

**Network of Interests and Center of Monarchical Reign: The Polish Court and Foreign Relations under the Vasa Dynasty**

**Veranstalter:** Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen; Polnische Akademie der Wissenschaften

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The conference, resulting from a cooperation between the University of Giessen (KOLJA LICHY, OLIVER HEGEDÜES) and the Polish Academy of Sciences (BOGUSŁAW DYBAŚ), was held between March 8th and 9th at the Viennese branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It was convened with the aim to help put the letters of Vasa court Lady Ursula Meyer, currently in the process of being edited by Kolja Lichy and Oliver Hegedües in a Giessen-based project, into a wider historical context. Bringing together experts who each approach the Vasa court from a different angle, the conference aimed at reassessing the role of the court and individual courtiers as diplomatic actors in contrast to an old historiographic tradition that has tended to refer all diplomatic agency to the state, that it traditionally equated with the Sejm in the Polish-Lithuanian case.

KATRIN KELLER (Vienna) opened the conference with her keynote lecture on Archduchess Maria Anna of Inner Austria, mother of both spouses of Polish king Sigismund III Vasa – Anna and Constance. Keller focused on the archduchess' role in the relations between the court of her son-in-law and the Habsburg- and Wittelsbach-court respectively, tracing how she attained political involvement due to her dynastic position as mother, sister, and sister-in-law. She tackled lingering 19th century patterns of describing women in historiography, in particular those in the recent works of Walter Leitsch, who decried female agency as „compulsive checking“ and as substitute motherhood. According to Keller, Maria Anna's agency should be seen on equal footing to those of male examples, notwithstanding her using idiosyncratic channels like staffing the queen's household

and corresponding with its members. Archduchess Maria Anna visited Sigismund III's court in person, gathered strategic information – e. g. on the Ottoman empire – through her correspondents, tried to mediate in Polish domestic affairs – e. g. in the case of Jan Zamoyski – and successively protected the interests of her daughters and her Vasa husband, even against male lines of the Habsburg dynasty – e. g. in the Archduke Ernst affair.

In his contribution, CHRISTOPH AUGUSTYNOWICZ (Vienna) focused on the ambassadorial bills within the Reichsaktensammlung of the Hofkammerarchiv in Vienna. Among other things, this collection contains documents of the 1592 mission of Hieronim Rozdrażewski and Albrecht Radziwiłł to Prague, who were dispatched in order to negotiate the marriage contract between Sigismund III Vasa and Anna of Austria. The bills give insight into the importance of objects, foodstuffs (gifts, wine) and the agency of lesser court agents like artisans, purveyors and cooks, which in Augustynowicz's view deserve further attention with regards to both inter-court relations in general and the Vasa-Habsburg-connection in particular.

ALEKSANDRA BARWICKA-MAKULA (Katowice) dedicated her paper to the question of identifying the pro-Habsburg faction within the Polish court, mentioning the names of Albrecht Radziwiłł and his wife Anna Kettler, lady-in-waiting to Queen Anna, Andrzej Opaliński, Gustav Brahe and others. She argued that this faction served as a base material for Sigismund III's own political camp and helped him emancipating from Chancellor Jan Zamoyski. According to Barwicka-Makula, a model supporter of the king had had contacts with the Habsburgs earlier in his career and shared a familiar relationship with the royal couple through personal service.

The next paper, authored by RYSZARD SKOWRON and TOMASZ POZNAŃSKI (both from Katowice) and presented by the latter, gave insight into the ongoing project of editing the correspondence between the Habsburg and Vasa dynasties based at the University of Silesia in Katowice. Focusing on a fragment of this material, Poznański presented the preliminary results

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of a quantitative analysis of Sigismund III's correspondence with different members of the Habsburg dynasty, showing general peaks in 1598–1600, 1612 and 1665.

In his presentation, OLIVER HEGEDÜES (Giessen) tried to debunk persistent historiographical stereotypes about the Bavarian-born Vasa-court lady Ursula Meyer, who owed her position to the contemporary Habsburg-Wittelsbach connection impersonated by the queens' mother Maria Anna. By taking advantages of otherwise missing information channels and due to her special position of trust within the royal family, Hegedües argued, Meyer became the sole node of exchange between the Vasas and Wittelsbachs. She was actively involved in supplying the Polish court with Bavarian servants, informed Maximilian I about political developments in Eastern Europe and even had her share in introducing the veneration of St. Benno, patron saint of the Wittelsbach, to Warsaw.

MICHAŁ SALOMONIK (Stockholm) presented first thoughts on a planned research project aiming at comparing the tomb and funeral of Catherine Jagiellon, the Catholic mother of Sigismund III, in Uppsala, to the tomb and funeral of his Protestant sister Anna Vasa in Toruń. Analyzing these events and their representations within their respective cross-confessional environments in predominantly Catholic Poland and in predominantly Protestant Sweden respectively, Salomonik planned to focus on questions of gender – such as that of female personal piety and that of male public devotion – and of religious toleration in both countries.

DOROTA GREGOROWICZ (Katowice) devoted her paper to the task of classifying and characterizing the audiences Sigismund III gave to papal diplomats. She stressed that the permanent character of the nuncios' embassies, as well as its religious dimensions, granted them a special position in comparison with other foreign representatives in Poland-Lithuania. Distinguishing between „private“, „public“, „secret“, „initial“, „subsequent“ and „concluding“, Gregorowicz presented a typology of audiences. Furthermore, she differed the matters usually discussed into „ecclesiastic“, „interstate“ and „matrimonial“. She concluded that in their diplomatic

writings the nuncios, like other diplomats, differed in what they considered important during the audiences. Some wrote more on the course of the audiences themselves, others focused only on the information they could obtain. Finally, Gregorowicz pointed out the generally warm reception of the nuncios as a barometer of Sigismund's own religiosity and of his loyalty to the Holy See.

PATRICK SCHUMANN (Potsdam) analyzed the audiences given to English ambassador Thomas Roe as reflected in the reports of his 1629 embassy to Poland. Following the negotiations of Altmark, Roe perceived his reception to be extraordinarily honorary – an impression which, Schumann remarked, has to be put into perspective. As he underlined, thousands of soldiers welcoming Roe with military honors at the border and the immediate audience with Chancellor Zadzik were a mere result of the fact that both were already there due to the ongoing peace negotiations. In comparison to the audience with the king and officials, so Schumann noted, the private audience with the queen seemed to be of a stricter and more symbolic character: Accompanied by the prince, she sat in silence as the chancellor was talking on her behalf. Roe was more like a spectator, as he had not brought any letter nor instructions from the English queen regarding the conduct with Queen Constance.

In her contribution, MAGDALENA JAKUBOWSKA (Warsaw) dealt with 10 cases of smaller diplomatic officials during the reign of Sigismund III. She identified two subgroups: low-ranking courtiers, like guards and coachmen, and the other secretaries and chamberlains (*komornicy*) – the latter differing from the secretaries by generally not being employed on the road. Some of these officials were dispatched to secret missions by the king, unauthorized by the Sejm, like e. g. the chamberlains Adam Krzyniecki and Andrzej Taranowski to Michael the Brave. Jakubowska concluded that, in general, the secretaries were the better-informed group, often having a state or regional specialization, while the courtiers were rather employed on unofficial, ad hoc missions.

MICHAŁ WASIUCIONEK (Bucharest) advocated widening the focus to cross-border

factions that emerged as an alternative to the court as centre of power. He discerned such a cross-border faction in the Movila dynasty of Moldavia and their Polish and Ruthenian magnate and in-law-allies. Wasiucionek considered this mutual cross-border lookout for political and economic resources a reaction to the ongoing conflict between Sigismund III and Jan Zamoyski. He traced how that faction broke apart in two camps and how the rupture lines were carried into the next generation of Polish-Moldavian trans-border elites. Furthermore, he put into question the extent of the political agency exerted by the state and argued that the so-called Polish-Lithuanian policy in Moldavia was rather defined by faction interest to which the king's reactive role merely provided legitimacy.

The 2nd-day's proceedings started with HEIKO DROSTE (Stockholm) tackling the question of how the Swedes built and organized their system of intelligence on Poland-Lithuania in the first half of the 17th century. The examples he presented showed that correspondents were recruited from Brandenburg and Silesia, from amongst merchants and religious minorities, like the Socinians. Without obtaining payments, they could hope for Swedish protection or benefit from trade privileges respectively. In general, Droste concluded, merchant cities served much better as a market for news than expensive resident cities, due to their connection to the emerging postal networks and credit markets.

HANS-JÜRGEN BÖMELBURG (Giessen) traced the connection between the Vasa dynasty and the Brandenburg court against a rather emotionally charged Polish historiographic tradition. He outlined various channels of contact: Dynastic blood-relationships via the Jagiellons; well-connected and often polonophone noble ambassadors like the Dohnas; secretaries wooed away from Warsaw to Brandenburg; Prussian agents pursuing Polish models of governance; Sigismund's Warmian-bishop confessors on the Brandenburg payroll; and individuals like double agent and self-acclaimed favorite, court factor Andreas Köhne-Jaski, who supplied female representatives of the Vasa dynasty with amber jewelry. However, even such connections did not guarantee success in diplomatic

conduct and could be outweighed by lack of money or fear of a Protestant cognate Vasaline, as in the cases of failed nuptial contracts.

ANNA KALINOWSKA (Warsaw) analyzed English embassies to the Polish Vasa court and focused their successes, failures and different assessments of the Polish-Lithuanian political system – particularly the role of the Sejm in decision-making processes. Francis Gordon, who, despite his many years in Poland-Lithuania, didn't understand how the political system precisely worked, is one case in point. Kalinowska assumed that he was blind to the bigger political picture exactly because of his closeness to the king's circle, failing to look for alternatives unlike Thomas Roe, who was less well-connected, yet more successful. Kalinowska underlined that English diplomats sent to the Vasa court were paid by the Crown and were of noble social standing, unlike merchant-diplomats who were typically sent to the Ottoman Empire and Muscovy. This indicates some understanding and sensitivity to local environment. All English diplomats, even the Catholics commented on the strong Catholic, the papal character of the Vasa court.

Focusing on French diplomacy, KOLJA LICHY (Giessen) pointed out how both countries, France and Poland-Lithuania, mutually considered each other as peripheries – with Poland and Sweden even being conflated from a French perspective. As an outpost, he showed, Warsaw and Gdańsk were seen from Paris as an information hub, which was reflected in instructions to gather information on the Ottomans in both places. French diplomats perceived the Polish-Lithuanian monarch and the court as a central point of reference and generally had little understanding for the role of the Sejm. Referring to the examples of Jean de la Blanque, a French resident in Gdańsk, and Philippe de la Canaye de Fresnes, an ambassador in Venice who corresponded with Blanque via Jesuit channels, Lichy probed into a French diplomatic network in Sweden and Poland-Lithuania. As he illustrated, this network emerged from an originally Protestant network surrounding the „arbiter of Christianity“ Henri IV by way of Languedoc kinship connections to Ponce de la Gardie, who was married to Sigismund

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III's illegitimate sister. He pointed out that de la Blaque's initial role and outreach were significantly greater as resident and newsagent in comparison with his later position as consul.

The discussions prompted by these papers touched many questions. Several revolved around terminological problems like the difficulty of categorizing inter-court correspondence or the universal applicability of the terms „diplomat“ and „faction“. The significance of court diplomacy vis-à-vis Sejm diplomacy, secret diplomacy vis-à-vis public diplomacy, generally neglected in the historiography on Polish diplomacy, was crucially underlined. Also, the issue of language competence among courtiers and dynasty members was debated as an important factor in correctly assessing certain practices observed in the sources. Another aspect discussed concerned the question of whether one can speak of Catholic zealotry at the Vasa court or not. In addition, addressing materiality, as expressed in gifts, allowances and fiscal documents, was perceived as an important corrective to narrative reports. Another verdict pertained to the slow pace of diplomatic penetration in the 17th century in accordance with the slow growth of the postal system. The importance of (trans-)regional micro-arenas of diplomacy was also emphasized.

To summarize, the Vasa court, although located in an elective *monarchia mixta*, was perceived to be not drastically different on the European court landscape. Paying more attention to the court as a social sphere and spatial reality, and its position within the political system of Poland-Lithuania might contribute to a better understanding of diplomatic practices in both domestic and inter-state dimensions.

### Conference overview

#### *Introductory remarks*

Oliver Hegedüs / Kolja Lichy (Gießen)

#### *Keynote*

Katrin Keller (Vienna): Manische Neugier? Erzherzogin Maria (1551-1608) in der Kommunikation zwischen Graz und Krakau

*Panel I: Dynastic Entanglements I: Between Royal Court and Imperial Court*

Christoph Augustynowicz (Vienna): Die Beziehungen zwischen Polen-Litauen und dem Kaiserhof um 1600 im Spiegel der Hofkammer

Aleksandra Barwicka-Makula (Katowice): Die Habsburgische Fraktion am Hof König Sigismunds III. von Polen. Leute und Interessen

Tomasz Poznański / Ryszard Skowron (Katowice): Dynastische epistolare Interaktion. Der Briefwechsel von Sigismund III. Wasa und seiner Familie mit dem Haus Österreich

*Panel II: Dynastic Entanglements II: The Female Court as Centre of Interactions*

Oliver Hegedüs (Gießen): „Wollen auch eine guette Corespondenz mit Eurer curfirstlichen durchlaucht halten“. Die Kontakte zwischen den Höfen in München und Warschau im ersten Drittel des 17. Jahrhunderts

Michał Salamonik (Stockholm): Swimming Against the Current: Catherine Jagiellon and Anna Vasa of Sweden and Their World of Religious Toleration

*Panel III: The Court and Its Diplomatic Ceremonial*

Dorota Gregorowicz (Katowice): Audiences of Papal Diplomats at the Court of Sigismund III Vasa

Patrick Schumann (Potsdam): Ein Gesandter bei Hofe. Das diplomatische Zeremoniell am polnischen Königshof am Beispiel des Empfanges von Sir Thomas Roe (1629)

*Panel IV: The Court and the Monarch as Diplomatic Players: The Ottoman Empire*

Magdalena Jakubowska (Warsaw): The Role of the Links between the Diplomats and the Court on the Example of the Polish-Lithuanian Diplomatic Mission at the End of the 16th Century

Michał Wasiucioneck (Bucharest): Who Runs the Show? Royal Authority and Factional Agency in Polish-Moldavian Relations under the Vasa Dynasty

*Panel V: European Perceptions of the Vasa Court*

Heiko Droste (Stockholm): Swedish intelli-

gence on Poland in the First Half of the 17th Century

Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg (Gießen): Der brandenburgische Hof und die Wasa-Dynastie

Anna Kalinowska (Warsaw): From Warsaw with Love? Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart Diplomats' Experiences and Perception of the Vasa Court and Its Foreign Policy, 1587-1648

Kolja Lichy (Gießen): A Kingdom Far, Far Away? The French Diplomacy and the Polish Court at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century

*Concluding Commentary*  
Kolja Lichy (Giessen)

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