

DIPLOMATS, ETIQUETTE, CEREMONIES –
THE UNPUBLISHED LETTERS
OF ŁAZARZ HORDYŃSKI
FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE CIRCA 1790

Since 1787, Russia had been at war with the Ottoman Empire; Poland during the time of the Great Sejm (the parliament of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that was held in Warsaw between 1788 and 1792) tried to carry out internal reforms before the partition of the state by neighbouring powers and attempted to improve its international situation by diplomatic activity. This was the reason for Piotr Potocki leading a mission to Constantinople between 1789 and 1792.¹⁾

We intend to focus attention on a collection of unpublished correspondence belonging to the author's family in Cracow. There are fourteen letters, that comprise of fifty pages of easy legible handwriting in brown ink. The paper is of western European origin, the dimensions of the sheets are eight times 38–40 x 23–24 cm, five of such sheets have been cut in half, and one is 34 x 22 cm; these have been folded so as to form four pages each. A single, unfolded sheet has the dimensions 28 x 19.5 cm. The letters were written by Łazarz Hordyński (1756–1815), who took part in Potocki's legation, most likely as secretary.²⁾ He had spent two years in Turkey and had learned the Turkish

¹⁾ About this unsuccessful diplomatic mission see: Kalinka (1895: 208–219); Dutkiewicz (1934); Waliszewski (1894); Czeppe (1984).

²⁾ In the Ms.846 of Czartoryski Library in Kraków "Korespondencya JWo Potockiego... Posła w Stambule" we find some (partly ciphered) texts written by Hordyński. A few other letters sent by Potocki from Turkey had been published by Waliszewski (1894).

language.³ His letters were a set of rather unofficial reports addressed to his patron Wincenty Potocki, Grand Chamberlain of the Kingdom, owner of an important art collection, freemason and relative of the envoy. The letters, written between 1789 and 1791,⁴ are mostly concerned with politics and military affairs, but Hordyński was interested in many other matters and used to add various details and sometimes anecdotes. Not only did he prepare a detailed register of the Turkish fleet and its armaments, but also wrote also about the ceremony of launching a warship: “...był na niey Sułtan, a z nim Muffti i całe Ministerium, a Ludu naymniey do Dwukroć sta tysięcy...zdaie się że i kanał morza, i brzegi, był to tylko ieden Turban...” (“...the Sultan was present, with him the Mufti and the whole Ministry and at least two hundred thousand people... it seemed as if the channel and the shore were a single turban...”).

The letters, above all, show the great importance the diplomats placed on protocol, to ceremonies and to etiquette. Hordyński arrived first in Patras on a boat, preceding the envoy. He visited the Consul of Venice first: “... natychmiast po zaarboryzowanej na barce banderze moiey, wywiesił był Swoją co Inni ...Konsulowie uczynili” (“when my ship’s flag had been hoisted over the boat he immediately raised his own and other ... consuls did the same”). His first discussions with the Turks concerned the number of welcoming salutes: the envoy required the cannons would be fired not twenty-five, but rather thirty times.

The envoy Potocki made three entries, always with his numerous assistants. The first one to Patras was referred to as ‘incognito’: “dla nieprzybyłego drugiego okrętu na którym wszystkie rzeczy do przyzwoitego wjazdu potrzebne znajdowały się” (“because the second ship with all the things necessary for a suitable entry did not arrive”). The arrival to Constantinople took place three months later, and it was referred to as ‘private’ – as the ship still had not yet arrived – but was however sumptuous: “Dwudziestu Czerzech czochodarów ... w atłasy przybranych wprowadzało Posła z wachlami” (“twenty four *tchocadars* [servants] ... dressed with satin introduced the Envoy holding big fans”). The second, ‘public’ entry to Constantinople was scheduled for two weeks later: “którego opisanie przeze Mnie, z zlecenia Posła ułożone mam honor ... przyłączyć” (“its description, which I have composed

³ Sufficient to be able to translate the *Kānūn Nāme* of Soliman II, see: Reyhman (1951: 90–91).

⁴ Other letters, written between December 1791 and 1796 after the return to Poland, concern mostly home affairs and references to Turkey are very scarce.

following the order of the Envoy... I am honoured to enclose"). Unfortunately, this description has been lost, but a painting representing this splendid procession has been kept in the collections of Wilanów Palace. Hordyński is also the author of the description of Potocki's audience with the *Kaimakan* (Deputy Vizier), inserted in a manuscript in Czartoryski Library.⁵ He gives a detailed description of the costumes of the participants and mentions the colours and even their materials.

The attire also had particular importance. When the members of the Polish legation enjoyed the pleasures of "le petit carnaval" in Venice, waiting for "wiatr który... zowią Tramontano" ("the wind called Tramontano"), necessary for leaving the harbour, they wore Western European clothes. Arriving in Patras, where he would meet the Turks for the first time, Hordyński was dressed in the Polish manner. In July, travelling to the military camp of the Turkish army near Vidyn (on the southern bank of the Danube) he wore Tatar clothes. After his return to Constantinople, he writes: "donoszę, żem strój odmienił, i podług rozkazu i żądania JWW Pana Dobrodzieja, iuż po Polsku przebrałem się" ("I state I have changed my clothes and I am already in Polish attire following the order and request of the Benevolent Sir"). The officer in charge of preparing Potocki's mission bought a Greek costume, and when he arrived in Constantinople, a Turkish one.⁶ It is obvious the choice of the clothes did not depend only on the taste of the diplomats, but was significant enough for the authorities to control its suitability.

Appearance had a great importance at that time. The splendour of the ceremonial entries, the richness and colours of clothing, should not only catch the eye, but were also supposed to display the wealth of the visitors and, at the same time, emphasize the importance attributed to the hosts. The opulent gifts brought by the delegation, such as clocks, snuffboxes and porcelain, had a similar function.⁷

At the end of the 18th century, a taste for antiquities was still present among diplomats. Hordyński writes to Wincenty Potocki: "zabrawszy w Salonice przyjaźń w JP. Cusinerim, Konsulem francuzkim, mam od niego kilkanaście bardzo pięknych sztuk dawnej monety greckiey, którą będę miał honor Panu... ofiarować" ("Making friends in Thessaloniki with Mr Cusineri,

⁵ Ms.846 of Czartoryski Library, pp. 389–392, the account published by Waliszewski (1894. 1: 151–156).

⁶ A list of expenses in Ms. 846 of Czartoryski Library p. 248, 249.

⁷ Waliszewski (1894. 1: 9).

the French Consul, I received from him more than ten very fine pieces of old Greek coins that I shall have the honour to offer you”). Another time, he reveals the intention to accompany the same Mr Cusineri on a trip: “myślą... Moją iest, zwiedzić brzegi Azyi aż do Smirny, tudzież niektóre sławniejsze w Staro-żytności, Archipelagu wyspy...” (“my intention ... is to visit the coasts of Asia as far as Smyrna, and some most illustrious Ancient isles of the Archipelago”). He added that Cusineri had promised to show him his description and observations regarding Macedonia, where he had travelled. In an earlier letter, Hordyński tells of his sorrow over the decline of Corinth. Diplomats did not avoid the pleasures of sightseeing. Potocki, in the description of his journey from Poland to Turkey, records the monuments he visited during six months of travelling. Hordyński mentions his visit to Virgil’s house: “w nim teraz mieszka szwiec, któremu dla honoru kazałem sobie zrobić parę trzewików” (“where lives to-day a shoemaker, whom for honour’s sake I ordered to make for me a pair of shoes”).

It is hard to say whether an interest in antiquities was present among all educated Polish gentry at the end of the 18th century. Another member of the legation declares he doesn’t write poems, neither is he acquainted with ‘Rubenses’, nor with sculptures, but he is able to estimate people and places easily.⁸⁾ But perhaps he wrote in such a fashion merely because such an attitude was not common in his environment.

Hordyński’s letters from Turkey do not reveal any new facts unknown to historians. Nevertheless, they contain many interesting details and opinions about the Ottoman Empire and sometimes show the seamy side of events. Therefore, the publication of that correspondence would certainly be of value to historians.

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⁸⁾ Reychman (1959: 53).