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**THE FRENCH ASPECTS IN THE EDUCATION PATTERN
OF THE POLISH NOBILITY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

Abstract

The pattern of education of the Polish noble youth in the seventeenth century changed in comparison with the preceding century. In the latter, the multinational, multicultural and multid denominational nature of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth nurtured attitudes of widely understood tolerance both in terms of ideology and in practice. Poland was receptive to strong Renaissance influence, while numerous sons of the Polish nobles studied abroad, mainly in Italy but also in Germany and France. The education system in the Jagiellonian monarchy reflected the trends and the ideals of contemporary European education. The seventeenth century saw increased influence of the Counter-Reformation in the Nobles' Commonwealth. The ideas of Sarmatism, embracing xenophobia, religiosity and self-glorification of the existing, petrified political system, became more pronounced. These tendencies were broadly present in the pattern of the education of nobility, a pattern that was prone to strong Jesuit influence in the spirit of the doctrine laid down by the Council of Trent.

Key words

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th century, education of noble youth; reception of French cultural patterns, Sarmatism in education

The pattern of education of the Polish noble youth changed in the seventeenth century as compared to the previous century. At an earlier time, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a multinational, multicultural and multi-denominational state, shaped attitudes of widely understood tolerance both in ideological terms and in practice. Poland accepted strong Renaissance influence, and numerous sons of the Polish nobles studied abroad, mainly in Italy but also in Germany and France. The education system in the monarchy of the Jagiellonians came to reflect the tendencies and ideals of the contemporary European education. The seventeenth century brought an intensification of the influence of the Counter-Reformation in the Nobility Republic. The ideas of Sarmatism that embraced xenophobia, religiosity and self glorification of the existing, petrified political system, became more pronounced. These tendencies were broadly present in the pattern of the education of nobility, a pattern that was prone to strong Jesuit influence in the spirit of the decrees of the Council of Trent¹.

On this background, I will present the role of growing French influence with respect to the education of nobility in Poland in the seventeenth century. In this period, more and more young Poles of the wealthy families traveled to study in the monarchy of the Bourbons, thus expanding their mental horizons. This in turn helped to consolidate in the Polish Republic more critical views of Sarmatism and of the ideals that this ideology propagated. The French monarchy and its glowing culture was now better known in Poland, with its specific forms of the education of the noble estate. These trends, however, collided in critical reflection with the conservative ideology of Sarmatism².

Thus one can say that in the seventeenth century the noble education ideals, which remained more or less uniform in the previous century, now broke into at least two trends: one – let us call it “noble” – remained under the influence of the Sarmatism and Jesuit education, the other – “magnate” – was often disconnected from the Polish reality and relied mainly on close ties with foreign countries. The education of a Polish young nobleman from a wealthy family typically looked as follows: first the family circle, next school, in the seventeenth century usually Jesuit. It was enriched with foreign peregrinations, which as a rule included France. Upon his return home, the

¹ Cynarski 1974, pp. 220-243; Butterwick 2010; Tazbir 2013.

² Serwański 2011c, pp. 14-49; Serwański and Napierała 2014, pp. 307-36.

young nobleman was being prepared for his political, social and economic activity in the Polish reality³.

One can ask: What exactly was he taught in France? Instructions given by fathers to their sons prior to peregrinations to West European countries are characteristic here. The directions from 1613 offered on such an occasion by Zbigniew Ossoliński, voivode of Sandomierz, to his 18-year-old son George can serve as a good example. They pertained to both taking care for safety while in the journey, maintaining a permanent correspondence contact with the family at home, avoiding expensive extravagancies and improper entertainment, and – most of all – they included an obligation to undertake academic studies, establish contacts with professors, participate in scholarly disputes, select proper readings in philosophy and history, learn foreign languages. Both the mind and the body needed training while leisure time involved possibly playing the lute and (...) walks with modest and sober-minded companions who were keen students⁴.

When in 1614 George Ossolinski arrived to Paris, where he then stayed for a year, in reports to his father he emphasized that he respected his father's directions. He noted, "I did not waste my time in vain because, apart from the French language, I had a professor of mathematics, so I did not miss public lectures and debates in the Academy". Moreover, he read works by excellent orators and historians. He did not neglect "exercises" (*exercitia*) such as playing the lute, horseback riding and learning to dance. He gained self-confidence in social life and in French customs thanks to conversations with prominent persons in Paris, as well as due to contacts with court circles and events connected to it. He watched the proceedings of the General Estates in late 1614 and early 1615, witnessed the visit of (right now declared major) King Louis XIII in the Paris Parliament and the farewell ceremony to Henry's sister Elizabeth who left for Spain after marrying Prince Philip, and also saw "seldom shown ballets as well as other ceremonies". These events must have been memorable for the young Pole, since they differed so much in their manifestations from Polish customs, expanding his mental horizons. George Ossoliński later became a prominent personality in the old Polish Republic; he was an excellent orator, distinguished diplomat, Great Crown Chancellor. Nevertheless, he remained a pious Catholic⁵.

³ Kurdybacha 1976, pp. 27-168; Żołędź 1990a, pp. 182-6; Żołędź 1994b, 29-63.

⁴ Ossoliński 1976, pp. 37-9.

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 41-2, 171.

Thirty years after George Ossoliński, who at that time was already very active in Polish political life, in 1646, brothers John and Mark Sobieski undertook a grand tour to the Bourbon monarchy. The first of them is the later king of the Polish Republic, John III. Their father, Cracow castellan Jacob, well-familiar with France (in 1607-1611 he attended Collège Royale in Paris)⁶, provided them with the “Instructions for Peregrination”. Its contents prove that a certain model of educational instructions for Polish magnate youth in the seventeenth century already existed; the document resembles the earlier instructions of Ossoliński prepared some decades ago. Additionally, it certifies to Jacob Sobieski’s great personal culture, and at the same time his wise attentive care for the best education of his sons⁷.

John and Mark were expected, first of all, to “exercise” their minds. To be able to read and take part in debates, one needed to know the French language, whose growing importance in Europe Jacob Sobieski recognized and he strongly encouraged his sons to learn it fast. He emphasized that French would be useful in Poland in connection to arrival of the French Queen in Warsaw. In fact, at that time the lines of politics of the then Polish ruler Ladislas IV Wasa were re-oriented from pro-Habsburg into pro-French, as was demonstrated in 1645 by the marriage of the monarch with the French Princess Louise-Marie de Gonzague de Nevers. Soon a numerous court of the Queen was to arrive in Warsaw⁸.

Immediately upon their arrival to France the young Poles were expected to find a master, in order to start learning reading and writing in French. Among their tutor’s responsibilities was reading to them “Historiam Gallicam Joannis de Seres”. Via this work they were to learn the history of France and the beauty of her language. Jacob Sobieski even warned them not to allow trivial books to be read to them in French. John and Mark were expected to find another tutor for conducting French conversations, as their father preferred this way of mastering a foreign language. Moreover, during their stay in Paris the young Polish noblemen were supposed to get acquainted with the Latin literature, and Jacob Sobieski listed for them, *inter alia*, the works of Tacitus and Livius⁹.

Among physical exercises recommended to his sons by Sobieski was “French play with football”. He also encouraged them to the *exercitia corporis*,

⁶ Sobieski 1991a, pp. 43-167.

⁷ Sobieski 2013b, pp. 63-78; see also Targosz 1985, pp. 67-122.

⁸ Sobieski 2013b, pp. 66-9.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 70-6.

taught in French academies, namely horseback riding, “jumping” (i.e., dancing) and fencing. The latter, however, he forbade to his sons because in his opinion fencing can lead to fights. On the other hand he recommended vaulting, as “they teach how to jump on the wooden horse”. He considered it a useful exercise, necessary in military training. The young Sobieskis were to expand their education also by attending the royal court. Because Louise Marie was expected in Poland soon, their father wanted them to learn French galarde and other major court dances¹⁰.

The recommendations formulated in the “Instructions” were meticulously implemented by the Sobieskis in Paris, as is confirmed by the “Journey Journal” of their tutor, Sebastian Gawarecki. He noted that immediately upon arrival to Paris the brothers began to learn horse riding with the instructor whose name he listed. This practice was very fashionable among the Poles visiting the capital of France¹¹. A Sarmatian poet Wacław Potocki in his epigram “Fortes Poloni, equites boni” criticized the fact that young Poles, neglecting their own national tradition, leave for Paris in order to learn horse riding there¹². Anyway, despite his father’s warnings, John and Mark decided to learn fencing with another master. It is worthwhile to add that also a journey thru France in 1647 was important for Sobieskis’ education and gave them deep inside into French life and institutions¹³.

In the contemporary terminology, the kind of education recommended by Jacob Sobieski, and experienced by his sons in 1646-1647, can be called general and comprehensive. John and Mark got well acquainted not only with the mental culture of France in the mid-seventeenth century, but also with the way of education of the courtier nobleman, together with the physical culture, according to the applicable modern model of *l’honnête homme*¹⁴. The previous experience of their father, who spent five years in France, was very useful thanks to his “Instructions”.

A similar type of education encountered Peter (Piotr) Opaliński, son of Poznań voivode, Christopher, who was sent to Paris in late 1652. However, already after a few months of stay on the Seine he divided his time between “cavalier games”, that is activities suitable for a nobleman, and private readings unrelated to the program of his study¹⁵.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 76-8.

¹¹ Gawarecki 2013, pp. 9-56.

¹² Potocki 1907, p. 268.

¹³ Gawarecki 2013, pp. 131, 137-219.

¹⁴ Sajkowski i Zielaskowska 2013, pp. 99-105.

¹⁵ Pollak 1953, p. 483.

Of a different character were studies undertaken in Paris between 1659 and 1661 by Stanislaus Heraclius Lubomirski. His father, Great Crown Marshal George Sebastian Lubomirski, the leader of the opposition against the absolutist aspirations of Queen Louise- Marie, as a priority in his son's tour perceived his own political and diplomatic plans aiming to stop the Queen's intensions. It was in this vein that Lubomirski directed his son's educational schedule. Accordingly, the study, in the true meaning of this word, became a less important part of the seventeen-year-old Pole's journey to France¹⁶.

Stanislaus Heraclius Lubomirski studied on the Seine under the tutorship of several private teachers. Thanks to his capabilities, he mastered the language of Moliere in a short time. He also borrowed the French attire, customs, and courtly habits. Getting well acquainted with a courtly lifestyle, having an occasion to freely mix among the highest social and political spheres of Lois XIV – this was the target for the young Pole, as his father planned. Lubomirski read extensively French and Italian romances, a literary genre that was very popular and fashionable among the nobility in the seventeenth century¹⁷.

Many years later, in 1699, a father himself, he sent his sons Theodor and Francis to study abroad, and provided them with his own "Instructions". For the benefit of their education in France, he told his sons to arrive in Paris as soon as possible and immediately begin "cavalierly" lessons in one of the most renowned academies. He encouraged them to hard work, while in their leisure time he wanted them to pay visits to the court, converse with important and "decent" people and see "valuable places and things"¹⁸.

Noticeably, forty years after his own peregrination to study abroad, he was not able to introduce major changes to its schedule, improve it, expand and, in the first place, make it more up to date¹⁹. The "Instructions" of Lubomirski do not differ much in contents from the "Instructions" of Sobieski formulated almost half a century earlier, while as regards the educational aspect, Lubomirski's directions are even poorer. At the same time, his Instructions are a step backwards as compared to the educational recommendations of Ossoliński from the early seventeenth century. This is an effect of a general decline of level of education in the late seventeenth century Poland, of the

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. XVII.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. XVIII.

¹⁸ Sobieski 1991a, pp. 273-8.

¹⁹ Pollak 1953, p. XXX.

expansion of the ideology of Sarmatism and of a limited scope of educational demands from the noble youth in their training.

Among a dozen or so French academies known in Poland, Sorbonne enjoyed the highest esteem. But Polish youth went to study also to Orleans, where they attended the law school²⁰. Nevertheless, in Polish opinions Sorbonne embodied the best patterns of education. According to the way Sorbonne worked, the theological Department was organized in the Cracow Academy²¹. And in 1646, a doctor from Sorbonne, reverend François de Fleury, confessor and preacher of Queen Louise-Marie who arrived from France, was welcomed in Cracow with great honors; in a pompous speech via his person tribute was paid to the Paris Academy, “the mother of so many wise doctors” and at the same time, the mother of the Cracow Academy, “proud of this honor”²². Remarkably, contacts between the two universities, in the Polish Republic being under stronger and stronger influence of the Counter-Reformation, rested on the theological plane.

In Poland of the second half of the seventeenth century, a crucial role in spreading French patterns in many fields of life was played by the courts of two French queens, royal spouses, residing in Warsaw: the above mentioned Louise-Marie (1646-1668), and later Marie-Casimire de la Grange d’Arquien (1674-1696), who married John Sobieski; both queens arrived to the Polish capital together with their numerous French courts. One can hardly speak here about strictly educational patterns as such. At stake was rather the insight into foreign institutions and lifestyles. The Polish nobility closely watched the courtly life, local fashion and habits. Some magnates were ready to accept these patterns, but the Sarmates, who aimed at protecting and maintaining traditional old values, rejected these novelties. An example of it is an opposition to more liberty in social life for women propagated by the French court²³.

One more aspect worth consideration is an important role that was played by religious orders imported from France to Poland in the second half of the seventeenth century by the French spouses of the Polish kings. These orders educated the Polish noble youth, both male and – especially – female, according to the patterns of their country of origin. “Queen Louise-Marie brought two convents and a male monastery from France to educate the

²⁰ Kot 1919-20, pp. 336-8.

²¹ Bruckner 1958, p. 519.

²² Laboureur 1822, pp. 261-262.

²³ Serwański 2007b, pp. 193-200. See also Serwański 2011c, pp. 32-41 and Serwański and Napierała 2014, pp. 75-85.

petty nobility, and the education these schools provided would include tuition in the French language. These schools (les prêtres de la Mission [The Priest of the Mission], les sœurs de la Charité [The Sisters of Charity] and les sœurs de la Visitation [The Sisters of the Visitation]) were set up in 1651, 1652, and 1654 respectively. The Visitandine nuns attended to the education of girls from noble families and high society, especially the daughters of French courtiers but also those of Polish courtiers. The education they offered consisted above all in lessons of reading and writing, the catechism, singing, playing musical instruments and performing tasks that were considered to be in the woman's domain. The sisters translated theological and religious works into Polish²⁴.

Summing up, the French aspects discussed above, though only briefly, were present in the patterns of the education of the Polish nobility, including the ones that were ideologically in juxtaposition and the ones that resulted from practical experiences of Poles in this sphere both in France and in the Polish Republic itself.

The conclusions may seem quite paradoxical. In the seventeenth century, Polish magnates were more and more interested in the French system of education, and young Polish noblemen got to be acquainted with it, so that their mental horizons were expanded; nevertheless, in practice, after their return home, the young men had to tune up to the political system of the so-called noble democracy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and stick in the political life to conservative Sarmatian attitudes of xenophobia and Counter-Reformation bigotry. On the other hand, the Polish nobles who approved French habits and patterns of education were named cosmopolitan.

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Summary

The article discusses the forms and methods of education which Polish noble youths were exposed to in the seventeenth century, highlighting the role of France, which at the time became a culturally attractive model of education. The study relies on several examples of Polish noblemen who travelled to France, typically with their

²⁴ Serwański and Napierała 2014, pp. 318, 318-28; Żołędź-Strzelczyk 1998, pp. 53-63.

fathers' recommendations: Jerzy Ossoliński, brothers Jan and Marek Sobieski, Piotr Opaliński, Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski. The latter, having become a father himself, would send his sons Theodor and Francis to study abroad, with an order to reach Paris as soon as possible.

In Poland of the second half of the seventeenth century, the spread of the French models in many areas of life – including broadly understood education – owed considerably to the two French-born royal consorts who resided in Warsaw with their numerous French retinues. In their turn, Polish nobility of various generations paid substantial attention to the courtly life, the fashion and the customs of the French.

Certain magnates, especially young ones, were ready to adopt the foreign patterns, but the 'Sarmatians', whose goal it was to protect and uphold traditional values, were vehemently opposed to such novelties.

Another aspect worth considering here is the significant impact of the religious orders brought from France to Poland in the second half of the seventeenth century by the French spouses of the Polish kings. The orders were involved in educating Polish noble youth, men and especially women, which they did following the cultural patterns of their country of origin.

Summing up, a fair number of French elements discussed in this article penetrated into the education of the Polish nobility, including those which were ideologically contrary and those which resulted from practical experience of Poles in this respect, both in France and in the Commonwealth.

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