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MAKING DIPLOMACY THROUGH CULTURE: MIKOŁAJ SĘKOWSKI, THE POLISH ENVOY TO NAPLES AND MADRID IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Abstract

The article is devoted to the little known but interesting Polish diplomat Mikołaj Sękowski, the envoy to Naples and Madrid in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The main purpose of the text is to complete Sękowski's biography with new details, and to shed a different light on his activity, placing it within the context of the beginnings of public diplomacy. Through the analysis of documental and literary sources comprised principally between 1576 and 1588, the author argues that Mikołaj Sękowski had, for more than a decade, remained a stable and active source of information about Poland in Italy in Spain. Thus, he provided an additional and unusual element of 'soft diplomacy' to the Polish foreign service actions in Naples and Madrid, aimed principally at recovering the Neapolitan sums.

Keywords: Mikołaj Sękowski, early modern diplomacy, public diplomacy, Naples, Madrid, Poland, Jagiellonians, treatises on Poland

The figure of Mikołaj Sękowski has not been, so far, in the centre of attention of scholars researching the history of Polish diplomatic missions to Naples and Madrid in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Ryszard Skowron, an acclaimed specialist in the subject, wrote in 1997 that 'we have scarce information about this interesting, but little known person'.¹ Since then, little progress has been made. One important publication

¹ Ryszard Skowron, *Dyplomaci polscy w Hiszpanii w XVI i XVII wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 1997), p. 121.

aimed at reviving the interest in Sękowski is a recent paper written by Matylda Urjasz-Raczko.² Nevertheless, it seems that the focus of the author's attention was drawn to the political aspects of the diplomat's activity, which offers a somehow limited perspective, given his secondary position, in diplomatic terms, in Naples, and the short period Sękowski stayed in Madrid as the official envoy of the Polish queen.

Instead, certain characteristics of Sękowski's activities draw to mind the contemporary concept of public diplomacy. The term, coined in the 1960s, has been recently applied successfully in the field of early modern international relations.³ Unlike the conventional diplomacy, concentrated on, often secret, negotiations between selected persons, or groups of persons, entitled to take positions on bilateral or multilateral issues, public diplomacy refers principally to some open actions and policies, especially through different types of publications and events, directed to a wider range of public. Its main objective is to influence and shape the public's perception of a State or different aspects related to it, either by a positive, often propaganda-like message, or by debunking false information, or by a combination of both. A closer look proves that Sękowski did, in fact, make numerous efforts to strengthen the diplomatic actions of the Polish court, by the able use of 'soft' cultural strategies *sensu lato*, employed by him in Italy and Spain.

The purpose of the present article is to complete Sękowski's biography with new details, and to shed a different light on his activity, placing it within the context of the beginnings of public diplomacy.

The first and probably the most important problem faced by anyone trying to analyse and assess his role in the Polish diplomatic service is the lack of biographical facts. The information about Mikołaj Sękowski, also known by the Latin version of his name, Nicolaus Secovius, and

² Matylda Urjasz-Raczko, 'Centros y periferias de la Monarquía Hispánica a finales del siglo XVI. Mikołaj Sękowski, un diplomático polaco en Nápoles y Madrid', in *Spain – India – Russia. Centres, Borderlands and Peripheries of Civilisations*, ed. by Jan Stanisław Ciechanowski and Cristina González Caizán (Warszawa: Faculty of Artes Liberales of the Warsaw University and Wydawnictwo Naukowe Sub Lupa, 2018), pp. 283–92.

³ See: Helmer Helmers, 'Public diplomacy in Early Modern Europe', *Media History*, 22, nos 3–4 (2016), 401–20.

Secovio or Segovio in Italian and Spanish respectively, is so scarce that he does not even have an entry in the principal source of biographical data for all Polish historical figures: the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*. Moreover, some of the information that can be found in principal publications that mention him is also erroneous, including the date of his death. The few certain facts come from isolated documents and with these scraps of information we cannot but reconstruct only selected moments of his life. The rest of his biography, at least for the present, is subject to more or less reasonable speculation.

Mikołaj Sękowski was probably born into a noble Mazovian family originating from the village of Sęków near Płock and using the coat-of-arms of Prawdzic.⁴ His date of birth is unknown but, based on the chronology of his later life, it could probably be placed between 1540 and 1550. He had at least one brother, Andrzej. It is not certain whether he was related to another Mikołaj Sękowski, who was the administrator of Queen Bona Sforza's land estate in Brańsk between 1555 and 1558.⁵ The fact that both bear the same name, as well as their direct implication in the affairs of the royal court, could support the hypothesis that they were, indeed, relatives, perhaps the latter being the father or the uncle of the diplomat; however, there are no documentary traces to prove it.

Little is also known about Sękowski's education, although it should be assumed that he had completed university-level studies, most probably somewhere outside Poland. One indication to his studies could be the information conserved in the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences at Kórnik. Among the sixteenth-century manuscripts, we find a copy of a speech made by the Bishop of Płock, Piotr Myszkowski, on the coronation of Henry of Valois as the Polish king. The copy, made from a version of the speech published in 1574 in Rome, is dedicated to Andrzej Sękowski, Mikołaj's brother, and dated 18 April 1575 in Paris.⁶

⁴ Kasper Niesiecki, *Herbarz polski Kaspra Niesieckiego S.J. powiększony dodatkami z późniejszych autorów, rękopismów, dowodów urzędowych i wydany przez Jana Nep. Bobrowicza*, vols 1–8 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Haertel, 1841), vol. 8, p. 324.

⁵ Jan Siedlecki, 'Działalność królowej Bony w Brańsku w latach 1533–1556 i fundacja szpitala', *Przegląd Historyczny*, 79, no. 2 (1988), 217–27.

⁶ *Katalog Rękopisów Staropolskich Biblioteki Kórnickiej XVI–XVIII w. Literatura*, ed. by Andrzej Mężynski, Krystyna Nizio, vol. 5 (Kórnik: PAN BK, 1992), p. 198.

It is the only evidence to confirm that the Sękowski brothers could have, and probably did travel across Europe in search of education, following a custom that had become fashionable in Poland in the sixteenth century.

In the 1570s, Sękowski resided in Italy, a place where he would spend a decade at the service of Stanisław Kłodziński, the Polish envoy to the viceroys of Naples, and where he published a short Latin treatise on Poland. At some point after 1584, he was appointed the secretary to Queen Anna of Jagiellon and destined to Spain, where he arrived in late 1586 to become an official diplomatic representative of Poland at the Philip's II court. His mission turned out to be an unexpectedly short one. Contrary to the general belief, the diplomat did not die in 1588,⁷ but on 16 May 1587, as a result of an unfortunate fall from a horse and was buried at the San Francisco cemetery in Madrid.⁸ The limited information we have today about his life could be completed, however, with different traces of his decade-long activity in Italy and in Spain, many of them signalled as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, but which have, in general, caught little or none attention from the scholars.⁹

⁷ This date, based on a belief that Sękowski had personally translated into Spanish his book on Poland and died only shortly before its publication, has been repeated in all previous publication on the subject.

⁸ Although the Parish Records give the date of Sękowski's death as 18 May 1587 (Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Madrid, Parroquia de los Santos Justo y Pastor, Difuntos 1, fol. 315v), I believe that it should be advanced two days, accordingly to Girolamo Lippomano's dispatches to the Venetian Senate, in which he relates the agony of Sękowski and states in the one of 17 May 1587: 'Essendo passato hieri sera a miglior vita il secretario della Serenissima Regina di Polonia', Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Archivi propri degli Ambasciatori, Spagna, 7, fol. 301r.

⁹ First person to notice the presence of Sękowski in the context of the Polish-Italian relations in the Renaissance era was Sebastiano Ciampi in his *Bibliografia critica delle antiche reciproche corrispondenze politiche, ecclesiastiche, scientifiche, letterarie, artistiche dell' Italia colla Russia, colla Polonia ed altre parti settentrionali* (Firenze: Leopoldo Allegrini e Giovanni Mazzoni, 1834), p. 7. The main published texts which have dedicated some attention to Sękowski are: Stanisław Kot, *Z dziejów propagandy polskiej w wieku XVI. Dyplomaci polscy w Neapolu* (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1928); Henryk Barycz, 'Podróże polskie do Neapolu w wieku XV-XVIII', in id., *Spojrzenia w przeszłość polsko-włoską* (Wrocław, Warszawa, and Kraków: Ossolineum, 1965), pp. 77–139; Pietro Marchesani, 'La Polonia nella storiografia italiana del XVI e XVII secolo: i clichés ideologici e la loro evoluzione', *Europa Orientalis*, 5 (1986), 203–31; and Skowron, *Dyplomaci polscy*.

Mikołaj Sękowski's name first appears in the volume *In funere Sigismundi Augusti Regis Poloniae*, a collection of funeral poetry in commemoration of late King Sigismund II Jagiellon, published in Naples in 1576 by the print shop of Giuseppe Cacchi.¹⁰ Preceded by a speech by Jan Żółczyński, the book comprises more than a hundred poems in Latin and Italian, written by more than a threescore of Polish and Italian authors. It is worth noting that Sękowski was the only Pole who not only penned two poems in Latin (one of which is the ending verse of the whole volume) but two more in Italian as well. In fact, his two latter poems are considered to be the first examples of poetry written in Italian by a Polish author.¹¹ From that, we can deduce that he must have received a very good education and obtained a high level of proficiency in Italian. It would suggest that Sękowski must have spent considerable time in Italy, probably at one of Italian universities, which would allow him to reach linguistic perfection necessary to write poems.

In funere Sigismundi Augusti Regis Poloniae was a carefully prepared publication which took almost four years to complete, as the Polish King had died in 1572. It was conceived by the Polish diplomatic representation in Naples and was an important element in a diplomatic game, played for a long time with the Spanish viceroys of the city. The stake were so-called 'Neapolitan sums', the Italian inheritance of Bona Sforza (namely the rights to the Duchy of Bari and Rossano, as well as the income from the customs chamber in Foggia following a loan

¹⁰ *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia* published in four volumes between 1739 and 1752 by the Lombard writer Francesco Saverio Quadrio gives a hint of what could be the evidence of an even earlier writing activity by Sękowski. According to it (II, p. 677), Niccolò Secovio would have published poems in *Rime di Diversi in Morte di Sigismondo Augusto Re di Polonia*. In Napoli: appresso Giuseppe Cacchi, 1572. However, Quadrio's work is the only mention of such publication, which does not exist in any contemporary Italian library catalogue. Neither does it appear in Piero Manzi's *La tipografia napoletana nel '500. Annali di Giuseppe Cacchi, Giovanni Battista Cappelli e tipografi minori (1566–1600)* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1974). Thus, unless it was a case of ephemera, whose scanty copies did not survive the last three hundred years, it should be argued that Quadrio mistakenly took the date of the speech by Żółczyński in the title as the actual date of the publication, and the mentioned book is nonetheless than *In funere Sigismundi Augusti*, published also by Giuseppe Cacchi.

¹¹ Kot, p. 17.

provided by the queen to Philip II), claimed unsuccessfully by the subsequent Polish monarchs. During the second half of the sixteenth century, Polish ambassadors, as well as lower-rank diplomatic agents and envoys, were sent almost incessantly to Spain, Vienna and Italy (principally to Rome and Naples), in an effort to convince Philip II to recognise the Jagiellons' claims as rightful heirs to Bari and Rossano, to pay back the (often backward) interests on the loan, and to gain important support for their cause at the imperial and papal courts.¹²

In this sense, the Neapolitan mission was crucial for the Polish diplomatic efforts, as it was the closest one to the territories in question. In the 1570s, the head of the diplomatic representation in the rank of the royal secretary was Stanisław Kłodziński, a lawyer educated in Padua and Bologna.¹³ His ties with Italy and, particularly, with Bona Sforza, can be traced back long into the past. In the 1550s, his father had served as an administrator of queen's properties in Poland, while his sister, Dorota, was a lady-in-waiting at the queen's court. After his arrival to Naples in late 1569, Stanisław Kłodziński concentrated his attempts on obtaining from the viceroys of Naples the interest sums from the Foggia Customs Chamber, leaving the question of the legal status of Bari and Rossano to the diplomats in Madrid, Rome, and Vienna. The practical approach to his mission, which did bring some positive results, can be additionally explained by the fact that his upkeep, as well as that of the whole representation, depended on his efficiency in retrieving the money from the viceroy. Although Kłodziński had apparently harsh relations with Polish diplomats working in Rome at the papal court and was often criticised by them, it seems that he had a good understanding of the characteristics of the work in Naples. He quickly surrounded himself by a group of capable Polish and Italian

¹² On 'Neapolitan sums' see: Maria Bogucka, *Bona Sforza* (Wrocław, Warszawa, and Kraków: Ossolineum, 2004), pp. 238–42; and Skowron, pp. 66–68.

¹³ For more information on Kłodziński see the entry in *Polski słownik biograficzny*, XIII (1967–68), 61–63. Certain information provided there has been completed or rectified (such as his date of death, erroneously given as 1585) by later works, especially Jerzy Axer, *Georgii Ticinii ad Martinum Cromerum epistulae, a. 1554–1585* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975) and id., *Georgii Ticinii ad principes Radziwiłł epistulae (a. 1567–1585)* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1980).

collaborators, among whom was Mikołaj Sękowski, and tried to make diplomacy through a combination of personal connections, occasional bribery and different forms of propaganda. For instance, after the news of King Sigismund's II death in 1572 spread, he immediately organised an impressive and sumptuous funeral parade inside the Santa Maria in Monte Oliveto church in Naples.¹⁴ Its goal was clearly to impress the local nobility and to create a positive image of the Polish Crown. Four years later, he managed to publish the volume mentioned above, *In funere Sigismundi Augusti Regis Poloniae*, which was a more tangible and durable effect of his actions. Mikołaj Sękowski proved to be an excellent addition to this strategy. Perhaps, he was even one of its architects, as a closer analysis of his activities in the next decade might suggest.

The year 1576 marks yet another example of the Pole's poetic, and not only poetic, attempts in Italy. That year Giorgio Lorenzo d'Anania published in Venice the second edition of his *L'universale fabrica del mondo, ovvero Cosmografia divisa in quattro Trattati di nuovo posta in luce*, a geographical treatise which first appeared three years earlier in Naples from the print shop of Cacchi, the very same that published *In funere Sigismundi Augusti*. D'Anania's book, today almost completely forgotten, was a typical renaissance description of the known world. Its interest lays in the fact that it attests to what was generally known about geography at the time, supporting the idea that Earth was immobile in the centre of the Universe but, at the same time, offering interesting details about life and customs in relatively unknown parts of the globe.¹⁵ The Venetian edition was dedicated to the Swedish Queen Catherine of Jagiellon, the daughter of Bona Sforza and the sister of Sigismund August. If we compare it with the first version, it is clearly visible that the part about Poland had been considerably augmented, and to understand why, it is worth taking a closer look at the dedication, dated in Naples on 25 July 1575.

There, d'Anania professes his deep admiration to Catherine, whom he refers to as coming from a great family of antique origin, the

¹⁴ Kot, p. 12. He provides the above information without revealing its source.

¹⁵ For more information on Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania and his work see the entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-lorenzo-d-anania_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-lorenzo-d-anania_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed: 10 October 2018).

Jagiellonians, whose virtue had placed the Grand Duke of Lithuania at the Polish throne, where not only he learned the true religion, but he converted himself in a new Apostle, introducing the Christianity in his old lands. The eulogy of the Jagiellonian dynasty is dominant throughout the entire dedication. According to d'Anania, Catherine's children Sigismund (the future king of Poland as Sigismund III Vasa) and Anna were the incarnations of the respective virtues of their uncle Sigismund August and their aunt, Queen Anna of Jagiellon.¹⁶ One cannot doubt that for d'Anania, Catherine is, firstly, a member of the Jagiellonian family, and only later the Queen of Sweden. Such an attitude might seem somehow inconsistent but is perfectly understandable after a better examination of the whole edition.

The book is preceded by some poems in Italian, Latin, Greek and Hebrew and, among them, we find a short Latin verse authored by Sękowski, called *Ad Vates (To the prophets)*. It was not, however, the Pole's only contribution to the book. Apart from writing a poem, Sękowski served to d'Anania as the primary source of information about Poland, as the Italian writer himself attests in the subsequent editions of *L'universale fabrica*: 'as was referred to me by Mister Nicolò Secouio, a Polish gentleman, educated and eloquent, very interested both in ancient and in modern history'.¹⁷ We cannot have any doubts that Sękowski did, in fact, take great care to befriend d'Anania, perhaps as a common acquaintance of the editor Giuseppe Cacchi, and provide him with details about Poland, shaping in this way not only the perspective of the Italian author but also, indirectly, that of his readers.

¹⁶ 'Sigismondo, et Anna, suoi chari figli, l'uno specchio, oltre dell'immensa virtù sua, della buona memoria del Serenissimo suo fratello Sigismondo Augusto [...] l'altra d'un ingegno, e bellezza inestimabile, così modesta, che pare l'effigie della Serenissima Infante Anna sia amorevole, e diletta sorella', Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania, *L'universale fabrica del mondo overo Cosmografia* (In Venetia: Ad instantia di Aniello San Vito di Napoli, 1576). The dedication to Queen Catherine has no page numbers, just like the subsequent poems and the introduction. The pagination of the book starts only with the core text of the treatise.

¹⁷ 'Secondo mi referì il Signor Nicolò Secouio gentil'huomo Pollacco letterato et di buona conversatione, assai curioso delle Storie, sì moderne, come antiche'; Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania, *L'universale fabrica del mondo overo Cosmografia* (In Venetia: Presso il Muschio, 1582) p. 174.

However, one could wonder why the book, instead of being dedicated to Queen Anna of Poland, or her husband, King Stephán Báthory, was offered to the Swedish queen. The probable explanation would be, at the same time, the evidence of use of soft diplomacy by the Polish envoys in Naples. In 1575, the sisters Anna and Catherine were engaged in a dispute over the rights to the heritage of Bona Sforza after their brother's death. Catherine's husband, King John III of Sweden, sent his own representatives to Italy: Camillo Brancaccio in 1575 and, two years later, Pontus de la Gardie, whose claims at the Neapolitan court paralysed the actions of the Polish diplomacy.¹⁸ From this perspective, convincing d'Anania to dedicate his work to Catherine, as well as to remind her of her Jagiellonian heritage, would perhaps serve to make her reflect on her attitude. The situation was so difficult and tense that the universally respected Cardinal Hosius, who was residing in Rome at that time, on numerous occasions appealed to the sisters calling them on to reconcile.¹⁹ D'Anania's Venetian edition of *L'universale fabrica* could thus constitute yet another element of soft pressure inspired by the Polish diplomats in Italy to end the feud between Catherine and Anna.

Sękowski did not cease in his efforts; neither did he limit his activities to the Italian Peninsula. In 1579, he wrote a letter to the famous Brabantian cartographer Abraham Ortelius, the author of the popular world atlas *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. The Latin letter, which offers a very rare example of Sękowski's elegant, rounded handwriting,²⁰ reveals a strong commitment to correct the erroneous information Ortelius had included in his *opus magnum*. Sękowski points out that Poland is not a part of Russia, as Ortelius claims, probably following the Herberstein's description. To avoid this, and other errors, Sękowski suggests that Ortelius should read the recently published Bishop of Ermland Marcin

¹⁸ Skowron, pp. 104–05.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁰ The letter has been reproduced by John Henry Hessels, *Abrahami Ortelii (Geographi Antverpiensis) et virorum eruditorum ad eundem et ad Jacobum Colium Ortelianum (Abrahami Ortelii sororis filium) Epistulae* (Cambridge: Typis Academiae sumptibus Ecclesiae londino-batavae, 1887), pp. 216–19. The digital facsimile of the original is available at: https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/mnemGal/55/HRC_55.pdf, pp. 112–17 [accessed 10 October 2018].

Kromer's *Polonia*, as well as his earlier history of Poland.²¹ Not only did the Pole offer to Ortelius various indications on the geography of Poland, but, apparently, was hoping for the cartographer to maintain the correspondence, asking him to write to Rome, where Sękowski was going to move in shortly after.²² Unfortunately, we have no trace of either Ortelius's answer to the Pole or the subsequent hypothetical correspondence.

Gradually, Sękowski intensified his attempts to influence local Italian writers. In the 1580s, we find at least two such examples. One was Bartolomeo Dionigi da Fano, and the other one was Giovanni Carlo Saraceni. Dionigi da Fano had recently translated into Italian Alessandro Guagnini's treatise on Poland *Sarmatiae Europaeae Descriptio* which was included in the popular travel texts compilation *Delle navigationi e viaggi* of Giovanni Battista Ramusio and published in Venice. He was also in charge of completing the supplement to the *Historie del mondo*, originally written by Mambrino Roseo da Fabriano and later, after his death, continued by Giovanni Tarcagnota. The 1583 edition of *Historie*²³ was dedicated to King Stephán Báthory of Poland and, apart from a textual reference to Kromer's *Polonia*,²⁴ it includes a direct clue about Sękowski's role in providing information about Poland. Dionigi da Fano openly admits that he has been 'told and given the evidence by the honourable and valiant Polish knight Nicolò Secovio, a courtly

²¹ Hessels, p. 217.

²² 'Bene vale, et Romam, quo me breui conferre cogito, ad Oratorem Polonicum, litteras tuas mitte. quid enim ad haec respondeas expecto', Hessels, p. 218.

²³ The edition in question actually bears no date of publication. Based on the date of the dedication (14 November 1583), Pietro Marchesani assumed that it was, in fact, 1583 (*La Polonia nella storiografia italiana*, p. 215). The same date is suggested by the central catalogue of the sixteenth-century Italian editions of the National Library Service of Italy, <http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it> [accessed 10 October 2018].

²⁴ 'perché i successi del Regno di Polonia saranno non picciola parte della presente opera, mi pare che non serà fuor di proposito il descriver succintamente il sito, i popoli, e l'altre qualità di detto Regno, secondo che da Martino Cromero [...] sono nella Polonia sua state descritte; qual ha voluto personalmente veder tutti i luochi e paesi alla Corona di Polonia sottoposti', Bartolomeo Dionigi da Fano, *Supplemento e Quinto volume dell'Historie del mondo D. M. Mambrino Roseo da Fabriano. Revisto, acconcio, e di tre libri nuovamente accresciuto* (In Venetia: Per gli Heredi di Francesco e di Michiel Tramezini, [1583]) p. 258v.

and affectionate gentleman, who has faithfully informed me and given true proofs of all the glorious feats of the Magnanimous King which I have written in the present history'.²⁵ The quoted information refers to the period comprised between 1572 and 1579, following the death of Sigismund August, the short reign of Henry of Valois and the early exploits of Stephán Báthory. The effective lack of chronological distance between the events and their description is worth stressing, as it seems that rather than about history, Sękowski informed Dionigi da Fano about the current political events in Poland.

Giovanni Carlo Saraceni's activities in the literary field bear a resemblance to those of Dionigi da Fano. Saraceni translated into Italian and complemented Natale Conti's *Historiarum sui temporis libri*, which he published in Venice in 1589 under the title *Delle historie de' suoi tempi di Natale Conti*. Conti was a universally known author of the Latin treatise *Mythologiae* (first edition in Venice in 1567), but he had also compiled an important Latin chronicle, first published in 1572 and later, with additional chapters, in 1581, one year before his death. Saraceni not only translated Conti's work, but he also took the liberty to introduce various fragments of his own authorship. One of them is another proof of Sękowski's eagerness to popularise information about Poland through direct contacts with Italian authors.

The king [Philip II] had Queen Bona's accounts revised and handed over to her, in exchange of the received money, the duties from the cattle in Apulia, which provide yearly 43 thousand *scudi*, under the condition that if the King wishes, can recover the duties, having paid back firstly the capital to the Queen. On the order of the King, this income passed not only on the Queen, but later also on her son, King Sigismund, and after him, on her daughter, Anna, Queen of Poland, who continuously keeps her agent beside the Viceroy of Naples, whose name is Stanislao Clodinio, a respectable and prudent gentleman, in whose company also assists Nicolò Segouio, a person of singular doctrine and integrity; both are Poles.²⁶

²⁵ 'Si come mi è stato riferito e fatto fede dall'onorato e valoroso Cavaliere Polono Nicolò Secovio, dal qual cortese e amorevole gentil'uomo sono anco fidelmente stato informato, e con prove verissime accertato di tutto quello che delle cose di Polonia, e delle gloriose imprese del Magnanimo Re nella presente istoria ho scritto', *ibid.* See also: Marchesani, p. 215.

²⁶ 'fece il Re [Filippo] diligentemente vedere i conti della Reina Bona, e consegnarle per il danaro ricevuto la gabella de i bestiami nella Puglia, che ogni anno rende di

Saraceni, clearly influenced by Kłodziński and Sękowski, put forward in his text the official Polish view on the dispute with the Spanish Crown over the Neapolitan sums. A somehow ironic twist is the fact that Natale Conti had originally dedicated his Latin work to John of Austria, the commander of the Battle of Lepanto, bastard son of Charles V and stepbrother to Philip II. Saraceni's Italian version, published barely two decades later, introduced instead information which would have most probably displeased the Spanish monarch. Another interesting detail is that by 1589 when *Delle historie de' suoi tempi* finally appeared, both Kłodziński and Sękowski had been dead.

In the early 1580s, Sękowski concluded that his previous work was insufficient and embarked on a more ambitious project, which can be considered the coronation of his activity in Italy: his own treatise about Poland which he published in 1582 in Naples, under the Latin name *Regni Poloniae brevis et compendiosa descriptio e Martino Cromero decerpta*. The book, or rather booklet, due to its limited size, is, as its title indicates, a brief description of the Polish State and was dedicated to the long-time Cardinal Protector of the Kingdom of Poland at the papal court, Alessandro Farnese. It was a shortened compilation of information given by Marcin Kromer in his *Polonia*, whose first authorised edition was published originally in Cologne in 1577. It was the same book which Sękowski had, on different occasions, advised to foreign authors as the best existing description of Poland. What is worth noting is the fact that *Regni Poloniae brevis et compendiosa descriptio* was written in Latin, despite Sękowski's apparent proficiency in Italian. One explanation could be simply the fact that the booklet was thought to be destined for foreign students coming to Italian

utile quasi quarantatre mila scudi: con conditione però, che potesse il Re ad ogni suo beneplacito, restituendo il capitale alla Reina, ricoverare la sua gabella. Pervenne questa entrata per ordine del Re Filippo, non solo nella Reina, ma di mano in mano poscia nel Re Sigismondo, suo figliuolo, e dopò lui nella figliuola Anna Reina di Polonia: laqual tiene continuamente un suo agente appresso il Vicerè di Napoli chiamato Stanislao Clodinio, gentiluomo da bene e prudente; in cui compagnia assiste anco Nicolò Segouio, persona di dottrina et integrità singolare; amendue Poloni', Giovanni Carlo Saraceni, *Delle Historie de'suoi tempi di Natale Conti* (In Venetia: appresso Damian Zenaro, 1589), pp. 285v–86r.

universities.²⁷ Moreover, it must have been definitely easier for Sękowski to work on a pre-existing, Latin version to shorten and adapt it, rather than having additionally to translate it into Italian.

The content of the booklet is far from original; however, this clearly was not the aim of the author. He openly admitted his dependence on the much greater authority, that of Marcin Kromer. Nevertheless, he decided to adapt it, eliminating large portions of the original text and dividing it into chapters (the original work by Kromer was divided principally into two large parts), which were dedicated, respectively, to: the origin of the Poles and their name; the site, provinces, borders and principal cities; the plains, highlands, and mountains, as well as mineral resources; the rivers, lakes, ports and fishing; the climate, forests, fruit, honey and wine; wild and domestic animals, grain and beer; the character and specific traits of the Poles; the political system of Poland; the king and the queen; the senate; the nobility; the parliament and the military force. For the obvious reason of its limited dimensions, it omits a lot of detailed information included by Kromer, such as the legal or the monetary system, local administration or the religious issues.

One might ask the question why to write a significantly abridged version of a book that had appeared barely five years before? In an attempt to answer this question, we should take into account several factors. Firstly, Kromer's book had been published in Cologne, which made it relatively less available in Southern Europe. Secondly, it was packed with very detailed information, which could sometimes confuse or even discourage an inexperienced reader. Thirdly, the cost of the short book published locally in Naples was much more affordable for a potential buyer. Fourthly, such publication was yet another opportunity to show to the Polish court the dynamic actions of the Neapolitan diplomatic mission. Fifthly, and by no means finally, it was also a chance for the

²⁷ Stanisław Reszka to Marcin Kromer, Rome, 20 April 1582: 'Mikołaj Sękowski, domownik pana Kłodzińskiego w Neapolu, na pociechę, jak mówi, Polaków sporządził jakiś nowy utwór dla Waszej Przewielebnej Dostojności. Z powodu małej objętości tego utworu cieszyłoby się studenci', Jadwiga Ambrozja Kalinowska, *Z dworu Stanisława Hozjusza. Listy Stanisława Reszki do Marcina Kromera* (Olsztyn: Ośrodek Badań Naukowych im. W. Kętrzyńskiego i Towarzystwo Naukowe im. W. Kętrzyńskiego, 1992), p. 246.

author to make a name for himself, thus increasing the recognizability of both the person and the cause he was acting to promote.

Kłodziński and Sękowski continued to work together in Italy at least for the next two years. In October 1584 Sękowski was still in Naples, participating in the retrieval of the income from the Foggia customs chamber on behalf of Kłodziński,²⁸ who already at that moment was very ill and two months later, in December 1584, died. This event was probably a turning point for Sękowski. All his previous activity apparently must not have escaped the attention of the Polish Queen, Anna of Jagiellon, who decided to appoint him her representative at the Madrid court of Philip II. Sękowski received the official status of the queen's secretary and was sent from Naples to Spain. It meant an important promotion for him, as the post of the Polish envoy in Spain had been earlier confided into the hands of diplomats of higher rank or stature.

We do not know the exact date of the appointment, but it must have happened in the second half of 1585 or the first half of 1586. Sękowski was called on to succeed the previous Polish representative in Madrid, Stanisław Fogelweder, who left the Iberian Peninsula in the summer of 1585.²⁹ The envoy, after a decade spent in Spain, had a deep knowledge of both the Spanish court, which he held in high regard and praised for being a model of well-organised administration and the people there. Fogelweder's able conduct and great personal culture earned him the title of a Spanish noble, granted to him personally by the monarch, as well as the right to move freely across the Iberian Peninsula.³⁰ He maintained close contacts with the nephew of Philip II, Albert of Austria, and with the cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, the head of the council for Italian affairs and a trusted advisor to the Spanish king. He also befriended other ambassadors at Philip II's court,

²⁸ Ludovico Pepe, *Storia della successione degli sforzeschi negli stati di Puglia e Calabria* (Bari: Trani V. Vecchi, 1900), p. 261.

²⁹ Fogelweder obtained the official permit to leave Spain at the end of May 1585, Archivo General de Simancas, Cámara de Castilla, Libros de Cédula de Paso, 361, fol. 528v.

³⁰ Lucjan Kurdybacha, *Stanisław Fogelweder. Humanista i dyplomata polski XVI wieku* (Lwów: Sztuka, 1929), p. 26.

especially the imperial one Hans Khevenhüller, and the French one, Pierre de Segusson, known as Sieur de Longlée.³¹

Spain was one of the principal destinations for the emergent Polish diplomacy in the Renaissance and early modern era. Since the first embassy of John Dantiscus in 1518, there was a constant stream of Polish diplomats flowing to the Iberian Peninsula throughout the sixteenth century. Among them were Wojciech Kryski (1559–62), Piotr Dunin Wolski (1561–73), Piotr Barzy (1567–69), Mikołaj Wolski (1570–74), and Stanisław Fogelweder (1576–86) mentioned above.³² From this list, it is clearly visible that Poland maintained at least one diplomatic agent the court of Philip II practically since the death of Bona Sforza d'Aragona. It should be stressed that this was not a regular practice of Polish diplomacy, which relied mainly on the ad hoc missions and embassies. Maintaining a relatively stable representation was limited to Vienna, Rome, Naples, and Madrid, and it proves the importance given to the diplomatic contacts with Spain.

Sękowski reached Spain in late 1586 and arrived at the court of Philip II in the first days of January 1587.³³ Among his first actions was meeting with the former envoy's friends, Hans Khevenhüller and Pierre de Segusson, and offering them as a gift a copy of his *Descriptio*.³⁴

³¹ Skowron, p. 118.

³² For the detailed description of the activity of the Polish diplomats in the period between the death of Bona Sforza and the arrival of Mikołaj Sękowski to Madrid see: Skowron, pp. 66–121.

³³ 'È gionto medesimamente en Corte un Secretario di Polonia, che viene da Napoli: et si tiene, che sia, per trattar il negotio di Bari, che è, di veder di cavar qualche summa de; denari di quelle pretensioni, per servirsene nella guerra, che desidera quel Re di fare contra Moscoviti', Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Archivi Propri degli Ambasciatori, Spagna, 7, fol. 185r, 8 January 1586, *more veneto* (According to the Venetian calendar, the new year started on 1 March and not on 1 January. Therefore, 8 January 1586 actually refers to 8 January 1587).

³⁴ The copy given to Segusson bore an inscription dated February 1587 'Omnia vincit veritas' and was erroneously dedicated to 'Longlée the English (sic!) Ambassador', see: Cristóbal Pérez Pastor, *Bibliografía madrileña. Descripción de las obras impresas en Madrid (Siglo XVI)* (Madrid: Tipografía de los Huérfanos, 1891), p. 152. The book, preserved in the nineteenth century in the Library of San Isidro (which was, subsequently, the basis of the Madrid Central University's library) was probably stolen or destroyed during the Spanish Civil War. The copy given to Khevenhüller is

Given the lack of any documental evidence, we do not know what his concrete instructions were, but very soon they were to prove useless, as in early February the news came from Poland about King Stephán Báthory's death in December 1586. This information changed everything dramatically, paralysing any activity aimed at the defence of the widowed queen's interests, as everyone at the Spanish court, beginning with Philip II himself, became vividly interested above all in the outcome of the pending election in Poland. In fact, Sękowski was asked to provide information on whom to write to in Poland, to convince the principal dignitaries to support the Habsburg candidate for the Polish throne, Archduke Maximilian III of Austria.³⁵

Probably around that time, Sękowski decided to publish the Spanish version of his short treatise. The moment was right for several reasons: the 1587 election aroused interest in Poland in a broader sense. He must have realised by then that there was no other publication in Spanish on this subject and that it would be of great utility both for the cause he was representing and for himself. Furthermore, until the resolution of the political situation in Poland, he was in no position to deal with the principal affair he was supposed to take care of in Spain: the matter of the Neapolitan sums.

Since the nineteenth century, it has been a common opinion among scholars that Sękowski personally translated the *Regni Poloniae brevis et compendiosa descriptio*. That could not, however, be true. Sękowski, who was undoubtedly a talented linguist, might have spoken some Spanish, but he could not have translated his book for the simple reason that he died long before it was published. The real author of the translation is uncertain, although the early seventeenth-century historian Antonio de Herrera attributes the Spanish version of the book to a respected humanist, Pedro Simón Abril.

mentioned in the catalogue of his private library, reproduced in Alfredo Alvar Ezquerro, *El Embajador Imperial Hans Khevenhüller (1538–1606) en España* (Madrid: Boletín Oficial del Estado, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, 2015), p. 204.

³⁵ *Documenta Polonica ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas*, ed. by Ryszard Skowron, vol. 1 (Kraków: PAU, 2015), p. 24. The meeting with Philip II is also referred to by Lippomano in his dispatch of 1 April 1587, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Archivi propri degli Ambasciatori, Spagna, 7, fol. 268v.

Surprisingly enough, Sękowski's sudden death did not put a stop to the project of the edition. In his testament, he appointed as executor of his last will the Venetian ambassador to Spain, Girolamo Lippomano who did carry on with the task until its successful completion. The choice of Lippomano was not accidental, as the Venetian diplomat was the closest friend Sękowski had in Madrid.³⁶ Lippomano had been sent by the Signoria to Poland in 1574 and was the author of a detailed account of his mission.³⁷ He was, therefore, considered an expert on Polish matters and, in fact, was treated as such at the Spanish court.³⁸

The book obtained the royal privilege in October 1587 and was published in early 1588 by the editor Francisco Sánchez under the title of *Una breve i sumaria descripción del Reyno de Polonia*. It is worth noting, that the Spanish version was updated in comparison to the Latin original, and included territorial and administrative changes after Stephán Báthory's Russo-Polish war. Sękowski's booklet was the first-ever published source of information about Poland in Spanish; comprehensive and accessible, thanks to its concise length. We have no details about the edition, although it seems it was rather limited. Nevertheless, Sękowski's treatise did have some impact on Spanish public opinion. Antonio de Herrera in his *Historia General del Mundo*, published in three volumes between 1601 and 1615, alludes to Sękowski in the first one, saying after a short description of Poland and its people: 'More about Poland can be seen in the booklet written by Nicolo Secovio,

³⁶ 'Il secretario della Regina di Polonia, che resiede qui, trovandosi in stato miserabile, et in ponto di morte, sendo stato amico mio già molti anni, et in Polonia, et in Napoli, ha fatto testamento, et creatomi suo commissario, con havermi mandato anco qui in casa in deposito due coffani di scritture, che dice esser importantissime della sua Patrona', Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Archivi propri degli Ambasciatori, Spagna, 7, fols 299v–300r.

³⁷ His report proved to be a very popular one, as various manuscript copies of Lippomano's *Relazione di Polonia* circulated in Italy and in Spain (both in Italian and translated into Spanish) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

³⁸ Lippomano mentions in a dispatch of 11 November 1587 a meeting he had with Philip II's sister, Empress Maria of Austria, who after the death of her husband, Maximilian II moved back to Spain. The Empress was interested in obtaining detailed information about Poland and, especially, Cracow, in view of her son being elected as the king by a part of the Polish nobility, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Archivi propri degli Ambasciatori, Spagna, 8, fols 2r–v.

a Polish gentleman.³⁹ Perhaps Herrera came to know about Sękowski's short treatise thanks to his Madrid based editor, Luis Sánchez, who was the son of Francisco. The quoted passage is the only documental proof of Sękowski's influence on a Spanish author yet, however, it cannot be excluded that *Breve i sumaria descripción* had a broader reception, given the fact that we find copies of it in different inventories of personal libraries, including the one of King Philip IV.⁴⁰

The circulation of information, and also misinformation, which has always shaped international relations, remains undoubtedly one of the most important subjects of the research in the history of diplomacy. Among the basic tasks of a diplomat has always been that of keeping his principals well informed about the state of his mission, as well as about the internal and external situation in the country of destination. However, we should not downplay the other informational function of the envoy: to provide the information about his homeland in the hosting country and to defend its good name publicly if such need occurs. To what extent this diplomatic policy, complimentary to their principal mission, was common among Early Modern ambassadors, and whether or not it was actually effective, needs yet to be established by further studies.

The information we have about the life and activities of Mikołaj Sękowski is, as it has been said before, very limited. Nevertheless, from the little data available it is revealed that an important, perhaps even the most important, part of his actions abroad was firstly to inform, and secondly to correct the erroneous information about Poland. This activity was, in turn, inserted in a double context of the Polish diplomatic actions in Italy and Spain aiming at securing the rights of the heirs of Bona Sforza d'Aragona, as well as of the new political situation after the extinction of the Jagiellonian dynasty, which opened the way to the Polish throne to foreign candidates.

³⁹ 'Lo demás de Polonia se verá en un librico que escrivio Nicolo Secovio, cavallero Polaco', Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Primera parte de la Historia General del Mundo* (Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1601), Bk VIII, Chap. XI, p. 231.

⁴⁰ Fernando J. Bouza Álvarez, *El Libro y el cetro: la biblioteca de Felipe IV en la Torre Alta del Alcázar de Madrid* (Salamanca: Instituto de Historia del Libro y de la Lectura, 2005), p. 279.

It is also worth noting, that, although one could quote various texts about history and geography of Poland published by Polish authors throughout the sixteenth century,⁴¹ it was not common to utilise them with a strictly diplomatic, makeshift end. Among rare examples of such use was *Polonia*,⁴² a short treatise written in Latin by then a student of the Bolonia University, Jan Krasiński, under the supervision of the famous scholar Carlo Sigonio, dedicated to the recently elected king of Poland, Henry of Valois. In 1621, the Polish envoy in Naples, Andrzej Mąkowski, had one of his collaborators, Maciej Tytlewski, pen a short history of the war fought between 1620 and 1621 with the Turks, to gather broader international sympathy and support for Poland.⁴³ The text was consequently reprinted in Latin and Spanish in Madrid, as well as included in the continuation of Cesare Baronio's popular *Annales Ecclesiastici*, written after the cardinal's death by the Polish Dominican, Abraham Bzowski. Some diplomats, while on a mission, decided to have their official speeches 'pronounced in front of the foreign heads of state' printed and distributed in the country of destination. Such was, for instance, the case of two famous embassies of Jerzy Ossoliński in the first decades of the seventeenth century to England and the pope.⁴⁴ Yet another approach was adopted by Stanisław Mąkowski who, in 1647, decided to publish in Spanish and Italian the collection of documents and letters resuming his decade-long attempts to recover the Neapolitan

⁴¹ See: Andrzej Feliks Grabski, *Zarys historii historiografii polskiej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2000), pp. 27–44; and Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Polska myśl historyczna a humanistyczna historia narodowa (1500–1700)* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), pp. 71–286.

⁴² Jan Krasiński, *Polonia. Ad Serenissimum, et Potentissimum, Henricum primum Valesium, Dei gratia utriusque Poloniae Regem* (Bononia: Apud Peregrinum Bonardum, 1574).

⁴³ Maciej Tytlewski, *Narratio de praeliis gestis inter Polonum et Turcam Annis 1620 & 1621* (Neapoli: Ex Typographia Lazari Scorigij, 1622).

⁴⁴ Jerzy Ossoliński, *A true copy of the Latine oration of the excellent Lord George Ossolinski, Count Palatine of Tenizyn, and Sendomyria, Chamberlain to the Kings Maiesty of Poland, and Suetbland, and embassadour to the Kings most excellent Maiesty* (London: William Lee, 1621); id., *Illustrissimi et excellentissimi domini Georgii Ossolinii, Domini in Ossolino, Comitibus de Thenzyn, Thesaurarij Curiae Regni Roloniae, Praefecti Bidgostiensis, Ricensis, Adzelensis, etc. Oratio* (Romae: Apud Franciscum Caballum, 1633).

sums at the court of Philip IV,⁴⁵ although it could be argued whether this initiative was destined for the Spanish, or perhaps for the Polish public.

Nearly a century ago, Stanisław Kot published an essay called *From the history of the Polish propaganda in Naples*, proposing an interesting direction in the interpretation of Poland's diplomatic activities in Southern Italy in the second half of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century. His proposal, repeated later by Henryk Barycz, has not received much attention from the scholars, although, the attempts of the Polish diplomats, including the less known ones, to support their actions by shaping the public opinion abroad about Poland deserve a deeper consideration. The term 'propaganda', employed by Kot, and having its origin in the name of the Papal Congregation 'De propaganda fide' established in 1622, is universally considered somewhat deprecatory, meaning, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary 'the spreading of ideas, information, or rumour for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person' or 'ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause'.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, in the diplomatic sense of the word, propaganda could be defined in a more neutral sense, as: 'the use of mass communications, to reinforce or change public opinion, domestic or foreign'.⁴⁷

In the recent studies on contemporary diplomacy, however, a new term has been coined which, in many ways, could also be applied to the early modern age: public diplomacy. Universally attributed to Edmund Gillion and originally used in the context of American actions during the Cold War, it has quickly gained popularity in the contemporary diplomatic practice all around the world. It has also proved to be, regardless of the obvious risk of anachronistic over-interpretation, 'the great promise' for the analysis of the history of diplomacy.⁴⁸ In contrast to

⁴⁵ Stanisław Mąkowski, *Memoriali Alla Maesta Catolica Di Filippo Quarto, Re Di Spagna E Biglietti A Diuersi Ministri...* (Madrid, [1647]); id., *Consultas Decretos, Resoluciones y otros despachos dados per orden de Su Md Catolica y sus Consejos, y Italia solve diversos negocios de su Md de Polonia...* (Madrid, [1647]).

⁴⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda> [accessed 10 October 2018].

⁴⁷ Geoff R. Berridge, and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (Hampshire–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 215.

⁴⁸ Helmers, p. 402

the secretive character of the traditionally defined diplomacy, it is much more open, being directed to the general public. This aspect, together with its inseparable aim to influence certain groups of people to achieve the precise objectives, has made public diplomacy semantically close to what is nowadays defined as 'soft power'. Contrary to the propaganda, public diplomacy is a broader term, as, although it envelops the former one, it deals with news publicity, with public ceremonies and public image of the diplomat, as well as various publications.⁴⁹

From this point of view, it could be argued that Sękowski's activities should be inserted within the context of the incipient early modern public diplomacy. His longstanding goal was to reinforce the traditional diplomatic actions by diffusing information about Poland among the general public. The public which, it should be stressed, was nevertheless limited to the circle of the literate elites in Italy and Spain, although he had also made attempts to act on the European scale, as his letter to Abraham Ortelius attests. Sękowski's actions were aimed concurrently at correcting the erroneous information in circulation, as well as at promoting the publication of the reliable and up-to-date facts on Poland. Finally, probably considering his previous attempts insufficient, he decided to personally author a text which could fill the gap in the general opinion about Poland in the south of Italy and, subsequently, in the Spanish Monarchy. All these continuing attempts are perfectly in line with the principles of public diplomacy, even though they could be considered still very intuitive and imperfect.

Was this strategy efficient? In strict terms of diplomatic or political effects, most probably not. Contemporary public diplomacy's primary goal is to influence the government's policy towards another state through the carefully applied cultural and informational impact on the citizens. Logically, such a result can be achieved principally in a modern democracy. It also requires a much broader action and needs access to the means of communication that did not exist in the sixteenth century. However, we cannot measure the effectiveness of such actions in the early modern era and today by the same yardstick; rather we should focus on more general attitude and strategies. From that perspective,

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Sękowski's efforts did not go in vain, as he had successfully managed to shape, practically single-handedly, the image of Poland in the circles of his educated friends and readers, even decades after his death. He made it surprisingly, even though he never was what we could consider an accomplished diplomat or a prominent intellectual.

One remaining question is whether Sękowski's activities were, in some way, influenced by his principals: Kłodziński, the officials at the royal chancellery, Anna of Jagiellon, or yet someone else, and therefore were the realisation of a conscious and coherent policy, or if he acted essentially out of his own initiative. In view of the lack of any conserved documentation on this matter, there is no unambiguous answer, even though it seems probable that this was not a common practice of the Polish diplomacy, given the general outlines for other missions. Instead, the particular activity in this field by the Neapolitan embassy could suggest a rather local and more makeshift inspiration, either by Kłodziński or perhaps, by Sękowski himself. Be it as it may, Mikołaj Sękowski had, for more than a decade, remained a stable and active source of information about Poland in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, providing an additional and unusual element of 'soft diplomacy' to the Polish foreign service actions in Italy and Spain.

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