Ryszard Skowron, Ceremonial, Etiquette, Residence. Europeanism and Own Traditions at the Court of the Polish Kings 1370–1648,
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In September 1524, in a letter to William Warham, archbishop of Canterbury, Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus complained of violent attacks made on him by his opponents. He added, however, that he had some friends: Pope Clement VII, Francis I of France, Archduke Ferdinand Habsburg, and the people of Poland – *Polonia mea est*. In order to understand the context of this remark, it is necessary to refer to a letter which Roterodamus wrote to Iost Ludwig Decius, secretary to the king of Poland, Sigismund I, one year earlier. In this letter we find declarations of admiration and friendship towards Poland and its inhabitants: »I congratulate a nation which – however, previously was considered to be barbarous – is developing now rapidly in the fields of science, law, customs, religion and everything which is in contrast to uncouthness, so it can compete with the most cultured nations in the world«.\(^1\)

The development thus noted by Erasmus was very rapid during the reign of Sigismund I, and encompassed cultural, social, legal, and religious areas, all of which paralleled and augmented similar changes occurring throughout Europe.

The issue of Poland’s dependency for its development on contacts with the West has been an object of study for almost two hundred years. The shaping of Europe as an interconnected whole was a complex process, and one which took place in different spheres of historical reality. One can trace the spreading of the Western model through studies on political relations, as well as on different social, economic and cultural structures, and the comparison of institutions and systems within which societies functioned. The Latin world was gradually united through processes defined as reception, adaptation, diffusion, and imitation. This movement towards a European »whole«, which took place because of the tightening and intensification of contacts between the centre and the peripheries, was a slow and selective process, with much adaptation to local conditions.

In relation to the main thrust of this defence of my postdoctoral thesis, I would like to stress in the introduction that it is practically impossible to focus on Burgundian influences in Poland because of the existing source base and the lack of scholarly attention to this matter thus far. Furthermore, much work on the issue of ceremonial and etiquette remains to be done. If we refer to indices of publications concerning relations between Poland and Western Europe, studies on culture, customs, literature, or art, we are not likely to encounter the words »Burgundy« or »Burgundian«.

\(^1\) Maria Cytowska (ed.), *Korespondencja Erazma z Rotterdamu z Polakami*, Warsaw 1965, p. 5.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 21.
As far as the dissemination of foreign influences are concerned, royal courts were the most susceptible environment for foreign cultural models and, therefore, a good place to begin. While trying to outline the course of the »westernization« of the Polish court during the period from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, I will present only examples which demonstrate the processes and models involved in the acceptance of foreign influences.

One of the oldest-known Polish coronation formulae and its order of ceremony are included in a codex from the first half of the fifteenth century. This codex is kept in the Archives of the Krakow Cathedral. »Ordo ad cornandum ad regem Poloniae« was prepared for the coronation of Ladislaus III Jagiellon in 1434, and the »Ordo ad benedicendum reginam Polonia eis« is connected with the anointment of Elisabeth Habsburg, the wife of Casimir IV Jagiellon.

The basic elements of the coronation were very similar in all such royal ceremonies in Europe at this time, from Aragon to Poland. The model for them was provided by formulae included in a tenth-century Romano-German pontifical. The model was supplemented, expanded or reduced, depending on local needs, but its basic elements – oath, anointment with holy oils, placing the crown in conjunction with the passing of insignia and enthronement – remained the same and did not disturb the internal structure of the model (by using the same words, gestures and objects).

Nevertheless, Ladislaus III’s ordo is not the oldest Polish formula of royal anointment; an earlier formula is also known. It is written in a manuscript dating from the second half of the fourteenth century, and was introduced to the fifteenth-century pontificals of the Krakow bishops Zbigniew Oleśnicki and Tomasz Strzempiński. The fourteenth-century ordo is very general in character since it contains no reference to the situation in Krakow or broader Poland. Neither is there any information on the actual course and participants of the ceremony. Therefore, I will concentrate here above all on the genesis of Ladislaus III’s ordo. I will not discuss the course of the ceremony in detail because it is available to European scholars in English, thanks to Aleksander Gieysztor’s article published in the joint publication »Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchical Ritual«.

The »Ordo ad cornandum ad regem Poloniae« for Ladislaus III was based on the text of the coronation ordo for the kings of Bohemia, reformed after 1347 by Charles IV Luxembourg, in which earlier Bohemian tradition melded with the fourteenth-century coronation formulae of the emperor and the king of France.

The Polish text does not fully adhere to the Bohemian formula. This probably reflects the need to adapt to Krakow, and Polish conditions generally: the Archbishop of Prague was replaced by the Archbishop of Gniezno; pilgrimage to Visegrad became instead a pilgrimage to the Saint Stanislaus Church at Skalka (the place of the bishop’s martyrdom); the altar of Saint Vitus, in front of which kings were crowned in the Prague Cathedral, was replaced with the altar of Saint Stanislaus; and the Chapel of Saint Vaclav, from which the holy oil for anointing the king was brought, was superseded by the chapel of Saint Catherine. These changes are logical and did not disturb the internal structure of the model.

In the Bohemian ordo the king swore the royal oath after the enthronement and singing of the »Te Deum». In the Polish formula the oath occurred in the first part of the ceremony, before the anointment and the handing in of the royal insignia. This possibly reflects the earlier practice.

A serious departure from the Bohemian model is connected with the stage of the coronation rite at which the royal insignia were given to the king. In both ordines, the first action was the donning of the mantle and then handing the sword, brassards and the ring. According to the Bohemian ceremonial, after putting on the ring the king placed the sword on the altar. The sword was later bought by one of the king’s officials who held it in front of the king until the end of the ceremony. After the rite of buying the sword, the archbishop handed the king the sceptre and the orb and, together with two bishops who co-celebrated the ceremony, placed the crown on the king’s head. This contrasts with the Polish ordo, where there is no rite of buying the sword. Having received the sword from the bishop, the king made the sign of the cross with it, in the direction of the four corners of the world. This custom seems to have older Polish origins and was of major importance in public receptions. As late as 1633 one of the participants in a coronation wrote: sign this, pray God is fortunate, that he shall defend all borders and recapture lost land with a sword. Then the king placed the sword on his left shoulder from where it was taken by the sword-bearer (miecznik) who put it in the sheath and passed it to the archbishop. He, in turn, girded the king with the sword-belt, reciting the traditional chant from the tenth century: Accipe gladium. Then, according to the ordo, the brassards and the ring were put on. This was followed by the culminating rite, which was the placing of the crown. The Archbishop performed this by himself. Only after the crowning itself was complete did the sceptre and the orb come into play. The ritual finished with the enthronement.

In Polish historiography it was generally thought that the coronations of the next Polish kings were conducted according to this ordo, composed for Ladislaus III. However, Zbigniew Dalewski has recently convincingly pointed out that the »Ordo ad cornandum ad regem Poloniae« was used no earlier than for the anointment of Alexander Jagiellon in 1501.

8 Marek Radoszewski, Diariusz koronacyjnej Najjaśniejszego Władysława Zygmunta IV, Opole 2002, p. 34.
The coronation did not end in the cathedral. Having left the church, the king processed to the castle where a feat was performed during which the king sat under a canopy at a separate table. The following day (most often on a Monday) the last act of the ceremony took place. The king went in a ceremonial procession from the Wawel Castle to the Market Square, where he sat on a throne and received the homage of the townspeople, knighting a few of them. It was the most secular part of the whole ceremony, and a great spectacle for the people; a visible demonstration of royal power.

The funeral of the previous king was inseparably connected with the coronation ceremony. The oldest information concerning funeral ceremonial comes from 1370 and concerns the funeral of Casimir the Great, the last Piast on the Polish throne. Indeed, this king had two funerals. The first one took place on 7 November, two days after his death, and was organised by the anti-Angevin faction, who thereby demonstrated their aversion to the impending accession of Louis Angevin after the death without heirs of Casimir the Great. Louis, however, after arriving and being crowned king, ordered ceremonial obsequies on 17 November. Joannis de Czarnkow described them in detail in his »Chronica Polonorum«. This text is one of the most extensive such accounts to survive from fourteenth-century Europe. Ralph Giesey did not use it in his study on funeral ceremonial of French kings, even though this text is an important source relating not only to the Angevin dynasty, but also to the discussion on the personalisation of the dead during *pompa funebris*. The complete description which is found in the chronicle may be divided into three parts: the first is the description of the funeral procession to three churches in Krakow, where offerings for the deceased were placed on the altars; the second, considerably more extensive, describes the course of the ceremony in the cathedral, the culminating point of which was the funeral mass, during which material offerings, or so-called *spolia*, were placed on the altar as *mortuarium*.

The aspect which arouses much interest and discussion between scholars is the appearance, at the funeral of Casimir the Great, of a figure who personified the dead king (*miles regia veste deaurata indutus in ambulatore regio optimo, purpura co-operato, ipsius regis mortui personam repraesentes*), and who, during the placing of the offerings, was, together with the horse, also symbolically offered at the cathedral. In Polish historiography, the dominant opinion is that this ceremony has Hungarian origins, since it is very similar to the funeral of Charles Robert, father of the king of Hungary and Poland, Louis Angevin, in 1342. The Hungarian account of

9 Dalewski, Ceremonial koronacyjny (as in n. 7).
this funeral, which is included in »Chronicae Hungarorum«, or, more precisely, the chronicle of Johannes of Küküllő, gives an account of three knights who rode horses belonging to the deceased, and who were also wearing his armour which he had worn during tournaments, jousting and military expeditions. According to the chronicler, they appeared in »persona et spiritu eiusdem domini regis«. The knights halted in front of the door to the basilica (in Alba Iulia). They entered it only when the offerings were being placed and were presented as offerings, together with armour and horses.

While the connection between the Polish and the Hungarian ceremonies is thus rendered visible, it is also seen fully-developed. We have no intimation of the origins of this ritual, which would allow us to capture the process in formation. However, as the personification-of-the-dead-as-offering is first connected with the Angevins, some scholars think that its origins will be found in the lands under that dynasty’s rule, which would indicate France and the kingdom of Naples. Giesey quotes two examples of représentans la personne du mort quand il viviot from France. The first relates to the funeral of Jean, son of Randonet Armand, Viscount of Polignac; the second is connected with the obsequies celebrated in 1389 for the Constable of France, Bertrand du Guesclin, in which, as in Krakow, there was no available corpse. In France, however, this practice did not become customary at royal funerals. However, it appeared in England during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, notably during the funerals of Edward IV (1483), Prince Arthur (1502) and Henry VII (1509).

The funeral liturgy did not provide special forms for royal funerals. The »Rituale sacramentarum« from the fifteenth century, which is preserved in the archives of the Krakow cathedral, includes texts of Carolingian funerary liturgy which reached Poland through the Roman pontifical. They did not contain any separate prayer connected with the ruler.

According to many sources, during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries there were some changes to the ceremonial that had been used at the funeral of Casimir the Great. However, the lack of detail precludes a full study. It was not earlier than 1548, after the death of King Sigismund I, that the »Ordo pompae funebris«, which referred to the ceremony of 1370, was drawn up. Two royal funerals in the sixteenth century – those of Sigismund Augustus in 1574, and Stefan Batory in 1588 – also followed these instructions. Written anew, this very detailed set of instructions in the necessary symbolic rites reflected the ideological and systemic changes which took place in Poland during the course of almost two centuries.

Similarly, as with the coronations, we will present the elements which contribute to the uniqueness of the funerary ceremonial of Polish kings. In the »Ordo pompae
funebris», in a depiction of ceremonies in 1548, there is a knight in armour with a squire and, known from the funeral in 1370, a personification of the dead king wearing the royal robe. The earliest example of a knight with an unsheathed sword dates to the description of the funeral ceremony of Casimir Jagiellon, in 1492 (eques armis regis inauratis indutus). In several sixteenth-century ceremonies, the knight wearing the armour of the deceased is referred to as eques totus armatus, eques catapharactus, and in Polish, rycerz w kirysie. For example, at the funeral in 1548, eques armatus wore the armour Sigismund I received from Emperor Maximilian, at the Vienna convention in 1515. The »Ordo«, and other sources which describe the course of sixteenth-century funerals, clearly distinguish the knight in armour from the person wearing the royal robe and thereby personifying the king. This person was referred to as a rider – veste Regia indutus nigra – a courtier »in royal robes«, personifying the king, or more directly, »the person of the dead king«.

Let us have now a closer look at the place and role of the two characters in the funeral ceremony. Eques totus armatus, equo catafaracato insidens, with a lowered, unsheathed sword, rode immediately after the biers, which were thirty in total. A squire with a shield bearing the royal arms, and a banner directed to the ground, bearing on either side the emblems of the Crown and Lithuania, rode behind him, followed by a rider in a black robe. After them marched the senate, princes and foreign envoys, followed by a group of high officials who carried the royal insignia, and after them came the bier carrying the corpse of the king. The knight in armour, the squire, and the person in the black robe clearly form a separate group, one which took part in all the processions. This group played a key role on the last day of the ceremony, during Mass in the cathedral. Throughout the service, the group in question stood at the entrance to the cathedral, with small, lit candles on the sword, helmet, shield, and the spear with the banner. These symbols of the king-knight were then taken by the senators, who handed the helmet to King Sigismund Augustus (he was crowned as early as 1530). The remainders were given to the princes and foreign envoys.

At that time the officials, who on the first day had carried the royal insignia, placed on a bier, formed a procession at »Agnus Dei«, and the eques catafaractus rode a horse between the bier and the altar, falling from the horse with a clatter, crying Deus est propitius animae heri mei. The officials then placed the royal insignia on the altar and King Sigismund Augustus threw the helmet to the ground, and the same was done with the shield and the sword. The person carrying the spear, which bore the banner of the arms of Poland and Lithuania, broke its shaft and threw the upper part, with the banner, at the feet of Sigismund Augustus. The king took it from the floor and passed it to one of the senators. After this act the marshals broke their staves and the chancellors smashed the seals against the floor.

Dramaturgy and the richness of symbols used in the funerary rites of the Polish kings, particularly in their last stage, made the funeral one of the most exceptional ceremonies, and one which combined European models with local tradition. The knight in armour, the key character in the drama, symbolised the king-knight (rex armatus), while the role of »the person in the royal robe«, deprived of all the other royal attributes, remains unclear. Did he play a role similar to that of effigies at the
funerals of French kings, as some scholars claim, or did he remain a personification of the king, as others believe? Reading and determining the origins of symbols is not easy and often requires further consideration. One of the most important sources for this purpose is the Latin poem «Historia funebris in obitu divi Sigismundi Sarmatiarum regis et ad Sigismundum Augustum filium admonitio» by Pedro Ruiz de Morales, a Spanish lawyer and a professor of the Krakow Academy, who witnessed the ceremonies. According to him, the fall from the horse symbolised the death of the king, and the throwing of the sword, shield, and helmet demonstrated the sorrow caused by his death. Urszula Borkowska suggests a connection between these gestures and the ritual of Good Friday, when liturgy books were thrown on the church floor as a sign of bereavement after Christ’s death. The spear carrying the banner, which bore the royal arms, played a particularly important role. The breaking of its shaft was one of the signs connected with the death of the king, but the fact that it was immediately retrieved from the floor by Sigismund Augustus, and later on by a king-elect, demonstrated that the *Corona Regni Poloniae* never dies.

The *Corona Regni Poloniae* separated the person of the king from that of the office held by him. In an elective monarchy, it was not the practice to declare, as it was in a kingdom such as France – and, indeed, as was shouted at the funeral of Francis I, at the Cathedral of Saint-Denis – *Le roy est mort! Vive le roy, vive Henri deuxièm de nom par la grace de Dieu roy de France, a qui Dieu doit bonne vie*. Despite the fact that a king-elect would usually take part in a funerary ceremony, his name could not be uttered in connection with the dead king, as he was only granted complete power after his coronation.

The ceremony of the funeral mystery, as written in 1548, survived until 1633. At that time, the custom of holding a royal funeral the day before a coronation took its final shape. Beginning with the funeral of Sigismund III, funerary and coronation ceremonies were divided into the following events, which sometimes took place on consecutive days: the king-elect’s ceremonial entry into Krakow; the funeral of the dead king; a pilgrimage to Saint Stanislaus at Skalka; the coronation of the new king; and, finally, on the fifth day, homage was paid by lieges to the new king at the Krakow Market Square. It should also be noted that, simultaneously, a coronation Sejm, that would usually have begun a few days before the coronation, was debating.

In studies on the courts of Polish kings, the problem of etiquette is dealt with only marginally. The close relations that existed between the two last Jagiellonians and Vasas with the Habsburgs of Vienna and Madrid, the courts of the five Habsburgs...
Queens (Elisabeth, Catherine, Anna, Constance, and Cecilia Renata), and the lively, broadly understood contacts with Vienna, pose a question: to what extent was Polish ceremonial and etiquette influenced, copied, imitated, and modified, not only at the court of the kings, but also at the courts of magnates, or even in the everyday rituals of the gentry?

According to diaries and other sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, criticism by, or even hostility of, the gentry towards the standards of behaviour present at the Habsburg courts was an expression of megalomania, xenophobia, and fear of the absolutum dominium identified with the Habsburgs. It was also a result, to some extent, of being under the influence of the Black Legend of Spain. For the gentry who criticized or mocked Spanish etiquette did not see that their own behaviour was very frequently similar to that of the Spanish, or that different gestures held the same meaning. This is exemplified by such gestures as the covering or uncovering of one’s head, ritual kissing, accepted tiers of hierarchy, and the use of titles, or order of precedence.

Many Polish historians frequently succumb to the temptations presented by the aforementioned sources, regarding Habsburg ceremonial and etiquette as the defining influence upon Poland, while ignoring the medieval, Burgundian influences. In Polish historiography, Spanish etiquette is associated with the rule of Sigismund III and Ladislaus IV. At the same time, it remains worth stressing that research into the structure and function of the royal court as a whole, and also of its particular political, economic, social, and religious aspects, is poorly developed. The best studied facet is that of culture, particularly the arts and patronage. Given the present state of research it is not surprising that we do not have even one study dealing with etiquette, but, rather, more or less successful and short references to it, formulated while working on other, more studied, subjects.

Czesław Lechicki, in his study of the patronage of Sigismund III, proposed a thesis that the king, imitating the courts of Vienna, Prague, and Madrid, »acclimatized« at his court Spanish etiquette, which standardized such details of court life as precedence of entry, table manners, ceremonial regarding taking rest or getting up, and of receiving guests. According to Lechicki, the court of Sigismund III »did not accept nor borrow the etiquette uncritically, as in the case of a free-elective ruler, who was practically a president of the republic of the gentry, it would be offensive, and the etiquette had to be modified in a more liberal spirit, although its keynotes: dignity, stiffness, hierarchization, were for Sigismund III’s closest circle reliable and directives«. Regarding ceremonial and etiquette, the courts in Vienna and Prague undoubtedly constituted, to some extent, a model for the last Jagiellonians and the Vasas, as well as for the magnates. The scope of this influence, and the notion defined by Lechicki as »acclimatization«, requires detailed research, but before this, some familiarity with particular elements of the ceremonial and etiquette, their development and function, is necessary. The most serious problem facing research into the etiquette and organ-

24 Ibid., p. 148.
izational structure of the Polish royal court is the lack of written or codified resources; kings did not issue ordinances regulating the structure of ceremonies or matters of etiquette within their courts.

The political model of the Polish state was fundamental in the shaping, development, and functioning of court etiquette. Two aspects in particular wielded a strong influence: equality within the ranks of the gentry, and a type of partnership between the ruler and the gentry. Not only did the gentry resist the introduction of aristocratic titles, but, also, by placing limits on the royal prerogative, made it impossible for the king to shape the court according to his wishes. Rather, the ruler would nominate his officials for life, or would inherit them from his predecessor. However, the community of the gentry was ranked according to the offices held, whether central, court or land. The hierarchy from the sixteenth century onwards was set by the Sejm, but almost only in relation to senatorial and ministerial offices.

The court of the Polish kings, similarly to other European courts, was subject to a high degree of hierarchical organization. The position of any given category of courtiers in the hierarchy determined the position of particular individuals within this group, both at court and in society. The court hierarchy shaped a system of formal and informal connections as well as dependencies. It is very difficult to determine the structure of the court, the position and functions of particular offices, or their mutual relations, on the basis of the existing sources. In addition, it should be noted that, even for contemporaries, many of these issues were not clear; a fact which is reflected in the text by Marcin Kromer, »Poloniae gentisque et reipublicae descriptinis«, published in 1575. According to Urszula Augustyniak, establishing the truth of a formal hierarchy within the Polish court, without ordinances regarding the etiquette and ceremonial, seems impossible. Similarly, Marek Ferenc, the author of the first modern monograph on the court of Sigismund Augustus, does not attempt to establish even an approximate hierarchy at the court, as that would require separate and laborious research. At present, then, the specific nature of the court’s structure remains unknown, and so appears amorphous, as matters such as recruitment, remuneration, competence, and promotion of officials remain to be determined.

It appears likely that the nature of the hierarchy within the Polish court presented one of many barriers which prevented the introduction of either the strongly hierarchical and stiff Spanish etiquette, or that of the Habsburg court. The organization and etiquette of the Polish court was based mainly on the tradition and practice of the king, marshal, and chamberlain (sucamerarius curie). Professional officials, using and gathering experience from one generation to another, did not decide the course of a ceremony or the behaviour of the courtiers; the magnates holding particular offices attended to such matters. A formalized and meticulous etiquette, present in most European courts, could not function at the Polish court. The Polish king was not isolated, and so gaining access to the king was much easier than it was elsewhere, both

25 Marcin Cromer, Poloniae gentisque et reipublicae descriptinis, Frankfurt 1575.
for the courtiers and other members of the gentry. Stanislaw Orzechowski, one of the most remarkable writers on the politics of sixteenth-century Poland, informs us that all the apartments of Sigismund I were exposed and accessible to the public. This accessibility continued throughout the reign of Sigismund II, according to an anonymous treatise on the role of the king and the order of the royal court. This author criticises the ease of access to the king and his quarters, and further comments upon the unpleasant manners of the courtiers, and the need to impress upon them the importance of rank and its proper observance. The treatise goes on to stress the necessity of maintaining the dignity and authority of the king, as the royal example influences both court and society. The king is, therefore, encouraged to take inspiration from other, more formal, European courts. Anna Sucheni Grabowska suggests that the author of this treatise might be the Castellan of Krakow, the military commander of note, Jan Tarnowski. If this is indeed the case, the court held up as an exemplar is most likely that of Vienna, as it was well known to Tarnowski, and he maintained good relations with the House of Habsburg. Indeed, in recognition of his fidelity to Austria, the emperor Charles V awarded him the title of count in 1547. However, despite the remonstrations of the anonymous author, etiquette did not greatly affect the Polish king’s everyday activities, nor did it constrain the activities of his closest circle. Under Polish conditions this lack of formal etiquette was not a threat to the dignity and majesty of the king. For the said majesty resulted mainly from the respect by the gentry towards one of their own class, as was pointed out in the middle of the seventeenth century: When respecting the king we respect ourselves in his person and that maiestatem dominationis that we gave him through our free votes.

While this «liberal» etiquette was practised on a daily basis at the Polish court, it was not applied to diplomatic matters. When meeting representatives of foreign states – notably at diplomatic audiences, or during royal weddings – the etiquette was far more formal, resembling in many ways the customs of other European courts, but with clear Polish overtones. Accounts by foreign participants provide the most detailed descriptions available of the ceremonials and etiquette at these times, as well as personal evaluations. Paolo Mucante, the secretary of Cardinal Enrico Gaetano, gave the following account of a feast which took place at the royal castle in 1596, after the baptism of Sigismund III’s daughter:

The tables have already been filled with various dishes for the main course, however I do not have knowledge about the tablecloth that covered the king’s table, on the one side gold plates and a basket filled with bread cut into small pieces, all this covered with a black cotton cloth. Before 20 p.m. the king entered and sat down in the middle under a baldaquin, accompanied by the cardinal. Before the king sat down, the cardinal had taken off his cap, and so did the nuncio. One of the king’s chaplains blessed the table. Lavishly sewed towels were spread in front of the king, cardinal, and the chaplain, then serving trays were brought with cups de chrystal de roche

28 Stanislaw Orzechowski.
and after infinite bows water was brought to wash hands of the king, cardinal, nuncio. Then, platters were served to every one of them, there were infinite bends and bows by those who would bring the platters as well as by those who would prepare the food and serve it. Each dish was first served by the royal chef, bowing, to the carver, then the carver would pass it to the Master of the Pantry, who finally dipped a piece of bread (already prepared) in a dish, placed the piece on his tongue, and then would throw it into a nearby silver basket, for so long that the king and the cardinal had to wait for a considerable period of time before they started eating.

When reading the above description the analogies with the ceremonial of a Spanish king’s meal seem obvious. Several weeks after this event, in January 1597, the Admiral of Aragon, Francisco de Mendoza, the ambassador of King Philip II, came to Warsaw. Mendoza described in detail his entry into Warsaw, and the lodging, audience and ceremonial dinner given by the king in his honour. It can be clearly inferred from the report that his dignity was preserved and the diplomatic ceremonial was properly observed. He gave the following account of the dinner:

Each of the many accounts given by foreigners describing formal court ceremonies in Poland, particularly during the rule of the Vasas, demonstrates the favourable impression created. Even if we take into account either an apparent tendency, on the part of the authors, to effusive praise, or the manner of writing characteristic of that period, the fascination of the foreigners with the ceremonials at the Polish court seems authentic. Let me quote one more fragment that constitutes an evaluation of other ceremonies, not discussed above. It also demonstrates that, for the observers from Western Europe, Polish court ceremonies were of a type with those of Europe generally. Giacomo Fantuzzi, the secretary of the nuncio Giovanni de Torres, wrote:
I happened to witness numerous conventions of the gentry as well as Sejms, the election of the reigning king, ceremonial coronation of His Royal Highness and Her Royal Highness, meetings, receptions, entries of great ambassadors, in particular from Moscow, ceremonial entries of the king and, separately, the queen when she came to Poland and when they both visited main, commendable cities of the kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, ceremonies, which can undoubtedly be described as the greatest in Europe.

In conclusion I would like to mention the Burgundian issue. The most visible symbol of Burgundy in Poland, in the seventeenth century, was the Order of the Golden Fleece. The first Polish ruler to receive this honour was Sigismund I, in 1519, and the order was granted to almost every seventeenth-century Polish king thereafter: in 1600 Sigismund III; 1615 Prince Ladislaus Vasa (king since 1646); 1639 John Casimir Vasa (king since 1648); 1669 Michal Korybut Wisniowiecki. The only Polish ruler not granted the order was John III Sobieski, mainly because he already held the Order of the Holy Ghost. However, it should be emphasized that in the seventeenth century Polish rulers were the only crowned heads in Europe, other than the Austrian House, who were admitted as Knights of the Golden Fleece. The first two Vasas enlisted the order as a buttress for an ideological position. Sigismund III immediately began to use it as a symbolic manifestation of both the religious basis of the kingship and of his friendship with the Habsburgs. The chain of the Golden Fleece became an important augmentation to every royal and national symbol, including the Vasa coat of arms and the national flag, originally created in 1605. The chain appeared in the newly-renovated Wawel palace, notably above a large fireplace in the audience hall and on the portals of the palace doors. It decorated the clock tower of the Warsaw Castle and the façade of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Krakow. Indeed, it was present whenever and wherever there was the royal emblem on everyday items such as bottles, cups, candlesticks and book covers. Ladislaus IV, on the other hand, who had a particularly close and friendly relationship with the court in Madrid, attempted to establish the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the purpose of which, among other goals, was to create a political elite connected to the king. This issue incited discussion and resistance among the gentry, who seemed to regard the move as a breach of their freedom, a matter which they held sacred. Finally, in 1638, in the face of stiff opposition, the king was forced to relinquish the idea. Numerous polemical writings on the king’s project refer to the Golden Fleece in relation to Spain. However, no mention was made regarding the connection between the order and Burgundy, a state of affairs which is all too typical of the source material relating to the relationship between Poland and the duchy.

34 Skowron, Dyplomaci polscy (as in n. 31).