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**PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE
OF NUNCIO JULIUS PIAZZA
WITH BISHOP AGOSTINO STEFFANI
OF THE YEARS 1706-1708***

ABSTRACT: The article presents the content of the private letters of J. Piazza, Nuncio for Poland, residing in Troppau, to the Vicar Apostolic to the north (for the area of Northern Germany), Bishop A. Steffani, in the years 1706-1708. Letters show difficult circumstances in which Piazza had to fulfil his duties of the Nuncio after the abdication of King Augustus II. According to the viewpoint of papal diplomacy, he supported the right of Augustus as a legitimate ruler to the Polish throne. These private letters provide us with numerous detailed information included in the official reports that Piazza prepared for the Secretary of State.

KEYWORDS: papal diplomacy, nunciature, Vicar Apostolic, Julius Piazza, Agostino Steffani.

The interest of the scholars in the history of the nunciature is still growing. Not only was it influenced by the re-establishment of the relations between Poland and the Holy See in 1989, but also, or above all, by the commencement of the edition of all acts of the Polish nunciature, perceived in terms of making sets of source materials available illustrating the functioning of this diplomatic mission from the early 16th century until the outbreak of the Second World War.¹

The primary source for learning about the diplomatic activities of the nuncios, as well as problems connected to the relations between Poland and the Holy See, is rich correspondence of the nuncios with the

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¹ A valuable introduction to the state of the research is included in: *Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae* (henceforth: ANP) vol. I, auctore H. D. Wojtyńska, Romae 1990. See also: J. A. Gierowski, *Akta nuncjatury w Rzymie*, „Tygodnik Powszechny” 1990 No. 14, p. 6; W. Tygielski, *Nuncjatura Apostolska w Polsce – ambasada nietypowa?*, „Mówią Wieki” R. 32: 1989 No. 5, pp. 19-27; Z. Zieliński, *Nuncjatura w Polsce. Rys historyczny*, „Życie i Myśl” Nos. 1-2: 1991 pp. 39-47.

Secretary of State in Rome. It was there that all the fundamental problems of a political and ecclesiastical nature found their reflection, which nuncios had to face in their post. It also made it possible to follow the successive changes in the position of the Popes and the Secretaries of State on the issues forwarded by the nuncios. Apart from the correspondence and its exchange between Krakow, Warsaw and Rome, further materials referring to official documents can be distinguished, such as nominations for nuncios handed over in the form of papal breve, letters of credence, envoy's instructions, including main guidelines referring to nuncios' actions during their missions, jurisdictional permissions (the so-called *facultates*), *acta contentiosa* and *gratiosa* (being the effect of the actions of the tribunal of the nunciature), as well as information processes of the nominees for the Polish bishoprics.

No less important from the scientific point of view were materials of legal character, from *avvisi* (reports, news), being the form of the press and often issued in the printed version, diaries, as well as the correspondence maintained with the people not connected to the currently held office of the Polish Nuncio.² The title correspondence of Nuncio Julius Piazza with Bishop Agostino Steffani is exemplary of such a type of source for the Polish nunciature of the beginning of the 18th century.

1. Nuncio Julius Piazza

It may seem that in the long line of papal representatives in Poland, J. Piazza did not stand out in any particular way; he did not reside in Warsaw, but, because of the Swedish occupation, in the small Silesian town of Opava, outside Poland. However, political complications meant that his contribution to the overall assessment of the events of the period should be described as significant.

Julius Piazza belonged to a group of more experienced diplomats in the service of the Pope.³ He was born in 1663 in Forli and from early childhood, taking advantage of the support of his uncle Bishop Camilo Piazza engaged in the administrative issues of the Holy See, was part

² See: ANP I, pp. 18-40.

³ Biographical data, cf. J. K o p i e c, *Cardinale Giulio Piazza (1663-1726). Uomo della Chiesa e diplomatico papale*, „Bollettino Diocesano di Faenza-Modigliana” An. 75: 1988 Nos. 7-12, pp. 117-123.

of serious tasks connected to the management of the very state. Well educated in Collegio Nazareno in Rome and at the Sapienza University, he held the office of Papal Nuncio in many different countries from the age of 27, for the next 23 years of his life. First, he stayed in Brussels (1690-1696) as an inter-nuncio, next, after a short stay in Rome to complete his education and after having been ordained priest and bishop's sacra in 1697, he was sent to Lucerne in Switzerland (1698-1703), Cologne (1703-1706), Poland (1706-1708) and Vienna (1709-1713). He was appointed Cardinal in 1712. He is known in historiography from successful diplomatic efforts in the Vienna Court in the years 1708-1709 during tense relations between Rome and Vienna at the War of the Spanish Succession and Northern War.⁴ Perhaps this and many other cases (chances of being elected Pope in 1724) caused that his Polish nunciature remains as if in the shadow.

Following the example of his predecessor Philip Horace Spada (nuncio from 1703 to 1706), J. Piazza did not reside in the country, but in the Habsburg state, in the border town of Opava.⁵ He did not meet King Augustus II, because on arriving at his post, he found the situation just after his abdication pursuant to the Swedish-Saxon treaty signed in Altranstädt on 24 September 1706.⁶ In December of that year, Augustus II left Poland and returned in the autumn of 1709. In such circumstances, the activities of the Nuncio came down to maintain legal relations referring to the continuation of the political line realised by the Holy See towards Augustus II and Polish case. In an atmosphere of accumulated conflicts, this required the Nuncio to be exceptionally prudent and skilful in dealing with all Polish camps and fractions.

The political situation during which J. Piazza fulfilled his duties at the Polish post was very complicated for several reasons. Polish involvement in the Northern War should be comprehended in the broad context of

⁴ Cf. F. P o m e t t i, *Studi sul pontificato di Clemente XI. La Santa Sede nella guerra di successione al trono di Spagna*, „Archivio della R. Società Storia Patria” 21: 1898, pp. 399-427; H. K r a m e r, *Habsburg und Rom in den Jahren 1708-1709*, Innsbruck 1936.

⁵ Cf. J. K o p i e c, *Śląski epizod w dziejach nuncjatury polskiej w czasach Augusta II (1705-1709)*, *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny* „Sobótka” R. 47: 1992 Nos. 1-2, pp. 331-336.

⁶ The text of the treaty and its discussion, cf. H. K r e t s c h m a r, *Der Friedensschluss von Altranstädt 1706/7*, [in:] *Um die polnische Krone Sachsen und Polen während des Nordischen Krieges 1700-1721*, eds. J. K a l i s c h and J. G i e r o w s k i, Berlin 1962, pp. 161-183.

the plans of all parties, including the papacy. And invariably, for several centuries at least, plans for Russia were widely considered – the vision of the union with Russia was a driving force behind Rome’s diplomatic references to this growing power. The priority of these efforts was discernible from the beginning of the functioning of the Polish nunciature. With the passage of time, plans for re-Catholicization of Saxony were also given priority. Moreover, the possibility of taking similar efforts with regard to Sweden was also considered.⁷ With regard to the accomplishment of such intentions, this was a standpoint treated very consistently. Poland was to offer support for such plans, which was based on the loyalty of Poland to Rome and papacy.

What was new, however, were high expectations that papacy held towards Augustus, Elector of Saxony, Protestant, young ruler of his hereditary lands (b. 1670). From the beginning, that is, from his claim to the Polish throne after the death of John III Sobieski (d. 1696), and based on spectacular conversion of the Elector to Catholicism (to ascend the throne), the actions of papal diplomacy showed great determination to prove that the support and confidence once given to him will be permanent, mainly owing to their willingness to re-Catholicise Saxony.⁸ Since Sweden, through her ruler Charles XII (1697-1718), was at the time the patroness of Lutheranism, Stanisław Leszczyński, the candidate to the Polish throne proposed by the Swedish king, was not supported by the Pope. The whole case was by all means complicated and Augustus himself did not guarantee that he would be an ardent executor of these far-reaching papal plans. In addition, as the ruler of Poland, Augustus did not earn public favour, let alone the magnates and much of the gentry. Therefore, he was faced with the absolutely astonishing result: the Warsaw Confederation announced interregnum in 1704. In July of the same year, a new ruler was elected, the Poznań voivode, Stanisław Leszczyński, under the pressure of Sweden. In this coincidence, Rome’s policy focused on upholding the rights of Augustus II to the Polish throne, but at the price of the increased

⁷ See: the envoy instruction for Piazza from before 13 September 1706, ANP XLI: *Iulius Piazza (1706-1708)*, vol. 1, ed. J. K o p i e c, Romae 1991, pp. 24-32.

⁸ J. Z i e k u r s c h, *August der Stärke und die katholische Kirche in den Jahren 1697-1720*, „Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte” Bd. 24: 1903, pp. 86-135, 232-280. See also: J. S t a s z e w s k i, *Stosunki Augusta II z Kurią Rzymską w latach 1704-1706 (Misja rzymska)*, Toruń 1965.

pressure to enforce the pledges given.⁹ At the same time, the support shown to Augustus II did not mean that Polish ecclesiastical affairs were completely subordinated to this political reason, which can be evidenced by papal decisions, of which Augustus II was not much satisfied, e.g. a demand to release Bishops M. Świącicki and A. Załuski from the Saxon captivity and their transfer to Rome, or the refusal to nominate Bishop J. Bokum as the Bishop of Krakow.

A person responsible for the execution of the papal policies was Nuncio Horace Spada, later Cardinal, who was replaced by J. Piazza at the end of 1706, the hitherto Nuncio of Cologne. His political experience was highly acclaimed and his neutrality towards the parties to the conflict much desired.¹⁰

However, J. Piazza was exposed to the country being in an entirely different situation. A turning point was the abdication of Augustus II from the Polish throne, Swedish occupation of Saxony together with high contributions imposed by Charles XII, as well as Tsar Peter I's involvement in the Polish case. All this put the support announced to Augustus II in a different light. What once was gained during the nunciature of H. Spada was lost.¹¹ New solutions had to be searched for, including modifications of once adopted standpoint. This task was entrusted to a new nuncio, and this, in the light of the materials left, was executed appropriately.¹² We assess it in this way, despite the fact that the conditions for his fulfilling his duties as Nuncio were extremely complicated.

First of all, the place of residence may come as a surprise. Following the advances of the Swedish army in the Polish land and the withdrawal of Augustus II, Nuncio H. Spada also sought a safe place so as not to expose a papal diplomat to the whims of the Protestant and ambitious Swedish ruler. He had no specific solution in mind, he was heading to the south of the country, when he finally settled in Opava at the beginning of 1705.¹³ This Silesian town in the area of the Habsburg empire, belonging to the Olomouc Diocese,

⁹ It primarily concerned the Catholic upbringing of his son, later Augustus III, and the opening up of places of worship for the Catholics in Saxony, particularly in Dresden.

¹⁰ J. S t a s z e w s k i, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-144.

¹¹ The above-quoted instruction for J. Piazza is a sign of the loss of its timeliness.

¹² Cf. ANP XLI.

¹³ Cf. J. K o p i e c, *Śląski epizod*.

became a random capital of the papal representative at the Polish King. It was there that H. Spada stayed until the end of his tenure. It was also there that Piazza stayed, as well as his successor N. Spinola, who lived there till the victory of Tsar Peter I over Charles XII in Poltava in July 1709. N. Spinola left Opava in October 1709 following the retreating Swedish troops and headed for Krakow to stay at the side of Augustus II returning to the Polish throne.

2. Bishop Agostino Steffani

An addressee of the title letters of Nuncio J. Piazza was Bishop Agostino Steffani¹⁴. He was an Italian, exceptionally talented, especially musically, and owing to which he is already known to the historians of culture. At the age of 13 (b. 1654), he was in München, thanks to the Bavarian Elector Ferdinand Maria (d. 1679) to study music. He became a court organist in 1675, and in 1681 Head of the orchestra at the Elector's court. In 1680, he received holy orders. Three years later he obtained the management of the Lepsing abbacy in Bavaria. During these years, he was very active as a musician, he composed operas, wrote suites and other musical pieces, which were highly valued. In 1688, he moved as court kapellmeister to the service of Duke Ernest August of Hanover (d. 1698), who used his services at important diplomatic missions. In the years 1695-1702, A. Steffani was an envoy of Hanover at the Bavarian court, and the main goal of his mission was to obtain a favourable result of the efforts of Hanover to receive rights of the electorate of the Reich.

In 1703, A. Steffani settled in Düsseldorf at the service of Elector Johann Wilhelm von Pfalz-Neuburg (d. 1716). The Elector was interested in the re-Catholicisation of northern Germany, and this was to be achieved by supporting the efforts of the Apostolic Vicariate of the North, directly subordinate to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in Rome. The result of these endeavours was the improvement of the pastoral work, through the separation of the Apostolic Vicariate of Upper and Lower Saxony. It was Steffani himself who was entrusted authority

¹⁴ Cf. F. W. W o k e r, *Aus den Papieren des kurpfälzischen Ministers Agostino Steffani, Bischofs von Spiga*, Köln 1885; H. G. A s c h o f f, *Steffani Agostino (1654-1726)*, [in:] *Die Bischöfe des Heiligen Römischen Reiches 1648 bis 1803*, hrg. E. G a t z, Berlin 1990, pp. 483-485. See also: P F. S a f t, *Der Neuaufbau der Katholischen Kirche in Sachsen im 18 Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 1961, pp. 91-97.

over this area. In 1706, thanks to the endeavours of the Elector, Steffani was appointed titular Bishop of Spiga¹⁵ and Vicar Apostolic of the area subordinated to the Elector of Neuburg and in 1709, Vicar Apostolic for Saxony, which resulted in his moving to Hanover.

He was subsequently very active in the field of re-Catholicization and in the resolution of German affairs. By the end of his life, he had accomplished a lot in this field and was extremely useful in paving the influence of Rome and the Catholic Church in Germany.

3. The Correspondence of Julius Piazza with Agostino Steffani

In the Historical Archives of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in Rome (earlier *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*) a non-inventoried collection *Fondo Viena* can be found with a rich section Spiga, whose name originates from the titular capital of Bishop Agostino Steffani.¹⁶

The object of our interest is the collection of autographs (handwritten letters) of J. Piazza to A. Steffani from the period of the Polish nunciature of Piazza; the whole collection is much richer since it is preserved from the period of 1703-1726, that is from the moment of the arrival of Piazza to Cologne, until his death in Faenza.¹⁷ Letters are bound, arranged chronologically, left without foliation or pagination, grouped in five volumes. The state of separate volumes is very good, as is the legibility of letters. As to the writing, we can vividly see that they were written with one hand: J. Piazza's. They were written in the form of *avvisi*, with dates only, with no headings, with usual reference to the addressee, closing lines and signature of the author. Envelopes have not been preserved.

63 letters have been preserved from the period of the Polish nunciature of J. Piazza.¹⁸ The first one was written in Opava on 15 November 1706,

¹⁵ Titular bishopric of Spigacensis or Pegae in Hellepont (Greece). A. Steffani was consecrated on 2 January 1707 in the Cathedral in Bamberg.

¹⁶ This was brought to my attention by Michael Feldkamp, a scholar at the Deutsche Historisches Institut in Rome, for which I offer him my sincere gratitude.

¹⁷ Within Fondo Vienna: vol. 4, 8, 13, 14, 17. Whereas responses of Steffani, only in the form of summaries, are preserved from 1723 (vol. 68, 72, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82).

¹⁸ This is Fondo Vienna vol. 47. The examples quoted in the following narrative are taken from this volume, following the chronology of the individual letters.

i.e. two days after the arrival of the Nuncio to his post, and the last one on 3 February 1708.

It is difficult, in the light of this collection, to grasp the source of this intimate acquaintance between the two hierarchs: the content of these letters allows us to authorise such a conclusion. The long duration could indicate a deeper basis for it. Could the fact that they both came from northern Italy have played a role? Both began their activities in Germany at about the same time, and both had to face numerous difficulties. Perhaps it is there that we can search for the reasons for such a long acquaintance of both bishops-diplomats. Although the correspondence we are interested in is of a private nature, the references to political information, the broad background of the theatre of the European events at the time, should come as no surprise to a historian.

Information on the conditions of this difficult diplomatic task of the Nuncio appear to be the most inspiring. The comparison between the official reports transferred to Rome and this private correspondence allows us to supplement our knowledge with numerous details about the conditions accompanying Nuncio's diplomatic mission. He did not reveal, though, many circumstances connected to the post itself, e.g. we possess no information on the offices of the "temporary" nunciature in Opava, personnel, web of correspondents, visiting guests from different countries, etc. It cannot be excluded that more details concerning this sphere could be included in the correspondence aimed at his relatives in his homeland. We know that he had a sister¹⁹ and a cousin.²⁰ Knowing his meticulousness in relation to his supervisors in Rome or for instance towards Bishop A. Steffani, we can also assume that such family correspondence existed.²¹ This way or another, the title correspondence completes the picture of J. Piazza's work as the Polish Nuncio.

4. A review of main topics of the correspondence

A set of letters, rich in information, from J. Piazza to Bishop A. Steffani allows us to systematise their contents.

¹⁹ Cf. a letter of 25 November 1707.

²⁰ Cf. a letter of 10 June 1707.

²¹ The family materials of Piazza have not been preserved.

a) Personal situation of the Nuncio in Opava

It has already been mentioned that the Nuncio did not have an opportunity to come to the country's capital. It seems that the decision to send him to the post in Poland was received by J. Piazza without enthusiasm, and the often-occurring term "exile" may have confirmed diplomat's discipline rather than his internal approval of the mission he was entrusted to.²² It appears to be somewhat difficult to determine whether he possessed any knowledge concerning the spectrum of tasks that he was to perform and the political situation in Poland from the perspective of Cologne and German matters.

J. Piazza arrived in Opava from Vienna on Saturday 13 November 1706 at 4 in the afternoon.²³ He settled, as he himself noted, in a respectable inn or a hotel, but he intentionally did not give its name.²⁴ It is difficult to provide a reason for keeping this in secret. This does not arise in later accounts from Opava either.²⁵ However, this residence was not surrounded by secrecy, since the access to the Nuncio was not complicated, given numerous visits by Polish and Saxon politicians, as we know from official reports.

His stay in Opava dragged on, and he complained of boredom and a kind of honourable exile, during which he had to exercise a great deal of patience.²⁶ We can only guess that Piazza must have been annoyed by the uncertainty of the political situation in Poland, which resulted, among other things, in his stay in Opava. He repeatedly expressed his willingness to go to Poland, also in the official correspondence with his supervisors in Rome. However, owing to the uncertainty of the situation, and, above all, the impermanence of the existing arrangements, a safety principle and the atmosphere of waiting for the situation to clarify and not burn the bridges prevailed in the Roman circles;

²² During the journey from Cologne to Opava, he sent a letter from Frankfurt on 14 October 1706 commending himself to the kindness of the Elector residing in Düsseldorf.

²³ This is the first letter from Opava dated at 15 November 1706.

²⁴ In this letter he wrote that he stayed "in un honorato albergo, perche non voglio per decoro del carattere nominarlo osteria".

²⁵ There is nothing about it in the official correspondence with the Secretary of State; I also did not encounter such information in the correspondence of his predecessor H. Spada and his successor N. Spinola.

²⁶ See: letters of 16 February 1707 and of 2 December 1707.

the reconstruction of the weakened positions could turn out to prove too costly. The Nuncio was forced to accept temporary solutions. However, not even for a moment did he treat them as normal for accomplishing his mission.

In the correspondence with Bishop A. Steffani, we do not find any data about the Nuncio's immediate entourage, about his colleagues in the chancellery and tribunal. There are only a few sentences about the auditor, Abbot John Charles Vanni, from the time of the previous tenure of Nuncio H. Spada. We learn from Piazza that the auditor's name was Lucchese. He was a well-educated and resourceful layman. Piazza valued him, yet we cannot deduce why during Piazza's nunciature he left the Polish post and undertook different tasks in different posts in Europe. The answer can be found in the sentence that Piazza wrote in a letter of the last day of 1707, when we know that he would return to the service of Nuncio N. Spinola: Vanni was hated by the S. Leszczyński's party, being at the same time very useful to Augustus II.²⁷ For that reason Piazza could not bear any grudge to him.

The rather considerable amount of mail sent by Piazza, both official sent to the Secretary of State in Rome and private, may suggest that he had plenty of time to prepare it.²⁸ On the other hand, the seat of the Nuncio must have been a destination of equally rich correspondence. We possess no information concerning rules of functioning of mail. Special couriers must have dealt with it, those who travelled well-trodden paths; the route for the Polish nunciature was via Venice and Vienna. Did private mail work in the same manner? In the letters to Bishop Steffani we can find numerous signs of waiting for subsequent deliveries.²⁹ We can see in them a normal reaction of a human for whom correspondence, especially with those with whom he stayed in close relationships, was the only way of maintaining contact with the world. It also brought information necessary for the fulfilment

²⁷ A figure known for his diplomatic activities in Poland, but not mentioned in biographies. Basic information about him was given by Piazza in letters of 22 November 1706 and 14 January 1707; moreover, he often mentioned him in further correspondence.

²⁸ Cf. ANP I. We can see how scrupulous Piazza was in keeping his superiors constantly informed about his work.

²⁹ Every letter started with a long introduction referring to the post received.

of diplomatic duties, which can be confirmed by his correspondence, in which content related to the analysis of the political situation, also outside Poland, belonged to the basic collection of news.

The correspondence with Bishop Steffani includes only short passages about the reality of the private life of the Nuncio. It is difficult to assume that he was isolated of any social contacts whatsoever. Opava might not have been the most significant centre of the then political life, but many paths interceded there with Vienna, Krakow and Dresden. In the existing material no information is provided about the Nuncio's participation in any ceremonies, either ecclesiastical or lay. We cannot decide convincingly whether he was not looking for ways to establish wider contacts with various circles of the society at the time, or whether this was the result of the makeshift functioning of this nunciature. He mentioned only once that he had been at a party at Baron Ragwitz's house, during which German and Polish languages were spoken. Could that mean that he wanted to point out that he had no common themes with those attending the party?³⁰ A note in the letter of 25 February 1707 about the end of the carnival party reveals the Italian spirit of Piazza, who in this cheerful period was doomed to inaction in Opava.³¹ As a newcomer from Italy, the Nuncio drew attention to wine, which he considered indispensable. Once he praised one Pole for a delivery of Tokaj and other Hungarian wines; he also pointed to the existing possibilities of the provision of various wines, which was taken care of by the landowner at whom he lived.³²

b) Observation of the political scene in Poland

It is understandable that in the private correspondence, especially with an addressee staying in a different country, matters concerning the situation in Poland were not discussed in detail, as was the case in the official reports to Rome. It is as well difficult to ascertain whether Polish affairs interested A. Steffani any closer. Admittedly, exploring the conditions of the situation in Poland was a fundamental task that Piazza as the Nuncio had to fulfil, but it did not constitute a main topic

³⁰ See: a letter of 13 January 1708.

³¹ See: a letter of 25 February 1707.

³² „Nella casa, dove habito, si é cominciato hoggi a vendere il vino, onde puo credere quanto sia cio di sodisfattione col concorso di ogni sorte di cavaglia”.

in the correspondence of these two hierarchs. Piazza became acquainted with the Polish case already in Cologne, before his arrival in the diplomatic post in Opava.³³ Moreover, the envoy's instruction issued by the Secretary of State most probably in September 1706 was to inform him about the situation in Poland.

However, upon arriving in Opava, the new Nuncio already found the country in a different situation following the abdication of King Augustus II. This, therefore, required Piazza to form an appropriate view of all possible aspects of the not too easy Polish conditions. The content of his letters to A. Steffani may serve as an illustration of the progress made by the Nuncio in assessing the state of the Polish affairs and the possible direction of their evolution.

A primary task awaiting the Nuncio was to get acquainted with the right to the Polish Crown. The abdication of Augustus II, for some time kept in secret, was astonishing for papal diplomacy and some time passed before they believed in its authenticity. Piazza himself, after arriving in Opava, sent credential letters to Augustus II and many dignitaries of the Kingdom. Since then, he stayed in touch with them despite distance. However, Augustus II, staying in Poland until December 1706, before final departure to Saxony, did not respond, which caused a sense of bitterness in the Nuncio.³⁴ From now on, this very situation would be almost paradoxical: papal diplomacy would be engaged in upholding Augustus II's rights to the Polish throne in hope that they would accomplish the far-reaching plans of Rome, and not just usual support for Augustus II. Augustus, in turn, left Poland, but also behaved in an arrogant manner, as can be evidenced by the account provided by the Nuncio. Therefore, upholding the rights of the Saxon ruler to the Polish throne would since be the work of other forces, with no participation of the former king.

In Piazza's correspondence with Steffani, the affairs of Augustus II were initially presented quite broadly in terms of demonstrating the legitimacy of his position and the priority of his rights to the Polish throne over S. Leszczyński. The Nuncio was convinced that only

³³ Cf. J. Staszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 144n.

³⁴ He made this clear in the letter to Steffani of 6 December 1706. But J. Szembek responded and he maintained a fairly lively correspondence with him, cf. The Princes Czartoryski Library in Krakow, mss. 450, 451, 452.

the return of Augustus II to the country would resolve many matters, but there was little indication that the king would return.³⁵ In such a situation, Piazza could attempt to modify his assessment of the situation in Poland, when the country was with no ruler, when the antagonization of the leading political groups did not ensure closer cooperation to overcome the crisis, and, above all, when the actual masters of this situation were Charles XII of Sweden and Peter I, Tsar of Russia. Taking into account the good of the Kingdom, from the summer of 1707, Piazza appears not to have talked about exclusive support for Augustus II. On 11 July of that year, the Sandomierz Confederation announced interregnum, and in the face of the offensive against Russia prepared by Sweden directly in the Polish land, nothing indicated that Augustus II's forces would be enough to return to Poland, in contrast, the position of S. Leszczyński seemed to gain in power. In view of these developments, did the search for a new nuncio for Poland in Rome mean that papal diplomacy would have to revise its position? This cannot be deduced from the materials conceived by Piazza.³⁶

Matters of S. Leszczyński also emerge from J. Piazza's correspondence to A. Steffani. It is known that the Nuncio referred to him solely as "Palatino di Posnania", and once even as "Stanislao"³⁷, and never as "king". The question of his possible rights to the throne was still open, although Piazza was pessimistic about the state of the affairs at all times. It was widely known that Leszczyński owed his election to the Polish throne exclusively to the Swedish king and his military might, with the general public tending to oppose this choice. For papal diplomacy, a foundation for distancing themselves from the monarch imposed by Sweden was linked to the concerns about the status of the Catholic religion in Poland, since a known Lutheran was king's protector, doing much to support Protestants in other areas, as for instance in Saxony or Silesia.³⁸

From the spring of 1707, in the face of the expected movements of the Swedish King from Saxony to Poland (in order to enter Russian

³⁵ Cf. letters of 25 March 1707, 14 April, 27 May and others.

³⁶ A. K a m i ń s k i, *Konfederacja sandomierska wobec Rosji w okresie poaltranstądzkim 1706-1709*, Wrocław 1969.

³⁷ In the letter of 16 February 1707.

³⁸ It referred mainly to Convention of Altranstädt of 21 September 1707 forced upon the Emperor, pursuant to which protesters in Silesia were to get back 130 temples.

territory from there), formal betrayals took place, many crown and Lithuanian dignitaries abandoned Augustus II and turned to Leszczyński. Everything that was happening as a result of the power of the Swedish weaponry strengthened the Poznań voivode to recognise his royal dignity. In addition, royal courts in Europe rushed to recognise his royal dignity in return for maintaining peaceful relations with Sweden. Particularly prestigious was the recognition of Leszczyński by Emperor Joseph I and the Elector of Brandenburg.³⁹ The arrival of the Turkish envoy in Poland, most probably to examine the complicated situation, Piazza instantly assessed as an imminent announcement of the recognition of King Leszczyński by Turkey.⁴⁰ The one concerned also sought diplomatic recognition by the papal court. His endeavours met up with resistance, and Pope Clement XI, as well as his Secretary of State Cardinal F. Paulucci did not respond to Leszczyński's letters as before.⁴¹

J. Piazza did not have a high opinion of S. Leszczyński. In his correspondence, he constantly emphasised his weakness and submissiveness to the Swedish king. This was manifested, for example, in the postponement of the decision to enter Polish territory (Leszczyński was staying at Charles's side in Saxony). The Nuncio also expressed doubts that the Swedish protégé would find the money to pay the army, which could be the only guarantee of his consolidation on the Polish throne.⁴² The most significant issue was, however, the validation of the election, since it was entirely devoid of legality. This aspect was treated by papal diplomacy as the main in the relations with the Kingdom of Poland. Therefore, the rumours about the peace treaty between the King of Sweden and Russian Tsar caused concern in Rome.⁴³

J. Piazza aptly evaluated the role of foreign rulers in shaping the situation in Poland. He saw an aggressor in Charles taking advantage of his military power to ruthlessly dictate his conditions to the

³⁹ He wrote of his surprise at the Emperor's recognition of Leszczyński in the letter of 18 March 1707.

⁴⁰ See: a letter of 31 October 1707.

⁴¹ See: a letter of 21 November 1707.

⁴² In the letter of 24 June 1707 he wrote about the trust of Leszczyński to the power of the Swedish arms.

⁴³ On 2 December 1707 he informed about the Leszczyński's intention to convene a pacification congress in Toruń. In the very period he wrote many a time about the possible peace between the rulers of Sweden and Russia, which would in practice mean the strengthening of the position of Charles XII in Poland.

conquered nation. He also rightly pointed to the fundamental objective of the Swedish monarch, which was the pursuit of war against Russia to defeat its power. Despite all this, the behaviour of the young ruler was a constant puzzle to him.⁴⁴ Somewhat dispassionately, J. Piazza reported to Steffani the plans of the Swedish king he heard, and particularly the impossibility to read his intentions.

The second of the rulers to interfere in the Polish affairs was Tsar Peter. The Nuncio quickly discerned the Russian ruler's real intentions towards Poland, as a means of strengthening his own state. He also did not share the confidence that papal diplomacy saw in Peter. J. Piazza followed his actions, emphasised his permanent failure to keep promises given to the Pope, e.g. the release of the Archbishop K. Zieliński.⁴⁵ He did not approve Peter's intentions referring to the new election in Poland, through which he wished to gain more convenient possibilities of the subordination of the Kingdom of Poland to himself.⁴⁶ The Nuncio saw in the announced new election a prelude to further deepening of the chaos in the country that needed peace and stability above all else.

With this in mind, J. Piazza assessed the Polish society, mainly their leaders. From the very beginning, he perceived their excessive ambition and their arguments being detrimental to the country. He always expressed his opinions about the leaders of the Sandomierz Confederation: Primate Stanisław Szembek, his brother Jan, Crown Deputy Chancellor and Kuyavia bishop Konstanty Szaniawski in a positive, yet restrained manner. They displayed great independence both from Augustus II, whom they supported, and from Tsar Peter I. The Nuncio identified their standpoint with the policy they conducted, the most appropriate insofar as it was possible in the given situation. He was interested in their actions, which he numerously referred to in the letters to Steffani.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The puzzling nature of the behaviour of Charles XII was a paralysing circumstance, as it prevented any insight into further development of the situation in Poland.

⁴⁵ Cf. a letter of 7 October 1707.

⁴⁶ In the letters of 17 January and 16 February 1707 he expressed his pessimistic predictions referring to the possible new election supported by Peter I. He saw some hope in the Lviv Convention to ensure independence from the pressure of Peter I. The whole situation could have been shattered by Charles XII entering the Commonwealth with his army.

⁴⁷ He often wrote about these people in December and January 1708. The Nuncio followed the steps of the search of the most convenient place of living by those mentioned, where they could feel independent from Tsar's pressure.

All in all, the picture of the Polish reality sketched by Piazza was not optimistic.⁴⁸ Perhaps this was the reason why the Nuncio did not feel comfortable in his post. In September 1707, it was already known that a new nuncio had been appointed to Poland, and from then until his departure from Opava, Piazza wrote to Steffani about the Polish matters even rarer, in turn, he referred to his future more often, or related to the matters from the period of the Cologne Nunciature, which were more familiar to the addressee of these letters.

c) The attitude of J. Piazza as the Nuncio

Private correspondence with a person outside the circle of influence of the diplomatic post headed by Piazza certainly cannot provide a solid basis for an assessment of the Nuncio's diplomatic activities. It does, however, enrich this assessment with additional elements.

There is no doubt that at such long period of diplomatic activities, at his Polish nunciature (November 1706 – February 1708), J. Piazza could not be engaged in particular initiative. Most of his time and power was taken by the examination of the Polish scene. Also the instructions from Rome clearly dictated him how to preserve neutrality towards the sides of the conflict.⁴⁹ The complicated political situation in Poland did not contribute to the activation of the nunciature in the state arena.⁵⁰ It can well be seen how, from a newcomer on the Polish political scene, Piazza became a recognised expert, who was also able to convey everything in a synthetic way. It is a pity that he did not reveal ways in which he kept in touch with a number of people representing different groups, how he collected news, or information about meetings and conferences at the Opava residence. He emphasised constantly the uniqueness of his standing. A complaint that he included

⁴⁸ Particularly depressing was the impression that the breakdown of the Polish power elite made on the Nuncio. From mid-1707 there were frequent opinions that peace in the country could not be permanently established because everyone ruled Poland at their own discretion.

⁴⁹ This was a fundament of the papal policy recommended to the Nuncio; he himself repeatedly mentioned this to Steffani, e.g. 17 January 1707.

⁵⁰ In Piazza's favour, it should be noted that the tribunal of the nunciature was in place throughout his tenure and that the Nuncio himself was actively involved in the reform of the Benedictines, the discipline of the clergy and the granting of dispensations and graces. This can be illustrated by Arch. Nuncj. Vars. vol. 182.

in the letter of 4 November 1707 about the inertia that was devouring him, can in a way testify to his honest attitude.⁵¹ Knowing about his diplomatic agility from other posts, we cannot be surprised that this forced inactivity in Poland could bother him. Also full of bitterness was his confession that, although he had written voluminous memoranda to the Secretariat of State, in accordance with the instructions he had received, from the decisions taken it could be inferred that they did not pay attention to the opinions he had expressed.⁵²

The Nuncio performed one important task decisively. This was the issuing of appropriate mandates against the Chapter in Gniezno in return for the choice of Chełmno Suffragan Bishop and Custodian of Gniezno Jan Dłużewski for the administrator of the archdiocese, according to the will of Leszczyński. In the light of the nomination of S. Szembek for Archbishop in June 1706, this was an explicit opposition to the Pope.⁵³ Piazza was well aware that this decision would hinder his standpoint. Steffani even wrote that in the eyes of the Leszczyński's camp he was lost; this was, however, after a new nuncio was appointed and Piazza expected dire consequences which could have touched his successor.⁵⁴

The appointment of N. Spinola, hitherto Nuncio in Tuscany, to the Polish post, was received by J. Piazza with a feeling of relief; this took place at the end of August 1707.⁵⁵ From then on, he waited impatiently for the opportunity to leave Opava.⁵⁶

J. Piazza was aware of new tasks that awaited him. He learned about his appointment to conduct negotiations with the Vienna court. During the pontificate of Clement XI this was the hardest mission for papal diplomacy, since in 1707, the emperor dubbed the then Nuncio as *persona non grata* and re-establishment of relations between Rome and

⁵¹ Cf. a letter of 4 November 1707.

⁵² Cf. a letter of 22 April 1707.

⁵³ These mandates were issued on 5 November 1707. On 20 January 1708, he wrote "Io già sono in disgrazia del di Lui ministri (i.e. Leszczyński) per i mandati spediti contro il suffraganeo di Chelma eletto d'ordine del sudetto Palatino dal Capitolo di Gnesna Amministratore di quell'Arcivescovado, ma me ne consolo, perche ho ubbidito a Nostro Signore".

⁵⁴ He referred to this also in January 1708, e.g. on 20 and 27 January of the same year.

⁵⁵ He was appointed to this post on 20 August 1707.

⁵⁶ Already on 9 September he wrote that he did not know when he would leave, since no requisite orders had come from Rome.

Vienna required remarkable skill and experience from a negotiator. J. Piazza shared his concern connected to this mission with his interlocutor.⁵⁷ Vienna, in turn, was in no rush to receive papal envoy, therefore Piazza with a feeling of relief accepted nomination for the secretary of the Congregation of Memorials.⁵⁸ He wrote that at last, after many years of wandering along difficult roads, his star had led him to a happy harbour.

The correspondence that J. Piazza maintained with Bishop A. Steffani enables us to supplement and at the same time confirm the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the materials of official nature, sent by the Polish Nuncio to the Secretariat of State in Rome. It also broadens the source base for further research into the Saxon epoch in the early years of the reign of Augustus II and the role which nunciature performed in the overall situation at the time.

⁵⁷ Cf. a letter of 14 October 1707.

⁵⁸ Cf. a letter of 2 December.

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