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The Polish Royal Court in the Eyes of Foreigners Visiting the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Reign of Jan III Sobieski*

Keywords: monarchy, court, orderliness, custom, foreigners

Słowa kluczowe: monarchia, dwór, organizacja, zwyczaj, cudzoziemcy, przekazy

In the second half of the 17th century the Polish royal court was a place frequently visited by foreigners. Descriptions presenting this institution were penned by travellers and people who stayed in the Commonwealth for longer and often served at the Polish royal court. An examination of their legacy reveals, however, that relatively little can be learnt from them about the royal court and that their descriptions do not make up a homogenous, coherent picture, which could serve to introduce the royal circle both in terms of its formal composition, i.e. the officials who created it and their hierarchy, as well as specific people who belonged to the royal court, i.e. the names and surnames of those who stayed or served there. Information concerning these issues is fragmentary in the foreigners' sources.

People who left behind records with information about the royal court, the basis of this article, are as follows: Frenchmen, Gaspard de Tende, François-Paulin Dalercac and Philippe Dupont; an Irishman, Bernard O'Connor, and an Italian, Giovanni Battista Fagioli.

Gaspard de Tende arrived in Poland in the 1660s and became a treasurer of Louise Marie; thus his knowledge of the royal court must have been extensive. It was probably useful when the Frenchman once again travelled to Poland, this time alongside Toussaint de Forbin-Janson, Bishop of Marseilles, who came to the Commonwealth right before the election of Jan Sobieski. From that moment onwards de Tende remained in Poland until the end of Jan III's reign.¹

Philippe Dupont was a man who spent many years at the royal court of Jan III as a loyal servant to the royal couple. It was he who brought the happy news about

* This work was written as part of a research project no. 2018/29/B/HS3/00907 financed by the resources from Nacional Science Centre.

¹ TENDE 2014, p. 14.

the success at the battle of Vienna to Marie Casimire, but he served her also in a later period, when she became a widow.² After the queen consort's death, he stayed in France and wrote down the memoirs which presented the military achievements of Sobieski.³

François-Paulin Dalerac was a Frenchman and a "royal house valet"⁴ of Marie Casimire. He published his memoirs under his own surname, but also as chevalier de Beaujeu, and it was this latter account which is more important for the subject under discussion.⁵

Bernard O'Connor was a physician of an Irish background who spent a few years in the Commonwealth. He left Poland together with Theresa Kunegunda Sobieska almost at the very end of the reign of Jan III.⁶

Giovan Battista Fagioli arrived in Poland in 1690 as a secretary to the then nuncio, Andrea Santacroce, and he stayed here only for one year. Due to his office, he had a chance to accompany the nuncio during his visits to the royal court, but his records do not show that the matters of the royal court and of its organisation were particularly interesting for him.⁷

The records left behind by the travellers shows that the royal court did not trigger their particular interest, since the functioning of such institutions may have been known by the recipients of these accounts from their own countries. Similarities did not deserve any detailed presentation and differences were difficult to describe, which was clearly demonstrated by the attempts — undertaken in the 18th century by one of the French publishers — to compare the royal court ceremonial.⁸ The records of the foreigners also tried to emphasise those similarities. Bernard O'Connor claimed that the Polish royal court resembled the royal courts of other rulers by its magnificence and the number of its officials.⁹ The Polish royal court was similarly characterised by François-Paulin Dalerac: "Sa cour n'a rien que d'éclatant: une Maison composée des plus grands Seigneurs de Royaume, une Grande nombreuse, & un respect infini pour sa personne, du moins quant aux civilités & aux ceremonies: une autre difference non moins particuliere de la Republique Polonoise à celle de Venise [...]."¹⁰

² KOMASZYŃSKI 1984, p. 264

³ DUPONT 2011, p. 19.

⁴ TARGOSZ 1997, p. 33. It should be mentioned here that a priest who was hiding under the pseudonym "F.D.S.", most likely a Capuchin, François des Stigmates, left a description in which we can find a few interesting comments on the family of Jan III; nevertheless, the Frenchman did not refer to the form of the royal court in his account, F.D.S. 1997, p. 31–56.

⁵ BEAUJEU 1883, p. XIII.

⁶ O'CONNOR 2012, p. 352.

⁷ FAGIOLI 2017, p. 30.

⁸ SKRZYPIETZ 2018, pp. 166–179.

⁹ O'CONNOR 2012, p. 352. "I would now give a particular Account of the King's Court, were it not like to that of other Princes, as to Splendor and Number of Officers", CONNOR 1698b, p. 28.

¹⁰ BEAUJEU 1698, p. 37.

While describing the royal court, O'Connor named all the most important officials, even though he did not give a list of all the people who surrounded the ruler. However, he emphasised that they were not equivalent to the officials who were holding state functions:

besides the Great Crown-Officers, as the two Great and Little Marshals; as many Chancellors, and Vice-Chancellors; two Generals, and two Great and Little Treasurers: The King has his Lord-Chamberlain; his Court-Marshal, or Lord Steward; his Master of the Horse; his Secretaries of State; his Standard-Bearer; Chief Huntsman; his Gentlemen of the Body, answerable to our Lords of the Bed-Chamber; his Physicians, Chaplains, Pensioners, Cup-Bearers, Sewers, Carvers, Musicians, and Guards.¹¹

According to Dalerac, the king of Poland:

il a deux Maisons, l'une de ses Domestiques particulieres à ses gages, comme un Seigneur ordinaire, l'autre de ceux que la Republique luy entierent comme roy, pour faire l'honneur à la dignité plus qu'à la personne: ceux cy ne servent que dans les fonctions publiques & les Ceremonies generals; & le premier de tous est le grand Maréchal, les autres son les quatre Ministres [...].¹²

According to the French courtier of Marie Casimire, the most important official at the royal court was the chamberlain:

Il y en d'autres qui sont seulement Officiers de la Couronne pour la Maison du Prince, sans etres Senateurs, & de cette classe de Domestiques; le premier est le Grand Chambellan appellé icy Podkomorge, don't l'autorité est renfermée dans la Maison du Prince, & sa place derriere le Fauteuil du Roy, debout & découvert dans les Diètes, aux convocations, aux Conseils & autres Assemblées particulieres du Senat ou des Tribunaux que le Roy honore de sa presence.¹³

The chamberlain supervised the monarch's staff and guards, took care of all events at the royal court, introduced ambassadors to audiences, and had unlimited access to the ruler's chambers. Deputy master of the horse, the sword-bearer and the Crown's treasurer were other important officials at the royal court. Dalerac noticed that in comparison with the French royal court, there was no captain of the guard and almoner in Poland. Moreover, the Frenchman listed a deputy cupbearer, cupbearer, master cook and master of the royal hunt, who performed their duties only during court ceremonies, of which there were few in the first half of Jan III's reign since the royal court was away from Warsaw most of the time.¹⁴

¹¹ BEAUJEU 1698, p. 28.

¹² BEAUJEU 1698, p. 419.

¹³ BEAUJEU 1698, p. 420.

¹⁴ BEAUJEU 1883, pp. 214–216.

O'Connor also mentioned the horse courtiers:

The Gentlemen Pensioners always attend the King on Horseback; this Body of Gentry consists of the Noblest Youth of the Kingdom, whereof many have Court and State-Employments, and are all subject to the Jurisdiction of the Court-Marshal. There are some of these that attend his Majesty on Foot, but in long Journeys they are always carried in Waggons. A set number of these keep Guard Day and Night about the King. Whenever the King goes in Public, these last March every way about him with long Battle-Axes on their Shoulders, and Sabres by their Sides, but still admitting the Senators and Chief Courtiers to March next him; yet when the Queen goes with the King, the Senators and other Persons of Quality are to walk before.¹⁵

According to Urszula Augustyniak, “the ‘horse’ courtiers were the king’s honorary escort.”¹⁶

The Irishman also wrote about the guards surrounding the king:

The King’s Horse-Guards ought by the Constitutions to be either Poles, Lithuanians, or Natives of some of the Incorporated Provinces; but however this Law has been dispens’d with, for the late King admitted both Germans and Hungarians amongst them. Their Number by the Law is not to exceed 1200, and their Chief Commander is to be subject to all the Four Marshals. The King has the same Number of Court Officers in Lithuania as he has in Poland, the Lithuanians being as Ambitious to keep up the ancient Grandeur of their Great Duke, as the Poles are for that of their King. The King has likewise the Nomination of some Court-Officers in several Provinces, as in Prussia, Masovia, and Russia, which had formerly distinct Princes of their own, and were afterwards United to the Kingdom of Poland, so that the King has the Nomination of as many Court-Officers as any Prince in Europe, but most of them are rather Honorary than Beneficial; yet the Gentry always make great Interest to get into them; Precedence, of which they are Ambitious, being Regulated according to the Nature and Dignity of the Employment.¹⁷

François-Paulin Dalerac, too, pointed to the variety of guards who surrounded the king.¹⁸

The nuncio’s secretary wrote about the guards surrounding the king and presented the order of Jan III’s journeys.¹⁹ It is not known whether this description referred to the official travels of the monarch or also to his excursions to residences in the Warsaw region and Ruthenia. According to the Italian author, the king travelled in a six-horse carriage and the other two or three carts were full of noblemen.

¹⁵ BEAUJEU 1883, p. 29.

¹⁶ AUGUSTYNIAK 1999, p. 183.

¹⁷ CONNOR 1698b, pp. 29–30.

¹⁸ BEAUJEU 1883, pp. 203, 216–217.

¹⁹ FAGIUOLI 2017, p. 91.

The entire retinue was surrounded on all sides by the royal guards and this arrangement was similar to what could be seen in Italy as well.²⁰

Philippe Dupont, who spent many years in the service of King Jan III, gave very little attention to the royal court. He only made a note that the monarch — due to his military activities — spent a lot of time in Ruthenia and in his estates which were situated closer to the Turkish front. However, this did not influence the size of the royal court; according to the Frenchman, it was very numerous, even though the monarch was away from the capital.²¹

Dupont devoted only one paragraph to Sobieski's entourage, writing that — “marshal of the court” — was a member of the Senate and he was “the only judge at the royal court.”²² The Frenchman completely omitted the grand marshal whose authority at the royal court was also greater while he was there.²³ This was noted by another foreigner, Dalerac, who emphasised that the powers of the grand marshal and the marshal of the court were not identical.²⁴ According to Dupont, the grand master of the horse was similar to an official who was present at the European royal courts, although the position of the master of the horse in the Commonwealth was not as high as at the French court.²⁵ Trying to make his words understandable to French readers, the author stated that the master of ceremony at the royal court in Poland was the grand chamberlain; he was responsible, amongst other things, for introducing the foreigners to the monarch during official audiences.²⁶ Meanwhile, there was no such office in the Commonwealth and such authority rested with the *podkomorzy*. Nevertheless, Dupont used this term in order to make his description clear to French readers.²⁷ On the other hand the *podkomorzy* who was taking care of the ceremonial at the Polish royal court during diplomats' visits was described by Giovan Battista Fagioli. It was *podkomorzy* who introduced the nuncio, Andrea Santacroce, during the audience with Marie Casimire and Prince James.²⁸

In his description Dupont lists also a standard bearer and a guard as the royal court officials. He noted though that each province — or voivodship — had offices resembling the central and court ones, and those local officials were supposed to exercise their functions for the monarch at a time when the royal court travelled through

²⁰ FAGIUOLI 2017, p. 92.

²¹ DUPONT 2011, p. 264.

²² DUPONT 2011, p. 270.

²³ WIŚNIEWSKI 2015, p. 35ff.

²⁴ BEAUJEU 1883, pp. 203, 210.

²⁵ MAGDZIARZ 2013, pp. 92–93.

²⁶ DUPONT 2011, p. 270.

²⁷ 18th-century French publications referred to *podkomorzy* (chamberlain) as Lord Chamberlain, perhaps using Dupont's work, *Le Cérémonial* 1739, p. 419.

²⁸ FAGIUOLI 2017, p. 89.

the Commonwealth; however, according to the Frenchman, the kings released those officials from such duties.²⁹ The same issue was addressed by Bernard O'Connor.³⁰

The foreign authors gave much more attention to a description of the queen's court. Gaspard de Tende, who appears in the publication as sieur de Hauteville,³¹ noticed that:

Les reines de Pologne n'ont d'officiers qu'un Marechal & un Chancelier. Ces deux Officers ne sont point Senateurs. Ils jugent seulement les affaires qui arrivent parmi les domestiques. Ils répondent aux harangues que l'on fait à la Reine; lorsqu'un Ambassadeur luy fait quelque compliment de la part de son Maitre; ou lorsque dans les mariages des filles d'honneur no luy offre les presens.³²

François-Paulin Dalerac also devoted a few words to the queen's court:

La Maison de la Reine a quelques Officiers considerable, Palatins ou Castelans, du nombre desquels est un Maréchal qui porte le baton haut, mesme en presence de ceux du Roy aux ceremonies publiques, & marche immdiatement devant la personne de la Reine: ila a une autorité sur ses domestiques, comme le petit Maréchal de la Cour sur ceux du Roy;& quand la Reine tient le Cercle, il impose silence dans la chambre où il commande en maistre: le Chevalier d'honneur est un Palatin ou Castelan de mesme que le Marechal; & le Chancelier ordinairement un Evesque: la Dame d'honneur, la Dame d'Atours, la Gouvernante de ses Enfans, celle des filles d'honneur, sons des Senatrices du plus haute estage [...] la reste de sa Maison est a son choix, & et est compose de domestiques à ses gages [...].³³

What results from this description is that the ladies-in-waiting and higher officials of Marie Casimire's court were representatives of senatorial families. Only the lower offices and posts in the royal consort's entourage were occupied by people who were personally selected by her and who were of a lower social rank.

Bernard O'Connor presented the royal consort's circle as follows:

As for the Queen's Court, it consists of about Thirty Officers, the Chief whereof are her Marshal and Chancellor. Their Business is to Preside over Domestic Affairs in the Queen's Court. Her Marshal or Steward, is to carry the Staff before her; and her Chancellor or Secretary, to Write, Sign, Receive, and Answer all her Letters. There is her Treasurer, who Manages her Revenue; her Master of the Horse, Cup-Bearers, Carvers, Sewers, Clerk of the Kitchen, &c. For Women Servants, she has her Ladies, Maids of Honour, Dressers, &c. When she goes in Public, she is always attended by a great number of her own Sex.³⁴

²⁹ DUPONT 2011, p. 270.

³⁰ O'CONNOR 2012, p. 353.

³¹ TENDE 2014, p. 17.

³² HAUTEVILLE 1686, pp. 254–255.

³³ BEAUJEU 1698, pp. 434–435.

³⁴ CONNOR 1698b, p. 30.

It should be assumed that these thirty people are only the most important individuals in the queen's circle since both royal courts — of the king and his wife — are estimated at a few hundred people by Urszula Augustyniak.³⁵ As regards the previous period, Bożenia Fabiani has counted around a hundred people at the court of Louise Marie, thus it cannot be assumed that the court of Marie Casimire shrank to thirty people only.³⁶

The foreigners who visited the Commonwealth and the royal court were mostly interested in the ceremonial which was applied at the court. A lot of attention was given in the analysed narratives to the coronations of the kings and their consorts.³⁷ O'Connor was also interested in the monarch's incomes:

When he is Crown'd the Diet allows him a Pension of about 140 000 l. per Annum; which together with his Patrimonial Estate, maintains him a very splendid Court. He has his Polish, German, and Hungarian Guards, and has the same Officers of his Houshold as other Kings have. While the Queen-Dowager lives, the Queen-Consort maintains her Court at the King's Charge, but after either the Queen-Dowagers Death or Marriage, or the King's Death, she has a Revenue Assign'd for that purpose, as will appear hereafter. Over and above the Pension which the Diet settles upon the King and Queen, which in that cheap Country serves to maintain them as high as our Kings live here; The King of Poland has great Incomes of his own, for the Poles never care to Elect a Poor Prince, for fear his Children may come to be a Charge to them after his Death. He gets besides vast Sums of Money for Nominations Employments, of which the late King did not scruple to sell, though 'twas directly contrary to the Constitutions of the Kingdom. [...] It has been Calculated, that the late King, what by his Own Incomes, Pensions allow'd him from the Crown, and other Casualties, was worth about Three hundred thousand Pounds Sterling a Year, of which he did not spend much above one Hundred thousand, having had no Soldiers nor Army to Pay, or Maintain, but only his Guards and his Court. He hoarded up the greatest part of the Money in the Kingdom, and was reputed to have had as much ready Cash by him, as any Prince in Europe; all which nevertheless the Poles Vow'd they would have back again, when his Sons bought their Votes to be King. The Kings Crown-Revenues are Imposts upon Merchandizes, and upon the Jews, part of the Customs of Dantzick, and the Revenues of the Salt Mines of Cracow and other Places.³⁸

Writing about Jan Sobieski, O'Connor pointed out the revenues received due to the selling of offices.³⁹ The Irish author, who visited the Polish royal court, also wrote about the queen's income:

³⁵ AUGUSTYNIAK 1999, pp. 174–175.

³⁶ FABIANI 1976, p. 37.

³⁷ O'CONNOR 2012, pp. 444–452; TENDE 2014, pp. 204–207.

³⁸ CONNOR 1698b, pp. 17–18.

³⁹ "He gets besides vast Sums of Money for Nominations Employments, of which the late King did not scruple to sell, though 'twas directly contrary to the Constitutions of the Kingdom. Nay, the Eccle-

The Queen's Revenue consists either in a Gift from the King her Husband, out of the Royal Revenues, with Consent of the States; or in an Annual Pension allow'd her by the Republick. The Gift from her Husband serves also for her Dower, and is called by the Poles what amounts to the Sense of the word Reformation, being the Reversion only of a certain number of Starostships after the Death of those that Enjoy them. If the King chance to die before the Queen has this Reformation assign'd her, then the Republic gives her a Yearly Pension out of the Crown-Revenues, but this no longer than she continues unmarried, or stays in the Realm, for otherwise in both those Cases the Queen Regent gets it, or else it reverts to the State. It may be observ'd, that the Queen Regent never comes by it without the Consent of the Diet, and that is no ordinary Expence to her to procure, by Purchasing almost all the Votes of that Mercenary Assembly. This may be seen in the Case of the present Queen-Dowager; for when the Queen her Predecessor Marry'd the Duke of Lorrain, she, observing that the Settlement of her Pension was like to be put off to the succeeding Diet, which is conven'd only once in three Years, thought it better to be at the Charge of gaining their Votes at that Session, than to lose three Years Income. This Revenue is generally computed at half a Million Polish, which amounts to about Thirty Thousand English Pounds. As long as the Queen-Dowager enjoys this Pension, the Queen-Regent can have none; for the Poles say, that it would be too much to Pension two Queens at once.⁴⁰

The foreigners extensively discussed the issue of the royal marriage and ceremonies associated with the coronation, and then the livelihood of the royal consort. In their opinion, the king did not have to press for the coronation of his wife but he sought consent for marrying, if he was not married. Gaspard de Tende stated that:

Pour couronner donc une Reine, il faut que le Roy le veuille, qu'il le demande à la republique' qu'il soit present à cette ceremonie; qu'il la conduise luy-mesme à l'Église; & qu'il la presente à l'Archevesque de Gnesne, ou à l'Eveqsque la doit couronner. L'Archevesque l'oingt d'huile sacrée. Il luy met la couronne du royaume sur la teste, le Sceptre à la main droite, & le Globe d'or à la gauche.⁴¹

siastical Benefices which are so very considerable, have been put under Contribution by some cunning Artifice or other, as happen'd some Years since about the Naming of a Bishop of Cracow, whose Bishoprick is worth Eight Thousand Pounds Sterling per Annum, which will go further than Twenty Thousand Pounds in England. There were several that Aspir'd a long while to this Vacant Dignity, and every one solicited what Friends he had at Court for the obtaining of it, but most applied themselves to the Queen, and begg'd of her (though she has no Authority of her own) to Intercede to the King in their Behalf. After a long Debate the Queen call'd the Abbot Malakowski aside (who was one of the Competitors, and a rich Man) and told him, That tho' there were several that aimed at that Bishoprick, yet she would Wager Fifty Thousand Crowns that he was prefer'd to them all. Whereupon the good Abbot thinking to venture nothing, being sure that either he should be Bishop, or should gain a considerable Sum, readily lays down the Money, and by way of an accidental Bargain, bought very dear his Bishoprick", CONNOR 1698b, pp. 17–18.

⁴⁰ CONNOR 1698b, p. 18.

⁴¹ HAUTEVILLE 1686, p. 326.

O'Connor presented it in a slightly different light:

As for the Manner of a Queen's Coronation alone, it must be with the King's Consent; he must request it of the Republick; he must be present at the Ceremony; he must lead his Queen into the Church, and he must present her to the Archbishop or other Bishop, who is to Crown her, Anoint her with consecrated Oyl, and to put a Scepter into her Right Hand, and Globe into her Left. The King likewise is to carry his Queen to the Townhouse, but she is to receive no Homage there.⁴²

Gaspard de Tende wrote a few words about the problem of the queen's livelihood and her circle, both during her husband's lifetime as well as in the period of her widowhood:

Le roi fournir à la Reine dequoy faire la dépense de sa maison. Mais après la mort du Roy, la Reine doit entretenir, elle & tout son train, du revenue que le Roy luy aura donné sur les biens royaux du consentement de la republicque; tant pour son Douarie que pour les present de ses Nopces. C'est ce qu'on appelle reformation, qui est un certain nombre de Starosties que l'on donne à une Reine de Pologne n'est riche que sur la fin de sa vie, & lorsqu'elle n'a Presque besoin de bien. Car ceux qui possèdent les Starosties qui sont dans la reformation, vivent quelque fois aussi long-temps qu'elle. Qui s'il arrive que le Roy meure avant que la Reine ait une reformation, alors la republicque luy assigne une pension annuelle sur les biens royaux [...].⁴³

The foreigners were also interested in the king's daily life:

It's customary all over the Kingdom, not only among the Gentry, but also amongst the Vulgar, to carry Pole-Axes in their Hands, or on their Arms; they take care that this Pole-Ax be kept bright and shining, with Plates of Silver round the handle, and sometimes set with Jewels. I have seen the Palatins and other Senators come with those Pole-Axes into the King's Presence, which seem'd when I came first to Court a frightful Sight, tho reckon'd an Ornament; but I was inform'd that at first it was for Defence, the Nation being tumultuous and quarrelsome, that they might make use of these Pole-Axes in a Throng where their Scimiters could be of no use. This Dress looks extreme manly, particularly on Horseback, and is the most expensive of any that I have seen in Europe.⁴⁴

This interest in the monarch's daily life referred even to the habits which accompanied the ruler's meals. In the opinion of Gaspard de Tende:

Le Roy de Pologne pour l'ordinaire mange qu'avec la Reine, ou avec quelque grande Seigneur. Mais quand il est à la casse, ou en voyage, il fait mettre à table avec luy tous les Gentilshommes, mesme ceux qui le servent dans la chamber. Car il seroit tellemnet dangereux qu'il en usât autrement, & temoignât avoir du mépris pour eut,

⁴² CONNOR 1698b, p. 164.

⁴³ HAUTEVILLE 1686, p. 326.

⁴⁴ CONNOR 1698a, pp. 178–179.

qu'il se seroit haïr de tout la Noblesse. Sigismonde de Luxembourg, que Louis Roy de Pologne & de Hongrie son beau-pere, avoit choisi son successeur, fut exclus de la Couronne par la raison qu'il avoit méprise les Gentilshommes Polonois, & n'avoit pas voulu les faire manger avec luy.⁴⁵

The Irish physician, who was a guest at the royal court of Jan III Sobieski, claimed that the king:

He kept his Subjects in great Awe, and the greatest Noblemen paid him all the Respect imaginable; they never us'd at Court to eat with him at his Table. He din'd always in Publick, and the Great Men waited upon him, serv'd him with drink, and none of his Subjects ever cover'd themselves in his Presence. And I admir'd to see the Persons that abus'd him in the Parliament-house, and spoke to him with all freedom when he sat on the Throne, pay him so great a Submission and Respect every-where else. But the Liberty of a Member of that Parliament is such, that he can speak what he thinks, and think what he pleases, without any Fear of the King.⁴⁶

O'Connor also described the issue of sitting at the table and headdresses:

The Poles attend his Person Uncover'd: The Chief Senators generally Serve him at Table, first tasting of the Cup before they present him with it. His Subjects never sit before him, nor cover their Heads any where but in the Diet, and there too the Senators are only allow'd that Liberty, for the Deputies stand behind with their Furr'd Caps in their Hands. The late King John Sobieski din'd always in Public, and I never saw any sit down with him at Table when he eat at Court, except the Queen, his Children and foreign Ministers: Yet when he either Hunted or Travell'd, I have known some private Gentlemen to have had that Honour: Nay even his own Servants that waited on him were then admitted to eat with him. This his Majesty knew was absolutely necessary for him to allow of, since by refusing any this Favour, he might incur the Displeasure and Hatred of the whole Noblesse. This was verified in the Case of Sigismund of Luxembourg, who for having refused the Polish Gentry to eat with him, was utterly excluded from the Crown that had been design'd him by Lewis King of Hungary and Poland, his Father in Law.⁴⁷

The nuncio's secretary saw the king's meal as follows:

On his table were served 33 larger dishes, 12 or 13 smaller, and 15 cold dishes each morning, in the evening he rarely eats supper. He is usually served by 12 pageboys who come from the nobility; they also serve other princes and even though they are noblemen who take the posts of a master of the pantry, cup-bearer, and other [positions] required for serving the King [...].⁴⁸

⁴⁵ HAUTEVILLE 1686, p. 326.

⁴⁶ CONNOR 1698a, p. 205.

⁴⁷ CONNOR 1698b, pp. 14–15.

⁴⁸ FAGIUOLI 2017, p. 92.

In this way the Italian author referred to the means of “recruiting” of the royal officials.⁴⁹

Bernard O’Connor emphasised the honour and authority the monarch enjoyed in the Commonwealth:

The Custom and Inclination of the Poles runs so strong towards Honouring their Prince, that all they have, or are able to do, even to the Destruction of their Lives and Fortunes, they are willing to lavish in his Service, without expecting any greater Recompence than the Glory of Waiting on His Majesty’s Person. Insomuch, that a King of Poland who is Couragious and Prudent, Just and Sober, Liberal and Religious; one that observes the Laws and Constitutions of his Kingdom, and in a word, who has no other Interest but the Common Good and Safety of his Subjects, is as much Respected and Honour’d, and as faithfully Obey’d both in time of Peace and War; nay, as formidable to all his Enemies as most Princes in Europe.⁵⁰

The foreigners who visited Poland did not pay a lot of attention to describing the Polish royal court. Having assumed that it was not significantly different from the royal courts of other European states, they accepted that the topic was not interesting to their readers. At the same time, they deprived their descendants of an insight into organisational and personal details of the Polish monarch’s circle. Since very little sources on the royal court of Jan III have survived, the silence of the foreigners deepens the frustration of researchers working on the subject. This is all the more evident as the descriptions of the Commonwealth which were written during Sobieski’s reign are relatively numerous and seem to be exhaustive regardless of the shortcomings of these records — they tend to be inadequate in comparison to the reality, which can be seen particularly in relation to the dualism of the Crown and Lithuania that is difficult to understand; sometimes they also deform their past. While examining these descriptions, a particular caution should be showed, since ambiguities and inaccuracies are discernible in those elements of the narrative that can be compared to the local sources. On the other hand their silence on the organisation and composition of the royal court during the reign of Jan III only widens the gap which the scholars working on this topic have to face. It is clear from the surviving sources that instead of the formal — or even more so, the personal — composition of the Polish royal court, the foreigners were interested in the matters of the ceremonial associated with both the coronation and the monarch’s daily life, i.e. rather surprising directness at the royal table during the journeys.

⁴⁹ SOBIESKI 1970, p. 485ff. On the topic of public and private meals of Jan III, see SARNECKI 1958, *passim*. Food from the royal table was tried by dipping bread into a meal and placing it on the tongue: LILEYKO 1984, p. 277; OCHMANN-STANISZEWSKA 2006, p. 265.

⁵⁰ CONNOR 1698b, p. 13.

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

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The Polish Royal Court in the Eyes of Foreigners Visiting the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Reign of Jan III Sobieski

In the second half of the seventeenth century the Polish court was often visited by foreigners. Accounts left by these travellers did not refer to the organisation of the royal court, which suggests that its composition and organisation were similar to those of royal courts in Western Europe. Thus little attention was paid to the composition of the Polish court and to the officials who made up the monarch's entourage. What was unique in the eyes of visitors coming to Poland was the dualism of offices in the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as well as the fact that the same offices functioning at the court could also be found in the country's various lands. The foreigners were struck and interested by the local ceremonial, which made the Polish court different from other courts. Of interest was, for instance, the royal coronation in Poland. Matters mentioned by the foreigners also include the court's travels — it has to be said that Jan III Sobieski and his family travelled between Warsaw and Ruthenia very often, while in Western Europe monarchs had long abandoned the old custom of regularly visiting various parts of their realms. The article is based on the accounts of several travellers whose notes are the most detailed and provide the most complete description of the reality of the Polish court, and whose stay in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was long enough for them to make insightful observations and probably also to establish contacts with Poles capable of providing them with interesting details. What is also significant is the fact that they were not diplomats, whose views on certain matters may have been linked to specific missions and tasks, and as such distorted by the objectives and interests they served. It is worth adding that accounts by many of the travellers mentioned in the article have been used in a French publication devoted to the ceremonials of various European courts in the first half of the eighteenth century.