

Adam Pertakowski

(Kraków)

“At the gates of a European policy”

Achievements and perspectives for research into the international policies of the Polish Commonwealth during the reign of Friedrich Augustus II Wettin (1697–1733)

When in 1971 the eminent historian Emanuel Rostworowski expressed the view that the period of the rule of the Wettins (1697–1763) in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was an era of inertia and the beginning of the Russian protectorate, he made use of weighty arguments to support this thesis. He saw the inception of the Russian protectorate as taking place in 1686 when, on the authority of the Grzymułtowski Treaty, the Muscovite Tsars received a guarantee of freedom of religion for people of Orthodox faith in Poland, as well as the right to intervene in their defence¹. In Rostworowski’s opinion, that system was significantly strengthened during the Great Northern War (1700–1721) when subsequent events, including the Narev Treaty (1704), the Toruń accord of Peter I and Augustus II Wettin (1709), and thereafter the Tarnogród Confederation (1715–1716) and the “Silent Sejm” (1717), sealed Poland’s dependence on its Eastern neighbour and precluded the hopes of the Polish king to establish a sovereign policy. Attempts to break free of Peter I’s domination fizzled out, which was visibly evident in Wettin’s spectacular

¹ E. Rostworowski, *Polska w układzie sił politycznych Europy XVIII wieku*, [in:] *Polska w epoce Oświecenia, państwo–społeczeństwo–kultura*, ed. B. Leśnodorski, Warszawa 1971, 11–59.

defeat in the question of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth’s entering into the Vienna accord during the years 1719–1720².

Emanuel Rostworowski was undoubtedly correct, but as it always is in such instances, only partially. Russia had of course painstakingly solidified its position in the Commonwealth, taking advantage of opportunities as they arose. The problem is, however, that today we tend to see this phenomenon (the Russian protectorate) more as one of the second half of the eighteenth century, during the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski, when nothing on the banks of the Vistula could happen without the knowledge and consent of the Russian emperors and, by extension, their proxies in Poland.

This example shows how the more than seventy years of the Saxon dynasty’s rule in Poland has been traditionally viewed. But for at least the past decade, numerous works have been published that diametrically alter the image of the internal history of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth during the first half of the eighteenth century. Józef A. Gierowski cast light on this in outlining the academic works of his tutor, Władysław Konopczyński, according to which it was possible to draw optimistic reflections on politics, society and culture. Afterward, the Polish Enlightenment eagerly seized upon these reflections, as a contrast to the period of decline and stagnation in the second half of the seventeenth century and the rule of the two “Piasts” to sit on the Polish throne: Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (1669–1673) and Jan III Sobieski (1674–1696)³.

Rostworowski is unquestionably among the most eminent of Polish historians to research the Saxon period: the main focus of his

² E. Rostworowski, *Polska w układzie sił politycznych...*, 11–59.

³ J.A. Gierowski, *Władysław Konopczyński jako badacz czasów saskich*, „*Studia Historyczne*”, 22, (1979), 1, 71–74.

interests was the rule of Stanisław August Poniatowski⁴. Meanwhile, an overarching study of diplomacy covering the years 1697–1763 was produced by the eminent representative of the Cracow historical community, Józef Andrzej Gierowski. Writing a section on the history of Polish diplomacy during the Saxon years in 1982, he referred not only to the current literature on the subject, but also to a solid foundation of source documents to present a thesis surprising for that time. He had a favourable view of Polish diplomacy on the threshold of the personal union between Poland and Saxony, claiming that it did not differ fundamentally in quality from the majority of diplomatic policies of Europe, and that it was only in the 1750s and 60s that it found itself lagging behind others, in contrast to the efficiently managed and modern diplomacy of the Saxons⁵. This thesis was to a certain extent a creative extension of his earlier views, as he had already seen this element of authority, that is a strong, effective, and sovereign international policy dependent on effective diplomacy, as key to achieving absolute power in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, which ultimately Augustus II did not achieve⁶. This study is, perhaps to this day, the only chronicle of international events in which Polish, or rather Saxon, diplomacy had a part, and may be the only presentation of the organization of diplomacy: the structure of the diplomatic service, its logistical support

⁴ J.A. Gierowski, *Czasy saskie w badaniach Emanuela Mateusza Rostworowskiego*, „Wiek Oświecenia”, vol. 8, (1992), 223–226; J.A. Gierowski, *Emanuel Mateusz Rostworowski*, „Nauka Polska”, No 2–3 (1993), 211–214.

⁵ J.A. Gierowski, *Dyplomacja polska doby saskiej (1699–1763)*, [in:] *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, 2, 1572–1795, ed. Z. Wójcik, Warszawa 1982, 331–481.

⁶ J. Gierowski, J. Leszczyński, *Dyplomacja polska w dobie unii personalnej polsko-saskiej*, [in:] *Polska służba dyplomatyczna XVI–XVIII w.*, ed. Z. Wójcik, Warszawa 1966, 369–431; J.A. Gierowski, *Sytuacja międzynarodowa Polski w czasach saskich, Polska, Saksonia i plany absolutystyczne Augusta II*, [in:] *Polska w epoce Oświecenia...*, 60–104.

structure, and the role of private diplomacy (e.g. that of the *Hetmans*) in the old Commonwealth.

I am consciously omitting here the Polish historical literature on the interregnum after the death of Jan III Sobieski, as well as the stormy election of Wettin himself to the Polish throne in 1697. I believe that to be a separate problem, deserving to be analysed in its own right. Some Polish historians feel that it was 1699, with the complete subjugation of a country torn by conflict during the Warsaw Sejm between the supporters of Augustus II and those of François Louis de Bourbon, Prince of Conti and the political camp headed by the Primate Michał Radziejowski, that marked the new era of sovereign and secure Saxon governments in Poland.

The reign of the first of the Wettins (1697–1733) has been studied in several works. Due to the way in which the subject was treated and the current state of research, those studies that have been published over the past decade or so should be counted as the most meritorious (including those published in English), written by Józef A. Gierowski⁷ and by Mariusz Markiewicz⁸. The problem of the relationship between the two states (Poland and Saxony) has been the subject of numerous, if brief, works. One that was certainly a breakthrough, not only from the perspective of Polish historiography, was the text by J.A. Gierowski entitled *Personal- oder Realunion?* included in a volume dedicated to Saxony and Poland during the Great Northern War⁹. Gierowski *de facto* resolved the issue of the

⁷ J.A. Gierowski, *The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in the XVIIIth century. From anarchy to well-organised state*, Kraków 1996; *Rzeczpospolita w dobie złotej wolności (1648–1763)*, [in:] *Wielka Historia Polski*, ed. S. Grodziski, J. Wyrozumski, M. Zgórniak, Kraków 2001, 217–290, 327–335.

⁸ M. Markiewicz, *Historia Polski 1492–1795*, Kraków 2004, 589–625.

⁹ J. Gierowski, *Personal- oder Realunion? Zur Geschichte der polnisch-sächsischen Beziehungen nach Poltawa*, [in:] *Um die Polnische Krone. Sachsen und Polen während*

relationship between Saxony and the Commonwealth, accentuating its personal character, which made a real union between the two nations impossible. This volume also contained articles by Polish and German historians (from East Germany) and was essentially the first attempt made by the two nations at creating a common view of that period of history. Its publication in 1962 was more than a major academic event: to this day, arguments continue over the supposed political motives and inspirations of the authors, thanks to which the publication was able to see the light of day¹⁰. Unfortunately, book's publication went completely unnoticed in East Germany, where only a few copies were sold (the same number as in Japan). Sales were little better in Poland, where, aside from the legal deposit for academic libraries, only a dozen or so copies were sold. The rest of the edition went to waste, and one of the German editors, Johannes Kalisch was „punished” by the East German authorities, who sent him from Berlin, where he had worked at the Academy of Sciences, to Rostock where he was forced to set aside his interest in the Polish–Saxon union in favour of Polish–German relations after the World War I¹¹.

The authors of the short works attempted to compare the relationship between Poland and Saxony to the Polish–Lithuanian union

des Nordischen Krieges 1700–1721, bearb. von J. Kalisch, J. Gierowski, Berlin 1962, 254–291.

¹⁰ R. Groß, *Elektorat saski i jego związki z Polską. Opinie i oceny*, [in:] *Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów i jej tradycje. Materiały z konferencji „Trzysta lat od początku unii polsko-saskiej. Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów i jej tradycje”, Kraków 15–17 IX 1997 r.*, ed. A.K. Link-Lenczowski, M. Markiewicz, Kraków 1999, 59–65; J.A. Gierowski, *Rzeczpospolita jako zwornik Europy środkowowschodniej*, [in:] *Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów i jej tradycje...* 217–226.

¹¹ J. Staszewski, *Badania Józefa Andrzeja Gierowskiego nad epoką saską*, [in:] *Profesor Józef Andrzej Gierowski jako uczony i nauczyciel. Materiały z konferencji dedykowanej pamięci Profesora i wspomnienia o Nim*, ed. M. Markiewicz, A.K. Link-Lenczowski, J. Maroń, K. Matwijowski and L. Ziátkowski, „Prace Historyczne”, 40, Wrocław 2008, 46–50.

(after 1569)¹², the Hannover–English relationship after 1714¹³ and English–Scottish relations after 1707¹⁴ from the viewpoint of the interests of Polish citizens and their rulers¹⁵. They also investigated these relationships in the context of the Anglo–Saxon concept of the “composite state” popular in historiography¹⁶. A portion of the publication brought to the foreground during a conference on the 1997 occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the personal union of the Commonwealth and Saxony¹⁷ and sketches presenting the international position of Poland in the eighteenth

¹² J.A. Gierowski, *Die Union zwischen Polen und Litauen im 16. Jahrhundert und die polnisch–sächsische Union des 17./18. Jahrhunderts*, [in:] *Föderationsmodelle und Unionstrukturen. Über Staatenverbindungen in der frühen Neuzeit vom 15. zum 18. Jahrhundert*, Hg. von T. Fröschl, 1994, 63–82.

¹³ J. Lukowski, *Hanover/England, Saxony/Poland. Political Relations between States in the Age of Personal Union: Institutions and Procedures*, [in:] *Die Personalunionen von Sachsen–Polen 1697–1763 und Hannover–England 1714–1837. Ein Vergleich*, Hrsg. von R. Rexhauser, 2005, 417–430.

¹⁴ A.K. Link–Lenczowski, *Unie angielsko–szkockie i związek Rzeczypospolitej z Saksonią. Wokół perspektyw i zagrożeń*, [in:] *Rzeczpospolita w XVI–XVIII wieku. Państwo czy wspólnota?*, Zbiór studiów, ed. B. Dybaś, P. Hanczewski and T. Kempa, Toruń 2007, 249–258.

¹⁵ J.A. Gierowski, *Ein Herrscher–zwei Staaten: die sächsisch–polnische Personalunion als Problem des Monarchen aus polnischer Sicht*, [in:] *Die Personalunionen von Sachsen–Polen 1697–1763...*, 87–102.

¹⁶ M. Markiewicz, *Stosunki między Rzeczpospolitą i Saksonią za panowania Augusta II i Augusta III*, [in:] *Europa unii i federacji. Idea jedności narodów i państw od średniowiecza do czasów współczesnych*, ed. K. Ślusarek, Kraków 2004, 83–90.

¹⁷ J. Staszewski, *Trzysta lat po zawarciu unii polsko–saskiej*, [in:] *Polska–Saksonia w czasach unii (1697–1763). Próba nowego spojrzenia*, ed. K. Bartkiewicz, Zielona Góra 1998, 9–21; *300 Jahre nach dem Entstehen der polnisch–sächsischen Union*, [in:] *Sachsen und Polen zwischen 1697 und 1763. Beiträge der wissenschaftlichen Konferenz vom 26. bis 28. Juni 1997 in Dresden*, Dresden 1998, 9–16; *Unia polsko–saska z perspektywy trzystu lat*, [in:] *Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów i jej tradycje...*, 15–21.

century with all of the consequences of being situated between the Russian state and the Habsburg Empire¹⁸.

One cannot complain about a lack of biographies of the monarchs who reigned in the Commonwealth during the first three decades of the eighteenth century. By the time of the Second World War, Józef Feldman had completed his editorial work on the biography of Stanisław Leszczyński (king of Poland from 1706 to 1709 and from 1733 to 1736), which was published in 1948, two years after its author's death. It would be nearly fifty years before Gdansk historian Edmund Cieślak would publish the next biography of that ruler¹⁹. The late 1980s and 1990s finally brought a serious exchange on the perception of the Saxon era in the Commonwealth. Discussion within the historical community in Poland was generated by the biographies of Augustus II and Augustus III. In both cases the author was Jacek Staszewski. The biography of Augustus III was published in 1989²⁰, with the biography of Augustus II following nine years later²¹. In the first of these, Staszewski presented his subject in an entirely different light from that in which he had been seen to date: hardworking, completely dedicated to his royal duties, concerned about the cultural development of Poland and Saxony. Furthermore, he emphasized Augustus III's introduction of a new model of state management based on significant prerogatives for the first

¹⁸ J. Staszewski, *Union mit Polen–Chancen ohne Realitäten?*, [in:] *Sachsen und die Wettiner, Chancen und Realitäten. Internationale wissenschaftliche Konferenz. Dresden vom 27 bis 29 Juni 1989* „Dresdner Hefte” (1990) 123–131; J. Staszewski, *Między Wiedniem Petersburgiem. Uwagi na temat międzynarodowego położenia Rzeczypospolitej w XVII i XVIII w.*, [in:] *Między Wschodem a Zachodem. Rzeczpospolita XVI–XVIII w. Studia ofiarowane Zbigniewowi Wójcikowi w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. T. Chynczewska–Hennel, M.Kulecki, H.Litwin, M.P.Makowski and J. Tazbir, Warszawa 1993, 169–177.

¹⁹ E. Cieślak, *Stanisław Leszczyński*, Wrocław 1994.

²⁰ J. Staszewski, *August III Sas*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1989.

²¹ Idem, *August II Mocny*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1998.

minister (Heinrich von Brühl), and leaving to himself the deciding word in key issues for the kingdom. The biography of Augustus II is also of vital importance to us, because it shows *de facto* the problems that remain unresolved, the best example of which is the limited information in print on the subject of the political activity of the King and his court in the 1720s. The new work by Jacek Kurek on the final years of the reign of August II does not, unfortunately, fill in these gaps, despite its title²².

The undoubted precursor of research on the Saxon period was the Poznan historian Kazimierz Jarochoowski, writing in the second half of the nineteenth century. His abundant historiographical writings deserve particular attention, as he was perhaps the first professional historian to use original sources from Dresden. J. Staszewski doubted the autonomy of Jarochoowski's archival research in Dresden, claiming that he had made use of paid copyists from the archives²³. While Jarochoowski's findings are currently in need of many clarifications and require extensive review, it should at least be noted that he was the first to undertake research on many previously unstudied themes of the history of the Saxon dynasty in Poland including the famed "Rakoczy episode": the matter of the election of Franciszek II Rakoczy, Duke of Transylvania, to the Polish throne and his contacts with the anti-Stanisław opposition²⁴. Also worth noting are the works dedicated to diplomatic missions undertaken by the Polish side during the Great Northern War, including those of Franciszek Poniński, the *starost* of Kopanica, to Russia in 1717 and 1718, and of Jan Jerzy Przebendowski, the Grand Treasurer of the Crown at the court of Frederick

²² J. Kurek, *U schyłku panowania Augusta II Sasa. Z dziejów wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej (1729–1733)*, Katowice 2003

²³ J. Staszewski, *Badania Józefa Andrzeja Gierowskiego nad epoką saską*, [in:] *Profesor Józef Andrzej Gierowski jako uczone i nauczyciel...*, 46–50.

²⁴ K. Jarochoowski, *Epizod Rakoczy w dziejach Augusta II*, [in:] idem, *Z czasów saskich spraw wewnętrznych polityki i wojny*, Poznań 1886, 187–325.

I Hohenzollern of Prussia from 1704 to 1709²⁵. A separate set of problems mentioned in the historical writings of Jarochowski includes the question of the relationship between Augustus II and Peter I Romanov following the “Silent Sejm” (1717)²⁶, the intrigue of the Prussian envoy to Warsaw, Friedrich Wilhelm Posadowski, as a result of which the Warsaw Sejm of 1720 was broken²⁷, and the policy of the courts of Dresden and Vienna after the Treaty of Altranstädt²⁸. Thanks to Jarochowski, many sources on the history of Polish diplomacy during the Saxon era were found in a collection entitled “The Portfolio of Gabriel Junosza Podoski...”²⁹.

The historical achievements of Kazimierz Jarochowski deserve, as I have mentioned, particular recognition, even though today his findings would be shocking due to their oversimplifications and lack of criticism, not to mention for succumbing to the undue influence of foreign historiography, which is especially evident in his discussion of Posadowski’s role in a plot aimed at breaking off the Sejm. Jarochowski, not having the information stored in the Russian archives concerning the diplomatic activities of the Tsar during the stormy year of 1720, based his writings uncritically on the *History of Prussia* by Johann Gustav Droysen, which handed him a ready answer to the plot “on a platter”.

²⁵ Idem, *Polityka brandenburska w pierwszych latach wojny Karola XII i misja Przebendowskiego do Berlina w roku 1704*, [in:] *Nowe opowiadania i studia historyczne przez Kazimierza Jarochowskiego*, Warszawa 1882, 251–317.

²⁶ Idem, *Car Piotr i August II w trzechleciu po sejmie niemym z roku 1717*, [in:] idem, *Rozprawy historyczno-krytyczne*, Poznań 1889, 39–130.

²⁷ Idem, *Próba emancypacyjna polityki Augustowej i intryga Posadowskiego rezydenta pruskiego w Warszawie roku 1720*, [in:] idem, *Nowe opowiadania i studia historyczne*, Warszawa 1882, 321–376.

²⁸ Idem, *Polityka saska i austriacka po traktacie altranstadzkim*, [in:] idem, *Opowiadania i studia historyczne. Seria Nowa*, Poznań 1884.

²⁹ Idem, *Teka Gabriela Junoszy Podoskiego, arcybiskupa gnieźnieńskiego*, vol. I–VI, Poznań 1850–1864.

It is not difficult to see that relations with Russia have been set by a certain „canon of interests” of the historians working to research the rule of Augustus II. This can be seen in particular in the works of Józef Feldman, one of the most eminent experts on the history of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in the first decade of the eighteenth century. He presented his main theses, including that of the high significance of the Polish–Russian treaty signed in Narva in 1704 for the future of the relations between the two states, in a study of the role of Poland during the period of the Great Northern War³⁰. Today, many of Feldman’s views, however grounded they may be in solid source materials for their times, provoke a lively discussion in the academic community. The basis of the thesis that asserts that Russian influence in the Commonwealth was grounded in the first years of the Saxon government is called into question, and the findings on the role and the importance of Reinhold Patkul, the Livonian anti–Swedish opposition leader, at court Russian and Polish courts are accepted with very significant reservations. However, Feldman’s work is an important contribution to the understanding of relations between Poland and Russia at a pivotal moment for both countries whose military resolution took place in Poltava in 1709. A continuation of the study of the problem of Polish relations with the Russian state appears in Feldman’s work on the policy of the Commonwealth toward Moscow in the post–Poltava period³¹ and the influences and diplomatic games of Russia in the period preceding the Tarnogród Confederation. As a result of these activities, pro–Swedish and pro–Russian camps joined in resistance to the policies of Augustus II Wettin, rendering impossible the pacification of the nobles’ movement according to the King’s desires. Furthermore, the Russian proxies (including

³⁰ J. Feldman, *Polska w dobie wielkiej wojny północnej 1704–1709*, Kraków 1925.

³¹ Idem, *Polska a sprawa wschodnia 1709–1714*, Kraków 1926.

Alexei Dashkov) flagrantly incited crowds of nobles into opposition to the monarch³². Twenty years ago Andrzej Leon Sowa took up the subject of Polish opinions on the activities of representatives of Russia in the Commonwealth³³.

The first part of the Great Northern War, which took place directly on Polish soil, the Tarnogród Confederation, and the period immediately prior to it enjoyed a great deal of interest on the part of Polish historians. This continued even after the Second World War. J.A. Gierowski repeatedly addressed the subject, analysing the internal and external situation in the period following the signing of the treaty at Altranstädt (1706), and immediately following the battle of Poltava. He magnificently underlined that in the political situation of that time, there was no other alternative for the Sandomierz Confederation, being as it was a close ally of Russia. It gave them the opportunity to survive on the political stage and gave hope to the restoration of the reign of August II in Poland³⁴. Exactly ten years later, Gierowski's student Andrzej Kamiński returned to the problem. Painstakingly investigating the Russian sources (including the collections of the Archive of the History Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Leningrad), he came to almost identical conclusions as Gierowski, indicating

³² Idem, *Geneza konfederacji tarnogrodzkiej*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny”, 42, (1928), 493–531.

³³ A.L. Sowa, *Stosunki polsko-rosyjskie w opiniach ministrów Augusta II. Refleksje o kształtowaniu się mechanizmów zależności*, [in:] *Studia z dziejów Europy, Polski i Śląska. Prace ofiarowane Józefowi Andrzejowi Gierowskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin*, ed. K. Matwijowski, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 47, (1992), Nr 1–2, 155–162; A.L. Sowa, *Świat ministrów Augusta II. Wartości i poglądy funkcjonujące w kręgu ministrów Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1702–1728*, Kraków 1995, 113–125.

³⁴ J. Gierowski, *Pol'sza i победа pod Połtawoj*, [in:] *Pol'tavskaja pobieda. Iz istorii mieżdunarodnych odnoszenij na kanunie i posl'e Poltavy*, „Institut Sloviaovedenija Akademii Nauk Sojuza Sovietskich Socjalisticzieskich Respublik”, Moskva 1959, 13–70.

that the Battle of Poltava entirely invalidated the provisions of the treaty of Altranstädt and directed Polish–Russian relations onto the road of cooperation. The battle of Poltava was, however, the end of the concert of the Commonwealth with Moscow and from that point forward Poland came under growing pressure from Russia, but not under its protectorate³⁵.

Józef A. Gierowski's writings have also been exceptionally valuable to current work referring to the events immediately preceding the Tarnogród Confederation and the contacts of the Polish elites with Russian diplomats with the aim of seeking the Tsar's protection³⁶. Several decades after the publication of J. Feldman's work, Gierowski discussed the problem of Russian influence on the Confederation's actions, indicating that the hopes of the camp of supporters of Russia and Sweden for the cooperation of those two nations in the interests of the Confederation were not groundless, taking in to account the international situation, but that it would not have taken place quickly enough to impact directly the final success of the Tarnogród group³⁷. In another article, Gierowski indicated the initiatives taken by Augustus II in the period preceding the Confederation and during its existence that, in his opinion, were the most important when the monarch attempted to increase the range of his authority in the Commonwealth through beneficial international

³⁵ A. Kamiński, *Konfederacja sandomierska wobec Rosji w okresie poaltranzstadzkim 1706–1709*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1969.

³⁶ J. Gierowski, *Między saskim absolutyzmem a złotą wolnością. Z dziejów wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1712–1715*, Wrocław 1953.

³⁷ J.A. Gierowski, *Konfederaci tarnogrodzcy wobec możliwości porozumienia szwedzko–rosyjskiego*, [in:] *Słowianie w dziejach Europy. Studia Historyczne ku uczczeniu 75 rocznicy urodzin i 50–lecia pracy naukowej prof. H. Łowmiańskiego*, ed. J. Ochmański, Poznań 1974, 251–261.

agreements. These resulted in a quick reaction from the Russian side³⁸. Finally, the events of period of the Confederation itself are discussed in two important articles by Gierowski, one of which is on “describing” (*opisanie*), or the incorporation of the activities of the most important government offices in the country into legal norms: the treasury offices, chancellors and crown and Lithuanian *hetmans*³⁹. It also addresses the discussions with the Tarnogród Confederates, the results of which was the signing of the Warsaw treaty in December 1716 between Augustus II and the leaders of the nobility. The second text is worthy of particular attention. In it Gierowski puts forward a description of the diplomatic activities of the confederates, counting not only on aid from Russia, but also from the Ottoman Porte (the mission of Dominik Bekierski, then later of Stefan Potocki in Istanbul), the Habsburgs (the delegation of Stefan Morsztyn) and Prussia (the activities of Georg Friedrich Lölhöffel⁴⁰).

In recalling the achievements of J. A. Gierowski, it is impossible to omit one of his most important works, which can without exaggeration be said to be a comprehensive study of the international policies of Poland during the second decade of the eighteenth century. The book, published in 1971, was entitled *W cieniu Ligi Północnej* [*In the Shadow of the Northern League*], and brings to the fore many key questions from the period, beginning with the winter campaign by the Swedish king, Charles XII

³⁸ J. Gierowski, *Między Francją a Rosją. Z dziejów polityki zewnętrznej Augusta II w latach 1712–1717*, „Sprawozdania Wrocławskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego”, 1962, 91–93.

³⁹ J. Gierowski, „Opisanie” urzędów centralnych przez konfederatów tarnogrodzkich, [in:] *O naprawę Rzeczypospolitej XVII–XVIII. Prace ofiarowane Władysławowi Czaplińskiemu w 60 rocznicę urodzin*, ed. J. Gierowski, A. Kersten, J. Maciszewski, Z. Wójcik, Warszawa 1965, 193–211.

⁴⁰ J. Gierowski, *Wokół mediacji w Traktacie warszawskim 1716 roku*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne”, 26, (1969), 57–68.

Wittelsbach, in the lands of the Duchy of Lithuania between 1708 and 1709, the strengthening of the alliance between the Sandomierz Confederates and Tsar Peter I, the change in policy by Augustus II after the defeat of the Swedes at Poltava, and the efforts of the monarch and his closest associate, Jakub Henryk Flemming, to reinforce the union with Saxony, which met with objection from the nobility and from the anti-Augustus opposition of Russia. It can be seen, therefore, that Gierowski's principal line of discussion was focused on Polish-Russian issues. Of course, *W cieniu Ligi Północnej* quickly moves beyond that single aspect, touching on such problems as those of the planned support by the Kingdom of Prussia for an absolutist coup in Poland in 1715, as well as the efforts of the Habsburg court to renew the participation of the Commonwealth in the Holy League in order to oppose Turkey⁴¹.

A separate direction of study that has interesting potential is the "Vatican direction": taking a closer look at the diplomatic contacts between Poland-Lithuania and the Apostolic See. One of the first works on this subject was the brief outline by Kazimierz Piwarski of the initial period of contact between the Wettins and the Apostolic See Papacy⁴². Jacek Staszewski analysed the relations between Augustus II with the Roman Curia between 1704 and 1706⁴³. Also deserving mention is the thorough monograph describing the policies of Rome toward the abdication of

⁴¹ J.A. Gierowski, *W cieniu Ligi Północnej*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1971.

⁴² K. Piwarski, *Pierwsze stosunki Augusta II ze Stolicą Apostolską. Nieznana karta z dziejów dyplomacji polskiej*, Warszawa 1937, 3-35.

⁴³ J. Staszewski, *Stosunki Augusta II z Kurią Rzymską w latach 1704-1706 (Misja rzymska)*, „Roczniki Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu”, 71, (1966), 1, Toruń 1965.

Augustus II and the succession to the Polish throne by Jan Kopiec⁴⁴, preceded by several important exiguous works by the same author⁴⁵, and the article by Józef A. Gierowski on the activities of the *nuncios* of the Vatican in the Commonwealth during important internal (the cancelled Sejm) and external crises (the possibility of a Turkish attack on Poland) in 1713⁴⁶. The problems in the cooperation between the Commonwealth and the Vatican can also be understood with the help of the valuable source edition from the Series *Acta Nuntiaturae*⁴⁷. The „Italian” theme also appeared in the historical writings of Gierowski in his brief analysis of the activities of Daniel Dolfin, the last Venetian ambassador to the Commonwealth (1715–1716), whose mission was intended to renew the connection of the Polish nation with the Holy League, to secure military

⁴⁴ J. Kopiec, *Między Altransztadem a Połtawą. Stolica Apostolska wobec obsady tronu polskiego w latach 1706–1709*, „Opolska Biblioteka Teologiczna”, 22, Opole 1997.

⁴⁵ J. Kopiec, *Śląski epizod w dziejach nuncjatury polskiej w czasach Augusta II*, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 47, (1992), 331–336; *Echa polskich wydarzeń z lat 1704–1709 w środowisku hospicjum św. Stanisława w Rzymie*, „Nasza Przeszość”, 82, (1994), 373–380, *Dyplomacja papieska wobec sporu o tron polski w latach 1704–1709*, „Nasza Przeszość”, 88, (1997), 203–225.

⁴⁶ J.A. Gierowski, *Sejm z 1713 r. w relacjach nuncjusza Odeschalchiego*, [in:] *Studia Historyczno-Prawne. Prace ofiarowane K. Orzechowskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin*, ed. K. Matwijowski, S. Ochman-Staniszevska, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 48, (1993), 2–3, 259–266; idem, *Stolica Apostolska wobec groźby tureckiego najazdu na Polskę w 1713 roku*, [in:] *Religia, edukacja, kultura. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana Profesorowi Stanisławowi Litakowi*, ed. M. Surdacki, Lublin 2002, 97–108; idem, *Nowe spojrzenie na genezę kryzysu politycznego Rzeczypospolitej w 1713 r.*, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 59, (2004), 3, 291–301.

⁴⁷ *Acta Nuntiaturae Poloniae, Tomus XLIII. Benedictus Odescalchi-Erba (1711–1713)*, vol. 1 (5 IX 1711–31 XII 1712), collegit et paravit Iosephus Andreas Gierowski †, supplevit et edidit Ioannes Kopiec, Cracoviae 2009; *Acta Nuntiaturae Poloniae, Tomus XLIII. Benedictus Odescalchi-Erba (1711–1713)*, vol. 2 (4 I 1713–17 I 1714), collegit et paravit Iosephus Andreas Gierowski †, supplevit et edidit Ioannes Kopiec, Cracoviae 2011.

reinforcements for the Venetian Republic in the war against Turkey, and to create a diversion on the border with the Principality of Moldavia⁴⁸.

Unfortunately, the literature on the problem of Polish–Turkish relations is still limited. As much as the period of Jan III Sobieski is associated, justifiably, with the victorious Vienna campaign (1683), and the successive Moldavian campaigns pursued by the Polish King, it is this aspect that has not received satisfactory examination in relation to the Wettin governments. To date, the basic work on this subject is the monograph by Władysław Konopczyński, covering the period from the victory at Vienna in 1683 to the war in defence of the Constitution of the Third of May (1792)⁴⁹. I have already mentioned the exiguous works by J.A. Gierowski, based on Vatican sources, which examine the internal and external crises of the Commonwealth in 1713 in the context of the Turkish threat. A separate theme that can be distinguished in Polish historiography after the Second World War, and that is almost exclusively related to the relations with Turkey and from there with the Crimean Khanate in studies on the diplomacy of the crown's *hetmans*. At first glance it could appear that we have a large amount of knowledge on this subject, as would be suggested by the work of Waław Zarzycki⁵⁰. However, deeper analysis leads to the conclusion that the author's statements are altogether inconclusive as the foundation of source material used is extraordinarily thin. The aspect of Polish–Turkish–Tatar contact was raised in several important works by Andrzej Krzysztof Link–Lenczowski. His doctoral thesis on the diplomacy of

⁴⁸ J.A. Gierowski, *Ostatni ambasador wenecki w Rzeczypospolitej polsko–litewskiej*, [in:] *Muner Polonica et Slavica*, S. De Fanti curante, Udine 1990, 69–84, Cillana dell'Instituto de lingue e letterature dell'Europa Orientale–Università di Udine, 2.

⁴⁹ W. Konopczyński, *Polska a Turcja 1683–1792*, Warszawa 1936.

⁵⁰ W. Zarzycki, *Dyplomacja hetmanów w dawnej Polsce*, „Bydgoskie Towarzystwo Naukowe. Prace Wydziału nauk Humanistycznych”, Seria E, Nr 8, Warszawa–Poznań 1976.

the great crown *hetman* Adam Mikołaj Sieniawski was not, however, published in print⁵¹. The other works refer to equally weighty problems of official diplomacy: the financial aspects of the hetman diplomacy with the Ottoman Porte and the Crimean Khanate⁵²; intelligence reaching 40–50 km into neighbouring territory, which at the Sieniawski's initiative was directed by Colonel Konstanty Turkuł⁵³ ; and the interesting, highly exotic, diplomatic ceremonies held during contacts with Turkish and Tatar delegates in the Commonwealth⁵⁴.

The historian on the Saxon period has at his disposal a relatively well-developed discussion of Polish–French contacts. Without question,

⁵¹ A.K. Link–Lenczowski, *Dyplomacja hetmana wielkiego koronnego Adama Mikołaja Sieniawskiego w latach 1706–1725*, Archives of Jagiellonian University, Ms. Dokt. 77/80.

⁵² Idem, *Hetman Adam Mikołaj Sieniawski a niektóre aspekty finansowe polityki polskiej wobec Porty i Krymu w początkach XVIII w.*, [in:] *O Nowożytnej Polsce i Europie. Prace ofiarowane Józefowi Andrzejowi Gierowskiemu w 60 rocznicę urodzin*, ed. K. Matwijowski, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 37, (1982), 3–4, 457–465.

⁵³ A.K. Link–Lenczowski, *W kręgu ograniczonych możliwości. Wywiad hetmana wielkiego koronnego Adama Mikołaja Sieniawskiego po restauracji Augusta*, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 47, (1992), 1–2, 145–155 (*Studia z dziejów Europy, Polski i Śląska. Prace ofiarowane Józefowi Andrzejowi Gierowskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin*, ed. K. Matwijowski); Idem, *Wokół ceremoniału hetmańskiego w czasach saskich*, [in:] *Theatrum ceremoniale na dworze księżąt i królów polskich. Materiały konferencji naukowej zorganizowanej przez Zamek Królewski na Wawelu i Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w dniach 23–25 marca 1998*, ed. M. Markiewicz, R. Skowron, Kraków 1999, 297–305.

⁵⁴ A.K. Link–Lenczowski, *Wokół kryzysu wschodniego z lat 1711–1713. Tureccy i tatarscy dyplomaci w Rzeczypospolitej*, [in:] *Między Zachodem a Wschodem. Studia ku czci Profesora Jacka Staszewskiego*, II, ed. J. Dumanowski, B. Dybaś, K. Mikulski, J. Poraziński and S. Roszak, Toruń 2003, 355–367; Idem, *Południowo-wschodnie pogranicze Rzeczypospolitej u schyłku wojny północnej. W kręgu aktywności hetmana wielkiego koronnego Adama Mikołaja Sieniawskiego po Połtawie*, [in:] *Między Lwowem a Wrocławiem. Księga Jubileuszowa Profesora Krystyna Matwijowskiego*, ed. B. Rok, J. Maroń, Toruń 2006, 1149–1163.

Józef A. Gierowski, Emanuel Rostworowski and Jack Staszewski deserve enormous credit for this. The earliest period of Saxon–Polish–French relations was the subject of works by J. Staszewski, alluding to the origins of the electoral reign of Frederick Augustus I (beginning in 1694), the conception of the dependence by the Habsburgs and the development of closer ties with France (the plan of Field Marshall Johann Adam Schöning) as a result of behind–the–scenes Austrian diplomatic games, attempts to paralyse Saxon attempts on the Polish throne in 1697, closer ties with Dresden in 1700 ending with an internal fracturing in the Commonwealth following the Altranstädt treaty, and the formal abdication of Augustus II⁵⁵. Thanks to Gierowski, we know a great deal about the behind–the–scenes manoeuvring in the development of closer ties between the Commonwealth and France in the autumn of 1713, which bore fruit in the form of a signed treaty of friendship in August 1714. This treaty was not duly accepted by the French side, whose unpredictable moves (support for the Swedish king Charles XII Wittelsbach) led in reality to a missed opportunity to take advantage of the benefits of closer ties between Warsaw and Versailles⁵⁶. A supplement to the works of J.A. Gierowski relating to the question of relations between Poland and Versailles was the short text on the opinions of French diplomats about Stanisław Leszczyński between 1707 and 1709 – the period during which he was the sole ruler of the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, these opinions were not favourable to the king, who was blamed for the weakness of Poland and a lack of the kind of leadership that

⁵⁵ J. Staszewski, *O miejsce w Europie. Stosunki Polski i Saksonii z Francją na przełomie XVII i XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 1973.

⁵⁶ J. Gierowski, *Traktat przyjaźni Polski z Francją w 1714 r. Studium z dziejów dyplomacji*, Warszawa 1965.

might keep the country from failing⁵⁷. A separate question that Gierowski touched upon in analysing the diplomatic correspondence of the French emissaries in Constantinople (Charles de Ferriol, Marquis d'Argental) found in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris was the relationship between France and the Crimean Khanate at the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century and the Versailles' conception of a union between Turkey and Russia. Subsequently, E. Rostworowski published an excellent monograph in 1958 showing the policies of the monarchy of Louis XV Bourbon toward the Commonwealth at the end of the reign of Augustus II (1725–1733). To this day it remains the fundamental work demonstrating the diplomatic moves made by Augustus II at the end of his life⁵⁸. Those moves were intended to rend Saxony from the grips of pragmatically sanctioned tight relations with France and, with its help, to take over the heritage of the Habsburgs. When, however, that the plans for a Saxon–French alliance fizzled out, the king of Poland withdrew from negotiations, and, aware of his impending death, decided to give his successor a free hand in conducting international policy. Five years later, Rostworowski supplemented his findings, this time based mainly on sources from Dresden (not previously used), showing the mission of the Saxon diplomats Karl Heinrich von Hoym to Paris in 1725, with the intention to sign a treaty with France at all costs⁵⁹. Later historians also cited Rostworowski in an attempt to investigate the source of the so-called *Secret du Roi*, which as we know was a secret diplomatic undertaking by Louis XV intended to create an anti-Russian coalition in Europe in the 1750s consisting of Poland, Sweden,

⁵⁷ J.A. Gierowski, *Stanisław Leszczyński i latach 1707–1709 w opiniach dyplomatów francuskich*, „Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis”, 543, Historia 36, 1981, 155–164.

⁵⁸ E. Rostworowski, *O polską koronę. Polityka Francji w latach 1725–1733*, Wrocław 1958.

⁵⁹ Idem, *Jeszcze o ślubie Marii Leszczyńskiej i polskiej koronie*, [in:] *Legandy i fakty XVIII w.*, Warszawa 1963, 10–65.

Prussia and Turkey under the guidance of France. The aim was to place on the Polish throne a candidate who enjoyed the acceptance of Versailles⁶⁰. Despite popular stereotypes and opinions, this plan should absolutely not be tied to the Saxon–French initiatives of the 1730s, except in that some of its assumptions were identical to those accepted during the lifetime of Augustus II. A review of the state of research on Polish–French relations is supplemented by Edmund Cieślak on the role of the French consulate in Gdańsk in the eighteenth century⁶¹. This monograph was based on the publication several decades earlier of a diplomatic report of the French mission, whose authors were E. Cieślak and Józef Rumiński⁶².

The relations between Poland and England have been relatively poorly researched. From the works penned to date, certainly worthy of attention are a few articles by J. A. Gierowski on the relationship of Great Britain and Gdańsk between 1717 and 1719⁶³, and by Grzegorz Chomicki, who thoroughly presents the most important problems in political contacts between the monarchies of George I of Hanover and Augustus II Wettin in

⁶⁰ J. Staszewski, „*Sekret królewski*” bez tajemnic, [in:] „*Jak Polskę przemienić w kraj kwitnący...*”. *Szkice i studia z czasów saskich*, Olsztyn 1997, 169–173.

⁶¹ E. Cieślak, *Francuska placówka konsularna w Gdańsku w XVIII wieku. Status prawny–zadania–działalność*, Kraków 1999.

⁶² *Raporty rezydentów francuskich w Gdańsku w XVIII wieku (1715–1719)*, ed. E. Cieślak and J. Rumiński, Gdańsk 1964, [in:] *Studia i materiały do dziejów Gdańska*, ed. E. Cieślak, 2, Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe. Wydział I. Nauk Społecznych i Humanistycznych. Seria Źródła, 6; *Raporty rezydentów francuskich w Gdańsku w XVIII wieku, (1720–1721)*, ed. E. Cieślak and J. Rumiński, Gdańsk 1968, [in:] *Studia i materiały do dziejów Gdańska*, ed. E. Cieślak, 2, Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe. Wydział I. Nauk Społecznych i Humanistycznych. Seria Źródła, 8.

⁶³ J.A. Gierowski, *Z dziejów stosunku Anglii do Gdańska w początkach XVIII wieku*, [in:] *O Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej XVI–XVIII w. Prace ofiarowane Władysławowi Czaplińskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin*, ed. J. Leszczyński, „*Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka*”, 30, (1975), 2, 333–342.

the years 1714–1721⁶⁴. This event, which echoed loudly throughout Europe, was the conversion of Prince Frederick Augustus II (son of Augustus II, later to be ruler of Poland as Augustus III Wettin) to Catholicism. The relationship to the English monarchy outlined by J. A. Gierowski was based on the correspondence of delegates to Queen Anne Stuart: Charles Mordaunt Earl of Peterborough, George McKenzie and James Scott, on the Public Record Office⁶⁵, and on the Vatican's Archives of the Secretary of State⁶⁶. A text by G. Chomicki on the repercussions of the conversion in the London court also had his own input in presenting this problem to the Polish reader⁶⁷.

As poorly understood as the relations in the first decades of the eighteenth century between the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and England are, the contacts between Poland and the Habsburgs nearly completely “lie fallow”. This does not mean that Polish historians knew nothing about the sources produced by the Imperial chancellors, nor that they had no idea about the role of Habsburg diplomats in the court in Warsaw or Dresden. Quite the contrary, the majority of the monographs as

⁶⁴ G. Chomicki, *Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec problemów politycznych Rzeczypospolitej (od wstąpienia na tron Jerzego I do zawarcia pokoju w Nystadt)*, [in:] *Rzeczpospolita w dobie wielkiej wojny północnej*, pod ed. J. Muszyńska, Kielce 2001, 167–183.

⁶⁵ J.A. Gierowski, *Anglia wobec konwersji królewicza Fryderyka Augusta*, [in:] *Kultura staropolska–kultura europejska. Prace ofiarowane Januszowi Tazbirowi*, ed. S. Bylina [et al.], Warszawa 1997, 127–138.

⁶⁶ Idem, *Interwencja królowej Anny przeciw konwersji królewicza Fryderyka Augusta w świetle materiałów Archiwum Watykańskiego*, [in:] *Czasy nowożytne. Studia Poświęcone pamięci Profesora Władysława Eugeniusza Czaplińskiego w 100 rocznicę urodzin*, ed. K. Matwijowski, „Prace Historyczne”, 36, (2005), 129–135.

⁶⁷ G. Chomicki, *Dyplomatyczne reperkusje konwersji królewicza Fryderyka Augusta w świetle raportów posłów brytyjskich*, [in:] *Rzeczpospolita wielu wyznań. Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji, Kraków 18–20 listopada 2002*, ed. A. Kaźmierczyk, A.K. Link–Lenczowski, M. Markiewicz, K. Matwijowski, Kraków 2004, 525–540.

well as short and long works are to some extent based on Viennese sources. Lacking, however, is a systematisation of research on the political relations between Poland and the Empire. The necessity of changing this situation was postulated in 1983 by Józef A. Gierowski in his short article, wherein he indicated the need for research not only on political relations, but also on those of an economic and cultural nature, of which we have only a very fragmentary understanding⁶⁸. This understanding was not improved by the publication by J. Staszewski, however interesting, which systematically looked at that (Saxon) period in the history of both nations⁶⁹, nor by the article by the Viennese historian Christoph Augustynowicz⁷⁰. The state of the work in the field of Polish–Hungarian relations appears significantly worse. Aside from the article by Jarochoowski previously mentioned, we can only make very cautious recourse to the introduction the memoirs of Francis II Rákóczi⁷¹.

Similar dissatisfaction is felt in analysing Polish–Brandenburg relations. There has, however, been a recent publication of a synthesis of the history of the Prussian Kingdom from 1701–1806⁷², in which the

⁶⁸ J.A. Gierowski, *Stosunki polsko–austriackie w czasach saskich*, „Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, (1983), 4, 517–526.

⁶⁹ J. Staszewski, *Die polnisch–österreichischen Beziehungen im 18. Jahrhundert. Anmerkungen zum Stand der Forschung*, [in:] W. Lukan, M. Demeter Peyfuss (Hg.), *Aus polnisch–österreichischer Vergangenheit*, (=Österreichische Osthefte, 32, Wien 1990), 7–35.

⁷⁰ Ch. Augustynowicz, *Habsburgisch–polnische Beziehungen vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Polnisch–österreichische Kontakte sowie Militärbündnisse 1618–1918. Symposium und Abendvortrag 11. und 12. September 2008*, Acta Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, Wien 2009, 41–76.

⁷¹ *Franciszek II Rakoczy, Pamiętniki. Wyznania*, ed. J.R. Nowak, Warszawa 1988, 5–43, Biblioteka Pamiętników Polskich i Obcych, ed. Z. Lewinówna.

⁷² *Prusy w okresie monarchii absolutnej (1701–1806)*, ed. B. Wachowiak, Poznań 2010.

relationship of Poland to the Hohenzollern nation is discussed⁷³. Also helpful may prove to be the short articles by Józef A. Gierowski on the Prussian plans to support a coup in Poland in 1715 in the aim of increasing royal authority, an intention which in any case had accompanied Prussian policy since at least 1710 (the famous *grand dessin* for the subjugation of the North at the expense of Poland)⁷⁴. Articles of Wanda Klesińska on the takeover of Elbląg by Brandenburg in 1698 and the repercussions in diplomatic contacts with Poland are equally of interest⁷⁵. The work of Jacek Staszewski should also be remembered, addressing the unsuccessful attempt to draw Augustus II into a Prussian partitioning scheme in 1733 and its later consequences in 19th century historical literature. It attributes to Wettin the foiling of plans to partition the Commonwealth, a notion that was “swallowed” without a shadow of doubt by Communist propaganda of the twentieth century⁷⁶.

It is the duty of the chronicler to remember the work of Władysław Konopczyński concerning the relations of the Commonwealth with Sweden. This was published over 80 years ago and covers the period between the treaty of Oliva to the third partition of Poland in 1795⁷⁷. Zbigniew Anusik joined the discussion on Polish international policy through his biography of the king of Sweden Charles XII of Wittelsbach⁷⁸.

⁷³ A. Kamieński, *Polityka zagraniczna Prus 1701–1740*, [in:] *Prusy w okresie monarchii absolutnej (1701–1806)...*, 210–219.

⁷⁴ J. Gierowski, *Pruski projekt zamach stanu w Polsce w 1715 r.*, „Przegląd Historyczny”, 50, (1959), 4, 753–767.

⁷⁵ W. Klesińska, *Okupacja Elbląga przez Brandenburgię w latach 1698–1700*, „Rocznik Elbląski”, 4, (1969), 85–121.

⁷⁶ J. Staszewski, *Ostatni „wielki plan” Augusta Mocnego*, „Rocznik Gdański”, 46, (1986), 1, 45–67.

⁷⁷ W. Konopczyński, *Polska a Szwecja: od pokoju oliwskiego do upadku Rzeczypospolitej 1660–1795*, Warszawa 1924.

⁷⁸ Z. Anusik, *Karol XIII*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 2006.

Unfortunately, Polish historiography still lacks classic biographies that would bring international issues into focus rather than simply chronicling the lives and achievements of rulers. We have practically no understanding of the diplomatic operations of the Polish and Saxon ministers. Thanks to Władysław Konopczyński, one of the most important ministers of Augustus II, manager of foreign affairs, Jakub Henryk Flemming, was discussed in an article of several dozen pages in the Polish Biographical Dictionary⁷⁹, and his biography was refreshed relatively recently in a short article by Teresa Zielińska⁸⁰.

This necessarily brief review offers many reflections on the subject of the state of Polish historiography related to the thirty-year reign of Augustus II Wettin. We see an important difference in the state of the works on specific stages of his reign. The first of them, coming during the Great Northern War with its tremendous importance for the region (up to the victory at Poltava in 1709) is well documented. The first important gap appears after the return of the king from Saxony and his reclaiming of the throne. Those years, 1710–1714, are in my opinion treated unjustly by some historians as the prelude to the Tarnogród Confederation (1715–1717) and the nobles' movement directed by the Saxon forces stationed in Poland. Thanks to the work of J. A. Gierowski, these events are not a “blank spot” to us. A real problem appears in the analysis of the 1720s and 1730s, known in historiography as the “mild rule” of Augustus II. Here we are practically helpless as partial study does not clarify the most important internal and external problems of the Polish state. These periods, therefore,

⁷⁹ W. Konopczyński, *Flemming Jakub Henryk*, „Polski Słownik Biograficzny”, 8, (1948), 32–35; *Feldmarszałek Flemming*, „Roczniki Historyczne”, 18, Poznań 1949, 163–180.

⁸⁰ T. Zielińska, *Feldmarszałek Jakub Flemming w środowiskach magnatów polskich*, [in:] *Polska–Saksonia w czasach unii (1697–1763). Próba nowego spojrzenia*, ed. K. Bartkiewicz, Zielona Góra 1998, 115–128.

constitute an immeasurable field of study for future generations of historians. The thesis put forward in 1978 by Emanuel Rostworowski remains valid today: the Commonwealth of the time became a stage upon which costumed people played their games, pretending to take action⁸¹. Could that assessment, however, be too severe?

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⁸¹ E. Rostworowski, *Polska w układzie sił politycznych Europy XVIII wieku*, [in:] *Polska w epoce Oświecenia, państwo–społeczeństwo–kultura...*, 11–59.

