent anti-French policy of alliance with the emperor. During the reign of John George II, Elector of Saxony (1656–1680), all novelties regarding fashion — garments and accessories prevailing in Versailles in the times of Louis XIV's youth

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¹ KELLER 1994.

in particular — were eagerly taken over.² French merchants travelling to the Elbe were rather a rarity at that time. Both the Elector and his subjects purchased the necessary things at the famous markets in Leipzig.³ A short-term political rapprochement with France in the times of John George III (1680–1691) resulted in exchange of people and royal court culture. The circle of the Elector, who had considerable ambitions on the international arena, included Italian and French artists looking for an opportunity at his court to make a career and receive an adequate payment.⁴

Both visits in the capital of France were an occasion for Frederick Augustus to get to know new trends and style of governance in which ceremonies and etiquette — played out in a suitable entourage — had a significant influence on the monarch's image. Augustus II's style of governance was by no means a simple imitation of what the monarch had seen in Versailles and what he had most likely admired to some extent. Therefore, it was not the goal of Elector of Saxony and King of Poland to imitate Louis XIV; for instance, the Elector quite consciously rejected the pompous and complicated ceremonial taking place in Versailles and gave up the etiquette for more direct forms of communication. Augustus II chose only those elements from the system created by the Sun King which he considered valuable for the state joined by the Polish-Saxon union, creating an original entity seasoned with cosmopolitan elements. Presence of foreigners at the royal court was its indispensable part. As Jacek Staszewski writes, “[t]here was a traditional belief in Augustus II's circle that each foreigner accepted into the Elector's service would become a good Saxon, if he ate bread received by the monarch.”⁵ An important place amongst the foreigners arriving at the Wettin court was taken by the subjects of the French monarchs due to strong cultural ties and an increasing significance of commerce. Relying on the court's calendars that were issued since 1728, Katrin Keller notes that French and Italian surnames appeared quite regularly in these publications alongside those of the Polish and German nobility. The foreigners usually held specific offices; they were court artists, cooks, or held military functions.⁶

As soon as the Elector took over independent rule in the Commonwealth, which at the same time visibly strengthened his position in the Holy Roman Empire, he sent to Paris Baron Raymond Leplat, an architect responsible for royal buildings, whose task was to make purchases and order various artworks (including fashionable furniture) intended for monarchical residencies in Dresden and Warsaw.⁷ As part

² The royal court culture in the times of John George II, Elector of Saxony, is presented by DEPPE 2006.

³ SYNDRAM 2009, p. 268.

⁴ STASZEWSKI 1986, p. 55.

⁵ STASZEWSKI 1986, p. 55.

⁶ KELLER 1999, p. 79.

⁷ Details on purchases made by Leplat at the request of Augustus II are presented by SYNDRAM 2009, pp. 272–274.

of his tasks, Leplat encouraged a considerable number of French artists to come to Dresden; they included the renowned painter of Augustus II's portraits Louis de Silvestre. Augustus' activity in France, and particularly the agility of his representatives (including chamberlains who were regularly sent to make large purchases) meant that the king quickly developed a network of his own commercial contacts which he most likely used while looking for specialists in specific fields for his court. For example, the Parisian merchant Antoine Boucher was a supplier of various objects for the king towards the end of the 17th century. Charles Le Roy, who was French but usually resided in Amsterdam, was responsible for precious stones and, in particular, for diamonds, which were popular on the Parisian markets. The monarch was personally visited in Dresden by a tailor, Simon, who transported various trinkets directly from the French capital on each occasion.⁸

The royal orders were still carried out by Leplat in the later period, but the king had his own permanent sales representative in Paris — Nicholas de Montargon.⁹ The subject of this article is the turbulent story of his life and career. Montargon is present on the pages of books of fiction and historical works, but no exceptional attention has been paid to him. Virginie Spenlé, the author of a book on the Saxon and French artistic ties, has quite inaccurately observed that little is known about Montargon and that even his name is unknown.¹⁰ The aura of ambiguities surrounding the chamberlain of Augustus II is understood in so far as the issue of the presence of foreigners — including newcomers from France — at the court of Augustus II still awaits a detailed analysis, even though their role in the transfer of cultural models seems to be obvious.¹¹ Thus Montargon is a representative of a certain group of people who either abandoned their own country for some reasons and chose to serve at the Saxon court, or — by using their position, knowledge and talents — became diplomatic agents, trade intermediaries or artists who were drifting between Dresden and Paris.

Information on Montargon's biography is extremely scarce. The most attention was given to him by Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz in *La saxe galante*, the story — full of gossip and fabrications — on Augustus II's circle, which was commissioned by the Prussian court.¹² The character of the Frenchmen appears in this work when the king, Augustus II, decides to send an envoy for Anna Constantia von Brockdorff, the Countess of Cosel. The mission was eventually assigned to Montargon, whose profile Pöllnitz decided to outline a bit on this occasion. According to him,

⁸ SYDRAM 2009, pp. 274–276.

⁹ WATANABE-O'KELLY 2002, pp. 205–206.

¹⁰ SPENLÉ 2008, p. 123.

¹¹ Only professional careers of artists and musicians have been analysed in detail, i.e.: WIERZBICKA-MICHALSKA 1964; WIERZBICKA-MICHALSKA 1975; STOCKIGT 2015, pp. 17–50.

¹² STASZEWSKI 1998, p. 5. Pöllnitz's version was very accurately repeated in the novel *Hrabina Cosel* by KRASZEWSKI 1952.

Montargon arrived in the Commonwealth together with Melchior de Polignac, who was preparing foundations for the election of the French candidate in 1697. He was then associated with the House of Bieliński and then — at a moment which was not closely defined by Pöllnitz — he became a chamberlain (*gentilhomme de la chambre*, *Kammerherr*) of Augustus II.¹³ The mission assigned by the king became an excuse for the author to describe Montargon's character a little bit. He was supposed to be “naturellement assez doux, & dont les manières étaient toutes composées”,¹⁴ which was probably a pose typical for a courtier at the beginning of the 18th century; additionally, it may have been his conscious strategy used during the negotiations with the Countess of Cosel. On the other hand an unerring rejection with the pistol, which the Countess chose, was used by Pöllnitz to point out the low birth status of the monarchical envoy. Montargon was allegedly a son of a public notary from the village of Chaillot near Paris.¹⁵

In the light of limited sources on Montargon, it is impossible to separate gossip and conjecture from truth in Pöllnitz's account. The nature of his work dictates great caution, but it should not be ruled out that in some of the aspects of the biography he was not far from the truth. It is not possible to verify the thesis that Montargon arrived in the Commonwealth with *abbé* de Polignac.¹⁶ It seems equally plausible that he met Augustus II personally during his Parisian stay and then found a job at his court. While searching for all useful contacts in France, the king was most likely eager to offer a position to an efficient Frenchman who was ready to leave his homeland and set off with him for Dresden. Pöllnitz certainly did not lie about the origins of Montargon, whose family did not belong to the nobility and represented a wide range of the bourgeoisie. However, it is doubtful whether he did not exaggerate a bit by placing his roots outside the French capital. A legal clue, presented in Pöllnitz's work, allows us to find the Montargon family in Paris in the 17th century; its main representatives, Nicolas (the elder) and Jean, served as *procureur* in Châtelet de Paris. The son of the former, Nicolas (the younger), was an attorney in the Parisian parliament,¹⁷ while the descendant of the latter was Alexandre (as of the 1670s).¹⁸ At the beginning of the 18th century the sources recorded another representative of the family, François, who was also a *procureur*.¹⁹ It seems plausible that if the chamberlain of Augustus II belonged to the Parisian family of Montargon, he may have been a descendant of the line of Nicolas the younger or Alexandre, who

¹³ PÖLLNITZ 1763, p. 251.

¹⁴ PÖLLNITZ 1763, pp. 250–251.

¹⁵ PÖLLNITZ 1763, p. 252. At present Chaillot is part of the 16th district of Paris, into which it was incorporated in 1860.

¹⁶ This fact is not recorded in works on Polignac's mission, i.e. SKRZYPIETZ 2009.

¹⁷ AN, Châtelet de Paris, Y//222–Y//225, *Insinuations* (21 juillet 1671–27 février 1673), f. 80v. Nicolas Montargon had a sister, Madeleine.

¹⁸ AN, Châtelet de Paris, Y//231–Y//234, *Insinuations* (11 janvier 1675–29 janvier 1678), f. 67v.

¹⁹ AN, MC/ET/I/238, marriage contract from 23 January 1710.

lived at the turn of the 18th century. His commercial contacts — which were in Wettin's service — were particularly valuable from the ruler's point of view and they additionally substantiate his Parisian background, suggesting that Pöllnitz mentioned Chaillot only in order to add a bit of an exotic flavour to his story, resulting from a clash between the parvenu and the Countess.

The course of Montargon's career as Augustus II's chamberlain is as mysterious as his background. The date of the commencement of his service is not known — no detailed court registries (*Hofbücher*) in relation to the beginning of Wettin's rule have been preserved; Montargon's surname appears in them for the first time only in 1717,²⁰ although it is known that he accompanied the king on a journey to Warsaw via Malbork and Gdańsk already in 1710.²¹ Therefore, he had to start his service before that date; H. Watanabe O'Kelly presumes that it happened even before 1705.²² This is very likely, because in 1720 Montargon referred to himself as a servant with experience of twenty years who had been receiving salary from the Saxon court for fifteen years.²³ On the other hand Augustus II wrote in 1722 that the Frenchman had remained in his service for twenty years which would make it possible to move the date when his career by the king's side commenced to 1700–1702.²⁴ In the abovementioned registries — controlled by the Lord Chamberlain's Office — a considerable number of details, not only on the courtiers' salaries but also on their age or period of service, was recorded as a rule. High officials, including the *Kammerherren*, in regard to whom this kind of annotation was forgone, were an exception as it was probably recognised that such a detailed attitude towards people who were at the king's disposal would be inappropriate at the very least. Thus the *Hofbücher* are paradoxically an extremely scanty source on Montargon's biography; they inform us (provided they were kept and are preserved) about the mere fact of his service and his salary which amounted to 800 thalers per annum (without any contingent and additional profits).²⁵ This gap cannot be amended by court calendars, which were regularly issued only from 1728.²⁶ It is only known that from 1718 the chamberlain was a member of the Royal Military and Hospitaller Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem United, which

²⁰ SHStA, 10006 Oberhofmarschallamt, K 02, No. 05, Hofbuch 1717–1720, f. 10.

²¹ SHStA, 10006 Oberhofmarschallamt, III, No. 01, Reise von Warschau nach Marienburg und Danzig, f. 1.

²² WATANABE-O'KELLY 2002, p. 205.

²³ SHStA, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, Die dem Kammerjunker Montargon bei seiner Verschickung nach Frankreich mitgegebene Instruktion, n.f., N. de Montargon to J.H. Flemming, Paris, 8 April 1720.

²⁴ SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2726/7, Sachen mit dem Königlische Französische Höfe vol. I 1710–1732, f. 62–62v, Augustus II to Philippe d'Orléans, Dresden, 25 June 1722 (concept).

²⁵ SHStA, 10006 Oberhofmarschallamt, K 02, No. 06, Hofbuch 1721–1725, f. 13.

²⁶ KALENDER 1728, n.f.

proved that he kept some ties with France and the elites there.²⁷ He changed his post at the Saxon court before 1726 — from a *Kamerrherr* to one of the *Kammerjunker* and he was subordinated to the court's Lord Chamberlain, Woldemar von Löwendal.²⁸ This was the end of his court career; in August 1727 he died in Paris and his surname — after providing it with a proper annotation — was removed from the registries.²⁹ Although he was present in the 1728 court calendar, this probably resulted from a kind of an outdated nature of these type of issues already at the time of their printing.

Montargon was employed by Augustus II probably mainly due to his Parisian contacts. As has already been noted, the monarch, who was trying to keep up with the European trends, needed suppliers and intermediaries in the French capital who would look for goods and conduct commercial transactions. Information about purchases made for the king by Montargon appears for the first time in 1715. The chamberlain was in Paris at that time and the monarch was in touch with him in order to personally set up transaction details. Amongst other things, Montargon arranged portraits of the French ruling family, which the monarch did not have in his collection.³⁰ The monarch's aim was to also control Leplat's significant expenses. It pertained mainly to a purchase of a 77-piece porcelain tableware with a silver edge which was bought for a considerable amount of money, 3005 thalers.³¹ Unfortunately, we do not know to what extent Montargon accomplished his task of spying on the royal architect. His service turned out to be indispensable once again a year later. An auction of items belonging to the late Armand-Charles de La Porte de La Meilleraye Duke de Mazarin, who died in 1713, was to take place in Paris. The king correctly assumed that it would be a great opportunity to enrich his own collection and he decided to send Montargon to the French capital. The latter received instructions on this matter twice, probably due to the delay of the time of the auction. Even before the public auction the king wanted to purchase nine chests (*coffres*), six Chinese cabinets, eight Chinese scrolls and four huge urns. He was also interested in a collection of defective statues which he believed had to be at a good price due to their defects. The monarch also specified which objects he was not interested in, probably trying to dispel Montargon's doubts regarding this matter. The servant purchased mainly statues, furniture

²⁷ SANDRET 1875, p. 114. Affiliation to the Order was proof of declarative piety of the knight bachelors and was associated with eagerness to provide help to those in need. In the 18th century reality the Order was less prestigious than the Royal and Military Order of Saint Louis which was founded by Louis XIV in 1693.

²⁸ It was probably not resulting from a change of chamberlains' competences, but rather the reorganisation of Augustus II's royal court. On the competences of both posts, see <https://deacademic.com/dic.nsf/pierer/191008/Kammerherr> (accessed 24 August 2019).

²⁹ SHStA, 10006 Oberhofmarschallamt, K 02, No. 07, Hofbuch 1726–1729, n.f.

³⁰ SPENLÉ 2008, p. 127.

³¹ SHStA, 10026 Geheimes Kabinet, loc. 2091/079, Briefwechsel König August II. von Polen, f. 11.

and porcelain; Virginie Spenlé speculates that if the monarch wanted to buy paintings from the duke's collection, he would have given this task to Leplat rather than to Montargon.³² The latter was therefore not a connoisseur, but an executor of the king's simple instructions. He was apparently effective, because over the following few years he purchased in the French capital e.g. furniture, saddles and even rare breeds of dogs for Augustus II. Finally, in December 1717 the monarch instructed him — as proof of trust — to order a model of an attire worn by Louis XIV at grand court ceremonies in the 1660s. In this case the king was particularly demanding; he commissioned not only sketches, but also a mannequin clothed in a model of the attire sewn in Paris.³³ The monarch presented himself wearing it in front of a wider public during the wedding celebrations of his son Frederick Augustus in 1719.³⁴

Montargon's mercantile skills and Parisian contacts were appreciated and used not only by the king, but also by extended Saxon court circles. In 1718 the chamberlain himself informed the Saxon minister, Jakob Heinrich von Flemming, that if he needed anything from the French capital, he could order it.³⁵ One year later he complained that finding a blue Turkish textile was next to impossible all around Paris and he hoped that the one he had purchased would satisfy the customers since — in his own opinion — it was very pretty.³⁶ Finally, in 1722 the king — through Flemming — reminded Montargon about an order of glass (*les lunettes*) he had placed and, incidentally, the minister himself asked to send 12 glasses of the very same kind.³⁷ There were probably more orders of this nature; small objects which reached Dresden through Montargon found their way to the king and the local elites, satisfying their need for details and fashionable attires reigning in Parisian parlours.

The scope of services provided by the Frenchmen for Augustus II was by no means limited to purchasing various objects in Paris. Montargon was also entrusted with small diplomatic missions which he accomplished, acting on the orders of the king or his ministries. In April 1712 he was in Utrecht where the peace talks ending the War of the Spanish Succession were held. Saxony was not involved in this conflict, but Augustus II carefully observed the results of the negotiations, the influence of which must have been of importance for the European politics. Montargon, as the elector's emissary, collected the information about the results of the talks; he

³² SHStA, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2091/079, Briefwechsel König August II. von Polen, f. 6; SPENLÉ 2008, pp. 123–124.

³³ WATANABE-O'KELLY 2002, pp. 205–206.

³⁴ *Splendeurs* 2006, p. 276.

³⁵ SHStA, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 697/9, Des Generalfeldmarschalls Herrn Graf von Flemming gehabte Korrespondenz, ff. 69–70v, N. de Montargon to J.H. Flemming, Paris, 7 March 1718.

³⁶ SHStA, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 697/9, Des Generalfeldmarschalls Herrn Graf von Flemming gehabte Korrespondenz, ff. 76–77v, N. de Montargon to J.H. Flemming, [Paris] 14 August 1719.

³⁷ SHStA, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 697/9, Des Generalfeldmarschalls Herrn Graf von Flemming gehabte Korrespondenz, ff. 78, J.H. Flemming to N. de Montargon, Warsaw, 16 September 1722 (concept).

acted unofficially, trying to find out the details primarily during meals. This proved frustrating; the Saxon emissary believed that the diplomats were so busy in Utrecht that they had no time for eating and, as a consequence, he could not act effectively.³⁸ In June 1714 Augustus II entrusted Montargon with a mission to travel to Cologne to his son Frederick Augustus with a task of giving him instructions regarding the travel to Paris. Initially, Montargon accompanied the prince to the French capital (perhaps he was even captured on a painting illustrating the presentation of Frederick Augustus to Louis XIV in Fontainebleau on 26 September 1714), but he was later sent back to Dresden after consulting the Polish delegates and French ministers (he left on 8 November 1714).³⁹

Diplomatic talents of the Frenchman were remembered a few years later by Count Flemming. In 1719 he entrusted him once again with an unofficial mission, the aim of which was to probe France's attitude towards a potential alliance with Saxony. At that time Montargon provided his expertise on the priorities of the French politics and he gave practical guidelines on how — in his opinion — these principles could be remodelled as part of a rapprochement with Saxony. In the document written on 8 May 1719 in Leipzig and intended for J.H. Flemming, Montargon emphasised that in the current political constellation Saxony was not regarded by France as a partner that could be allied with, because it was too strongly tied with the Empire. In addition, the French diplomats were suspicious about Augustus II's activities in the Commonwealth, assuming that his actions had attempted to strengthen his power. Finally, according to Montargon, the Saxons were not considered reliable partners in Paris, their truthfulness was doubted, and — most importantly — so were the numbers and fighting qualities of the Saxon army.⁴⁰ Theses prepared by Montargon were a starting point for Flemming to elaborate on the *pro memoria* document which was to become a foundation for all the unofficial activities conducted by the chamberlain in Versailles and Paris. The document was equipped with a few attachments intended to shake the fully guarded French politics towards Saxony.⁴¹ It was argued in *pro memoria* that the rumours about the attempts to implement absolutism in Poland were ludicrous and that the information on the Elector's efforts to guarantee his son with the Polish crown was exaggerated. Augustus II could certainly pursue politics heading in that direction, but this would doom him to have

³⁸ SHStA, 12881 Genealogica 3197 (de Montargon), N. de Montargon to NN, Utrecht, 12 April 1712.

³⁹ AD, Correspondance politique, Pologne 145, f. 16v, J.-V. de Besenval to J.-B. Colbert de Torcy, 3 July 1714; *ibidem*, Pologne 147, f. 79, a dispatch from the court to J.V. de Besenval from 1714; KISLUK-GROSHEIDE, BERTRAND 2018, p. 192; KRAUSHAR 1911, pp. 11–15.

⁴⁰ SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, n.f., P[ro] M[emoria] que Mr de Montargon à donné le 8 Mai 1719 à Leipzig.

⁴¹ There were various explanations (“narration historique”) and a political journal known as “Reflexions de l’espion Turc à Paris le 24 may 1718 envoyées à un de ses amis Tartares à Moscou sur la lettre que celui-ci lui avait communiquée d’un Ecossois à Dresden du 18 Fevrier 1718 à un de ses amis”.

constant clashes with the Poles. After withdrawing the Saxon troops from the Commonwealth, the king's relations with the Poles were exceptionally harmonious and if someone wanted to spoil them, it would have been done at the initiative of Tsar Peter I or the King of Prussia William I. It was Montargon's task to ensure the French diplomats about Augustus II's good intentions towards France and to indicate that France could benefit more from an alliance with Saxony than with the northern countries. He was expected to skilfully point out the advantages of Saxony, which were significant for the alliance, including a harmonious cooperation with Poland, possession of an excellent army, the numbers of which could be raised even to forty-five thousand soldiers (a detailed listing of the Saxon forces was attached), possibilities for mobilising the Polish army, but also good relations with the Empire and England. The talks he was expected to carry out were exclusively for exploration and had he managed to get an approval from the French side, it would have been necessary to create a commission of ministers for negotiating the alliance details.⁴²

While carrying out his mission, Montargon arrived in the capital of France in February 1720 and stayed there until October of that same year. He was seemingly cooperating with a Saxon diplomat, Burkhard von Suhm, but the talks he was holding went beyond the official course of diplomacy. For this reason he sought the favour of Cardinal Guillaume Dubois, who was at the helm of French politics; he persistently attended his Thursday audiences and, as a consequence, he reported on the familiarity in his relations with the minister of the regent, Philippe of Orléans, with a slight exaggeration. The exploratory and noncommittal nature of the talks, which he held, and the death of Suhm at the beginning of March 1720, meant that Montargon started to treat the mission entrusted to him first and foremost as a chance for a promotion. Having received the news about Suhm's death, he immediately endeavoured to take over the position of the Saxon *chargé d'affaires* in Paris and asked J.H. Flemming for patronage of his case.⁴³ His efforts remained fruitless; the management of the Saxon post in Paris was given — not without Flemming's consent — to Count Karl Heinrich von Hoym, which meant the end of Montargon's dreams about the position.⁴⁴

Unsuccessful efforts to become *chargé d'affaires* in Paris in spring were not the only defeat Montargon suffered in that period. Rather accidentally he found himself at the epicentre of significant events, in which he was personally involved. He was an eyewitness to the collapse of John Law's system based on paper banknotes in France, the panic at the securities market and, finally, the closing of Banque

⁴² SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, n.f., Pro memoria pour Mr de Montargon, Leipzig, 11 May 1719.

⁴³ SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, n.f., N. de Montargon to J.H. Flemming, Paris, 4 March 1720 and 8 March 1720.

⁴⁴ J.H. Flemming claimed that Montargon started to make efforts too late, but this does not seem to be a real reason for failure in this case, SHAD 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, n.f., J.H. Flemming to N. de Montargon, Warsaw, 27 February 1720 (concept); [http://saebi.isgv.de/biografie/Karl_Heinrich_von_Hoym_\(1694-1736\)](http://saebi.isgv.de/biografie/Karl_Heinrich_von_Hoym_(1694-1736)) (accessed 22 August 2019).

Générale, which meant bankruptcy for people who had invested money in the securities issued by this institution.⁴⁵ Tension was gradually increasing in the letters sent by Montargon at that time from Paris. Once he realised he could not count on Suhm's post (March 1720), it gradually dawned on him he could soon become a bankrupt, since he had placed his savings in Law's bank. In a letter from April 1720, Montargon openly wrote that the money he had lent did not bring him the expected fortune and he would probably have to live off 800 écus, which Augustus II had assigned to him 15 years earlier as an annual salary.⁴⁶ In June, seeing that the matter of the money invested in Law's system was practically lost, he only indicated that he had not been financially successful in the past few years.⁴⁷ Complaining about the reality, Montargon probably relied on some form of compensation from the Saxon court. J.H. Flemming very quickly cut through all hopes in that matter and he stated that he had limited possibilities. The Saxon Elector noticed the problem, but the activities he undertook were rather unlikely to satisfy Montargon. In 1722 August II sent him again on a mission to Philippe of Orléans, entrusting him to the duke's patronage and indicating that Montargon had been his old servant, for whom he had *affection* and who was in considerable trouble due to the Law system.⁴⁸ However, there is no suggestion that the bankruptcy resulting from careless investments became a reason for the Saxon or French courts to particularly appreciate Augustus II's servant or to pay him any financial compensation.

The fate of Montargon, who died in 1727, and who — presumably — spent around twenty-five years in Augustus II's service is as interesting as it is also representative of specific circles. The presence of a Frenchman at the Wettin court was significant for the transfer of cultural models, the source of which was the style of Louis XIV, strongly influencing the official and unofficial lifestyle at courts all over Europe. Augustus II consciously drew inspiration from Paris and eagerly employed newcomers from France. These people were very important for the ruler — they were bringing with them if not the knowledge of the life in Versailles itself then an awareness of artistic novelties prevailing in Paris at that time or the resourcefulness, experience and commercial contacts just like Montargon did. Thanks to them and the commissions they conducted, the king enriched his artistic collections and weaved French trends into the everyday life of his court — he organised a fair during *à la foire de St. Germain* carnival, he made sure that French dances were performed during the ceremony and that one of the marching dressed-up groups represented the French nation.

⁴⁵ BLACK 1999, pp. 72–73.

⁴⁶ SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, n.f., N. de Montargon to J.H. Flemming, Paris, 8 April 1720.

⁴⁷ SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, n.f., N. de Montargon to J.H. Flemming, Paris, 14 June 1720.

⁴⁸ SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2727/10, n.f., J.H. Flemming to N. de Montargon, 2 May 1720; SHStA 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 2726/7, f. 62–62v, Augustus II to Philippe d'Orléans, Dresden, 25 June 1722 (concept).

Such great regard was probably a result of the preferences of the monarch, who was consciously choosing some elements of Louis XIV's propaganda stylistics and wove them into his own strategy of image development.

Montargon was a courtier-mercenary type who was not uncommon in modern Europe. He decided to abandon France and offered his services to a court the ruler of which needed his knowledge and skills in trade and — to some extent — also in diplomacy. He associated his entire professional life with the Wettin monarch and it came to be dominated by constant travels between Paris and Dresden. Although he spent a quarter of a century in Augustus II's service, he did not attain a spectacular advancement in the royal court's hierarchy; despite his efforts, he most likely did not become a wealthy man either.

SOURCES, STUDIES, MONOGRAPHS AND OTHER MATERIALS USED IN THE TEXT

MANUSCRIPT SOURCES AND UNPUBLISHED WORKS

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A Chamberlain, a Diplomat and a Bankrupt. Nicolas de Montargon in the Service of Augustus II the Strong

The article examines elements of cultural transfer between France and Saxony during the reign of the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland Augustus the Strong. During his educational journey, the grand tour, across Europe in his youth, the future elector had an opportunity to get to know and admire the splendour of the Versailles court of Louis XIV. After becoming ruler on his own, he would choose those elements of French courtly culture which corresponded to his vision of rule and Saxon courtly culture. Augustus liked to order French works of art and brought to his court French artists, primarily musicians, singers and dancers. In order to achieve his goals, he used a network of contacts with professional commercial agents. In addition, it was possible to follow Parisian and Versailles trends also thanks to Frenchmen employed at the Dresden court. They included Nicolas de Montargon, who found a place at the Saxon court probably around 1705. He served first as *Kammerherr*, and then *Kammerjunker*. Operating on behalf of Augustus, he would initiate and supervise various purchases in Paris. His services were not limited to the elector — they also encompassed interested representatives of the Saxon elite. The Saxon elector also entrusted the courtier with minor diplomatic missions, primarily in France, where he knew the reality and the people quite well. During one of his missions (in 1720) he witnessed the collapse of John Law's bank, to which he had entrusted a considerable part of his money. Until his death in 1722 Montargon remained a courtier of Augustus II, with whom his entire professional career was associated, dominated as it was by constant travels between Paris and Dresden. Despite the fact that he remained a quarter of a century in Augustus' service, Montargon did not advance spectacularly in the court hierarchy, nor did he become — despite his efforts — a wealthy man.