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Legal, political and cultural heritage of the Polish Vasas (1588–1668): the culmination of the Year of the Vasas celebrations

Abstract: The quatercentenary anniversary of completion of the crucial phase of expansion of the Royal Castle in Warsaw initiated by King Sigismund III Vasa, which fell on 2019, offered a good occasion to carry out a series of scientific, editorial, exhibition and artistic events within the Year of the Vasas. The celebrations were inaugurated in February 2019 as a part of an initiative to present an overall picture of the reign-period of the Vasa Dynasty in the Polish Republic. In line with the organisers' objective, the programme of the anniversary events was aimed at providing a thorough insight into and disseminating to an ever-wider public the knowledge about the over eight-decade-long period of the monarchy of the Polish Vasas – Sigismund III, Ladislaus IV and John II Casimir, falling in the late 16th century and the major part of the 17th century. The multidimensionality of the output provided by the representatives of the Vasa Dynasty on the Polish throne is illustrated particularly in the anthology *The World of the Polish Vasas: Essays* edited in 2019 under Jacek Żukowski and Zbigniew Hundert's scientific supervision. This edition accompanies the monumental exhibition *The World of the Polish Vasas: Space – People – Art* organised by the Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum between 6 November 2019 and 14 January 2020 as the culmination of the Year of the Vasas celebrations.

Keywords: POLISH VASAS, THE YEAR OF THE VASAS, HERITAGE OF THE VASA DYNASTY

1. Introduction

A variety of scientific, editorial, exhibition and artistic occasions making up the Year of the Vasas celebrations inaugurated in 2019 marked the quatercentenary of when a crucial phase of the expansion of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, undertaken at the initiative of King Sigismund III Vasa,

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was completed.¹ Accomplishing the redevelopment works in the edifice of the Warsaw castle commenced at the turn of the 16th and the 17th centuries bears symbolic weight because they resulted in transforming the residence into a permanent royal seat representing the central government power and the majesty of the Polish Republic.² Accordingly, the organisers of the Year of the Vasas accepted the date of 4 February 1619 as a caesura. This is the date inscribed on the Latin documents found in a bronze ball crowning the Sigismund Tower of the Royal Castle. They report chronologically the momentous events which occurred during the reign of Sigismund III Vasa, including notes on the course of building works in the royal residence. In the translation provided by the Polish historian and writer Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, the above records are headed ‘Pargaminy zawierające rys czynów i dzieł Zygmunt[a] III. K[róla] P[olskiego]’ (Parchments containing an outline of the deeds and works of Sigismund III, the Polish King).³

The celebrations marking the Year of the Vasas contribute to comprehensively presenting the reign of the Vasa Dynasty in the Polish Republic. The idea underlying the extensive anniversary programme is to provide a thorough insight into and to disseminate to an ever-wider public the knowledge about the over eight-decade-long period of the monarchy of the Polish Vasas – Zygmunt III (Sigismund III), Władysław IV (Ladislav IV) and Jan II Kazimierz (John II Casimir), falling on the late 16th century and the major part of the 17th century. What satisfies the call for illustrating the multidimensionality of the output provided by the representatives of the Vasa Dynasty on the Polish throne is the anthology *Świat polskich Wazów. Eseje* (The World of the Polish Vasas: Essays) edited in 2019 under Jacek Żukowski and Zbigniew Hundert’s scientific supervision.⁴ The

¹ See further: W. Kaczorowski, *Zasady ustrojowe Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w świetle obchodów Roku Wazowskiego 2019*, „Opolskie Studia Administracyjno-Prawne” 2019, vol. 17, No. 3.

² See further: M. Wrede, *Rozbudowa Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie przez Zygmunta III*, Warszawa 2013, p. 7 ff.; W. Falkowski, in: *Rok Wazowski 2019*, eds. A. Kalinowska, M. Klarecki, T. Hardej, Warszawa 2018. Cf. also: W. Leitsch, *Finanse i działalność budowlana dworu królewskiego w latach 1626–1629. Finanzen und Bautätigkeit des Warschauer Königshofes in den Jahren 1626–1629*, transl. B. Ostrowska, Warszawa 1999, p. 79 ff.; J. Lileyko, *Zamek warszawski. Rezydencja królewska i siedziba władz Rzeczypospolitej 1569–1763*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1984, p. 27 ff.

³ J.U. Niemcewicz, *Zbiór pamiątek historycznych o dawnej Polsce z rękopismów tudzież dzieł w różnych językach o Polsce wydanych oraz z listami oryginalnymi królów i znakomitych ludzi w kraju naszym*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1822, p. 34–39. On this issue see also: M. Wrede, *Domus – curia – domus ducalis – domus regalis – curia murata – domus magna lapidea – lapidea regia – stary dom mурowany – kamienica. Budynek południowy Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie (XIV–XVII w.). Rekapitulacja*, „Kronika Zamkowa” 2009, No. 1–2, p. 30; J. Lileyko, *op. cit.*, p. 45–46; A. Król, *Zamek Królewski w Warszawie. Od końca XIII wieku do roku 1944*, Warszawa 1971, p. 37, 216.

⁴ *Świat polskich Wazów. Eseje*, eds. J. Żukowski, Z. Hundert, Warszawa 2019 (published by Arx Regia – Wydawnictwo Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie – Muzeum).

volume accompanies the monumental exhibition *Świat polskich Wazów. Przestrzeń – ludzie – sztuka* (The World of the Polish Vasas: space – people – art) organised by the Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum between 6 November 2019 and 14 January 2020 as the culmination of the Year of the Vasas celebrations.

2. Threefold essayistic image of the Polish Vasas and their epoch

The collection of scientific essays *Świat polskich Wazów...* constitutes a wide-ranging illustration of an intricate network of relationships and conditions that formed the context of the governance exercised by the Polish monarchs of the ‘Silver Age’ and the realm in which they functioned. As conceived by the editors, the publication is expected to serve as a guide to the era of the Polish rulers representing the Vasa Dynasty. Its aim is to reflect thoroughly both the multifariousness of the Vasas’ heritage and the dynamics of the geopolitical, social and economic changes occurring during their reign-period.⁵ A distinctive feature underlying the concept of the edition is the pursuit of emphasising the Polish Vasas’ patrimony which was manifested especially in the prominence gained thereafter by the Royal Castle in Warsaw as it became a significant political centre, as well as in laying ‘the foundations of a modern government system of the Polish Republic’.⁶

The structure of the volume includes three parts encompassing studies devoted to threefold dimensions of the Polish Vasas’ realm: the court, Poland and Europe, respectively. Each part is intended to assemble the following three interweaving perspectives: the space, personal interactions as well as the art and the artistic patronage. Employing such an approach offered the possibility to reconstruct a broad panorama of the Vasas’ epoch and to present an original synthesis of a number of factors which determined the complexities of the underlying background.

In the opening essay entitled *Wazowie a Polska – zderzenie dwóch wizji państwowości* (The Vasas and Poland – a clash between two visions of statehood), Adam Zamoyski attempts to examine critically the Polish Vasas’ reign-period in the light of the pre-identified contrasts and conflicts of different nature, including the political aspects, the system of ideas as well as cultural and social dimensions, with particular focus on discrepancies as to the concepts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’s form of government.

⁵ See: W. Falkowski, *Słowo wstępne*, in: *Świat polskich Wazów. Eseje...*, p. 6-7.

⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 7.

The heading devoted to the royal house contains the study *Dwór Wazów polskich* (The Polish Vasas' Royal Court) by Wojciech Krawczuk who presents a range of research findings on the organisation of the court life in the institutional dimension, the impact of the court as well as the specificity of its internal hierarchy and ceremonial. The point of departure for the author's considerations is the hypothesis on the uniqueness of the Polish Vasas' court in Europe. An important quality of the essay lies in putting forward research postulates regarding in-depth studies on the queen's and the royal offspring's courts, comparative analyses of the political ramifications of the transfer of European monarch's residences, personal aspects, court protocol and customs or iconosphere. The court space issues are addressed also in the essay *Ceremoniał codzienności i rytuał święta: sztuka dworska* (Everyday life ceremonial and festivity ritual: the court art) by Jacek Żukowski. The author comments upon the artistic creativity under the auspices of the Vasa Dynasty monarchs as well as the contribution of the royal family members into shaping the court culture perceived as a phenomenon in the course of the civilisational development of the Polish Republic, but also – to a considerable extent – of Europe. The engagement of the Polish Vasas in the domain of patronage over scholars in the light of the advancements in particular scientific disciplines of that time as well as the dominant intellectual currents is the subject matter of the study *Mecenat naukowy i życie umysłowe na dworach Wazów w Polsce* (The scientific patronage and intellectual life in the Vasas' courts in Poland) by Łukasz Traczyk. The author exemplifies the contemporary achievements in exact sciences, rhetoric, political thought or historiography. Moreover, what has been examined thoroughly in the essay is the religious issue which constituted a significant component of the early modern mentalities. The matter in question is illustrated for instance by the case of the Vasas' patronage contributing to the foundation of a number of convents in Warsaw. Additionally, the dynamic development of academic education is explored with account being taken of the John II Casimir's attitude towards the initiative of granting the status of academy to the Jesuits Collegium in Lvov. The Vasas' courts as significant centres of theatrical events are described in the essay *Teatr dworski w czasach Wazów* (The court theatre in the times of the Vasas) by Karolina Targosz. The emphasis is put mostly on the remarkable achievements in this field made during the reign-period of Ladislaus IV, who is considered to be the founder of the court opera theatre. Another aspect of the Vasas' epoch viewed from the perspective of the royal court is addressed by Barbara Przybyszewska-Jarmińska in her study *Patronat muzyczny polskich Wazów* (The musical patronage of the Polish Vasas). The essay presents the heritage of the

‘golden half-century of music’ in the Commonwealth of Both Nations, including most notably the engagement of Sigismund III and Ladislaus IV in the foundation of an international court music band, dominated by Italian musicians, as well as the work of eminent composers under the auspices of the Vasa Dynasty rulers.

The national dimension of the Polish Vasas’ reign covered by the anthology is analysed from manifold perspectives. In his essay *Sztuka w Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1587–1668* (The Art in the Polish Republic over the period 1587-1668), Piotr Krasny examines the issue of royal foundations and the artistic formula adopted under the influence of the monarchs’ patronage. Moreover, special consideration is given to the further reception of the elite art developed at the initiative of the individual rulers, with account being taken in particular of the conceptual, legal and economic conditions underlying various artistic undertakings. An issue complementing the picture of the Vasas’ reign on the Polish throne is the sphere of ceremonial and symbolism of hunting excursions as a component of the monarchs’ prestige. It has been discussed comprehensively in the essay *Przestrzeń królewskich polowań: między elitarną reprezentacją a kameralną rekreacją* (The space of the royal hunt: between elite representation and closed-circle recreation) by Tadeusz Bernatowicz. A detailed assessment of military operations and diplomatic missions at European courts undertaken by the Polish rulers representing the Vasa Dynasty is the subject matter of the study *Plany wojenne Zygmunta III i jego następcy – Władysława IV* (The war plans of Sigismund III and his successor – Ladislaus IV) by Mirosław Nagielski. The reign-period of the Polish Vasas is scrutinised also from the perspective of religious concerns. In his essay *Polityka wyznaniowa w epoce Wazów* (The denominational policy in the Vasas’ epoch), Radosław Lolo characterises thoroughly the subsequent Polish Vasas’ reign-periods against the background of the transformations affecting the religious relationships in Europe at that time, with particular consideration given to the reception of the Tridentine reform in Catholic countries, the dynamic development of the Society of Jesus, the significance of the 1596 Union of Brześć as well as the decisive role of the Polish monarchs in implementing the assumptions of the Counter-Reformation. The free election of monarchs as the foundation of the ‘Noble Democracy’ system is discussed extensively in the essay *Wolna elekcja wiritim i koronacja Władysława IV* (The free wiritim election and the coronation of Ladislaus IV) by Włodzimierz Kaczorowski. The study contains a detailed examination of the course of Prince Ladislaus Vasa’s election, the funeral of the royal couple – Sigismund III and Constance of Austria and, finally, the subsequent coronation of the king-elect, with a particular emphasis laid on the specificities of the

coronation ceremonial adopted in the Polish Republic as confronted with parallel solutions applied at that time in other European countries. Furthermore, the underlying conditions and forms of the attempts intended to build the royal political organisation during the reign-period of the last Vasa on the Polish throne are outlined in the essay *Stronnictwo polityczne Jana II Kazimierza i Ludwika Marii w walce o zmiany ustrojowe* (The political faction of John II Casimir and Marie Louise in pursuit of institutional changes) by Zbigniew Hundert.

Selected issues addressed in the collection of essays demonstrate the complexity of the European context impacting the Polish Vasas' rule. In his study *Rezydencje królewskie Wazów – europejskie inspiracje architektury i rzeźby* (The Royal residences of the Vasas – European inspirations in architecture and sculpture), Michał Wardzyński gives an account of foreign patterns that influenced, through the monarchs' foundations, the intensive advancement in contemporary infrastructure of the Polish Republic, including architecture of the residential, sacral and military character. The author investigates mostly Italian influences but concurrently also Netherlandish, French or German ones, with the aim to expose the Vasas' contribution to giving a prestigious status to modern residential complexes comprising palace residences designed to perform official and parliamentary functions, suburban villas and hunting manors. Juliusz A. Chrościcki and Ryszard Szmydki have devoted their study *Wazowie w podróży. Europejska peregrynacja Władysława Zygmunta* (The Vasas on the journey: European peregrination of Ladislaus Sigismund) to the import of the Sigismund III's sons itineraries around Western and Southern Europe from the perspective of the Polish Republic's civilisational development in the 17th century and that of achieving the policy goals during their expeditions. The essay contains a detailed description of the pilgrimage to Loreto and Rome embarked on by Prince Ladislaus in 1624. Moreover, what has been accentuated by the authors is the symbolic aspect of the experiences that Ladislaus Vasa acquired during his journey to Italy. This is reflected in the monarch's initiative to erect, within the concept of a complex of dynastic structures, the Sigismund's Column in Warsaw which is perceived as a representative monument of the entire epoch. In the essay *Europejski wymiar kolekcjonerstwa polskich Wazów* (The European dimension of the Polish Vasas' collections), Jacek Żukowski presents the origin and chronology of successive extension of the Vasa collection including a variety of objects of different provenience and representing divergent cultural backgrounds. The closing essay *W rodzinnej Europie. Związki i relacje polskich Wazów z innymi dynastiami europejskimi* (In the familial Europe: the Polish Vasas' connexions and relationships with other European dynasties) by Ryszard Skowron constitutes an attempt to deline-

ate a ‘map’ of family-court connections that demonstrate the position held by the Vasa Dynasty in the prestige hierarchy among the contemporary European houses.

The richly illustrated collection of essays is provided with an overview of superb iconography that embodies the specificity of the Vasas’ epoch. The assortment of over one hundred and fifty reproductions expresses – in line with the editors’ objective – ‘the splendour and riches’ of the Vasas’ reign-period on the Polish throne.⁷

3. Unprecedented exposition presenting the Polish Vasas as the Leading Protagonists

The idea behind has remained the same in case of the exhibition *The World of the Polish Vasas: Space – People – Art* regarded as ‘an attempt to recreate the Vasas’ world of values and the cultural landscape of the epoch’.⁸ The authors’ ambition was to display elaborately selected factual material, abundant enough to allow a comprehensive assessment of the governance of the three Polish monarchs representing the Vasa Dynasty as well as to provide a thorough insight into the intricacies of their reign-period.⁹ The exhibition culminating the Year of the Vasas Celebrations, along with the accompanying publications and parallel occasions, was aimed to enhance testifying historical particulars that are not widely known, and thereby to promote revision and revaluation of a fixed stereotypical view on ‘the Age of the Silver Sheaf’.¹⁰ The unprecedented nature of the exposition follows from the fact that the figures and the heritage of the Polish Vasas constituted for the first time the main theme of such a large display.¹¹ The momentum of the exposition was indicated by the great number – amounting to almost three hundred – of artefacts on loan from nearly eighty, both Polish and foreign, institutions and collections of works (including Amsterdam, Budapest, Dresden, Florence, London, Munich, Paris, Rome, Stockholm, Vienna and Vilnius collections), exhibited in twelve halls of the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The display depicted the Vasas’ epoch as a continuation phase of the Polish Golden Age and an el-

⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 7.

⁸ See: *Świat polskich Wazów. Przestrzeń – Ludzie – Sztuka. Katalog wystawy*, ed. J. Żukowski, Warszawa 2019 (published by Arx Regia – Wydawnictwo Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie – Muzeum).

⁹ Cf. W. Falkowski, *Słowo wstępne*, in: *Świat polskich Wazów. Przestrzeń – Ludzie – Sztuka. Katalog wystawy...*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Z. Hundert, J. Żukowski, *Wprowadzenie*, in: *Świat polskich Wazów. Przestrzeń – Ludzie – Sztuka. Katalog wystawy...*, p. 9, 12.

¹¹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 9.

ement of the 'classical period of the Old Polish culture'. These determinants locate Poland in a special position – not just that of a passive recipient of impulses deriving from the European cultural centres, but the one of a principal creator of original civilisational forms.¹²

By analogy with the collection of essays, in line with its guiding idea, the exhibition was intended to provide incentives for further exploring the network of complex relationships pertinent to the reign of the Vasa Dynasty kings at court-, country- and European levels, viewed in a threefold perspective, namely that of space, people and art. The composition of the exhibition was compounded of the following ten modules:¹³ 'Prologue' (designed as an introduction into the role of the Polish Vasas as 'the testimonies and co-origins of both the illustriousness and the profound crisis of the contemporary Polish-Lithuanian state' and at the same time – as the architects of a multifaceted system of values in the Commonwealth of Both Nations), 'The Royal Court Space', 'People of the Royal Court', 'The Royal Court Art', 'The Nation – the Space and People', 'The Art of the Commonwealth of Both Nations', 'Europe of the Vasas – the Space and People', 'The Art in the European Context', 'Funerary Ceremony' and 'Epilogue' (intended, according to the authors' objective, to stimulate reflection on the current significance of the legacies resulting from the Polish Vasas' Epoch). In accordance with the exhibition concept, the royal court is narrated as an environment for operation of the king and his family members as well as the broadly perceived circle of his assistants, but also as a space encompassing the network of royal residences. Special attention was drawn to illustrating the monarchs' relationships with the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The exhibition scenario involved also the question of changes to the territorial extent of the state ensuing from the military actions. Moreover, the dynastic connections of the Vasas with European rulers were illustrated, along with the European inspirations that motivated Polish monarchs to realise their own artistic and collectors' aspirations as well as to undertake their patronage activities. What achieved a particular suggestiveness was the exhibition module 'Funerary Ceremony' considered to be a kind of 'annex to the major part of the narrative'. Its main focus was on representing the court-state *pompa funebris* ceremonial, but simultaneously it was arranged so as to demonstrate an 'ideological farewell to the Vasa Dynasty'. The authors of the exhibition attempted to reveal, through the collected artefacts, the weight of the deaths of monarchs in terms of the institutional system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – as a factor in initiating the *interregnum* period.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ For more on this issue see: *ibidem*, p. 9-11.

The vernissage of the exhibition was held on 5 November 2019 in the Grand Hall of the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The programme included the remarks delivered by the Director of the Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum Professor Wojciech Fałkowski, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage Professor Piotr Gliński and the exhibition curators – Jacek Żukowski, PhD and Zbigniew Hundert, PhD. The opening pronouncements stressed the wide-ranging scope of the exhibition and accompanying publications intended to include comprehensively a number of aspects of the Polish Vasas' realm, mainly the personal and dynastic ones. What contributed to employing such a holistic approach to the Vasas' reign was the remarkable collection of exhibits, many of which exposed in Warsaw for the first time since the 17th century. The vernissage was enriched by the concert of Zespół Muzyki Dawnej conducted by Anna Urszula Kucharska and the performance of a variety of dances at the court of Ladislaus IV by Balet Cracovia Danza under the direction of Romana Agnel.

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The prominence given to the Year of the Vasas celebrations is a strong expression of recognition of the legal, political and cultural heritage of the Vasa Dynasty. At the same time, it fosters further popularisation of knowledge on the history of the Polish Republic in the 16th and the 17th centuries as well as broader reflection on the Polish Vasas' reign assessed from the contemporary perspective.

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PRAWNO-USTROJOWE I KULTUROWE DZIEDZICTWO POLSKICH WAZÓW (1588–1668). ZWIEŃCZENIE OBCHODÓW ROKU WAZOWSKIEGO

Streszczenie: Przypadająca w 2019 r. okrążyła 400. rocznica sfinalizowania kluczowego etapu podjętej z inicjatywy króla Zygmunta III Wazy przebudowy Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie dała asumpt do zorganizowania serii jubileuszowych wydarzeń naukowych, wydawniczych, wystawienniczych i artystycznych pod hasłem Roku Wazowskiego. Zainaugurowane w lutym 2019 r. obchody wpisały się w cenną inicjatywę całościowego ukazania okresu panowania dynastii wazowskiej w Rzeczypospolitej. Program uroczystości rocznicowych w założeniu organizatorów miał służyć pogłębieniu i przybliżeniu szerokiemu gronu odbiorców wiedzy o przypadających na koniec XVI w. i znaczną część XVII w., trwających ponad osiem dekad rządach polskich Wazów – Zygmunta III, Władysława IV i Jana II Kazimierza. Postulatowi zobrazowania wielowymiarowości dorobku przedstawicieli dynastii wazowskiej na tronie polskim w sposób szczególny czyni zadość antologia *Świat polskich Wazów. Eseje*, red. nauk. J. Żukowski, Z. Hundert, Warszawa 2019, która towarzyszy wystawie *Świat polskich Wazów. Przestrzeń – ludzie – sztuka* (*The World of the Polish Vasas. Space – People – Art*) zorganizowanej przez zespół Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie – Muzeum w terminie 6 listopada 2019 r. – 14 stycznia 2020 r. jako zwieńczenie Roku Wazowskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: POLSCY WAZOWIE, ROK WAZOWSKI, DZIEDZICTWO DYNASTII WAZÓW