

THE AFFAIR OF OSTROG

AN EPISODE IN MALTO-POLISH RELATIONS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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In the days of the mediaeval Catholicity of Europe, the Order of Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem held lands in countries outside the narrower compass to which it was reduced by the Reformation, but by 1700 the Tongue of England was defunct, and the Priory of Dacia, which had included commanderies in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, had disappeared. In the Tongue of Germany, the Priory of Brandenburg had turned Lutheran and the Priory of Poland dwindled away. In that last century however, whose boundaries had expanded and contracted with such bewildering rapidity in the turbulent years following the union with the kingdom of Lithuania in 1569, two commanderies remained: Posen and Stolowitz, the second in the *jus-patronatus* of the Radziwill family. The Commanders took their seats in the Chapter of the Priory of Bohemia. Other commanderies, once part of Poland, had been absorbed into the dominions of her neighbours or lost to the Turks; alone these two remained, a poor incentive to the nobility of that enormous and fiercely Catholic nation to enrol themselves in the Order of St John. But within twenty years of the Order's expulsion from Malta and Poland's final partition, the Knights Hospitaller were once more to turn to that leviathan country as a recruiting ground. The cause of this nearly two centuries' delay was a celebrated law-suit, known to both the Maltese and Polish Chancelleries as *The Affair of Ostrog*.

It began, years before, in 1609. In that year Prince Janus Ostrog, owner of extensive territories in Volhynia, a province in the south-east of Poland, to-day part of Russia, applied to the Polish Diet for permission to dispose of the succession of his lands as an entity, either to his own or to his brother-in-law's male heirs succeeding, but in the event of their surcease, to an heir whom he should be allowed to specify¹. The Diet,

¹ Archives of the Order in Malta (AOM) 268. Lib. Conc. Stat. 21 May 1728.

AOM 270. Lib. Conc. Stat. 24 May 1754.

Lettres sur la Négociation de l'Affaire de Malthe en Pologne: écrites par un habitant de Warsowie à son ami à Londres. (London, 1775) 10 April 1773.

which alone could grant an ordinance for such a thing, agreed, and though he did not specify this ultimate heir at the time, it registered an ordinance to this effect. The sixth clause of his disposition stated, when it came to be made, that this heir should be a Knight of Malta, to be chosen from among existing Polish Knights by the majority vote of all the ecclesiastical and secular nobles in the Diet. This Knight of Malta should be in possession of the lands until his death or translation, and should be replaced by another. The only proviso was that the estates of Ostrog should provide three hundred foot and three hundred horse on the occasion of a war with Turkey for service in the Polish Army.

In 1672, the event Prince Janus had provided for occurred. The line of male heirs died out. In accordance with the will, Prince Jerome Lubomirski, Grand Marshall of Poland and a Knight of Malta, became the Ordinat or possessor of the lands. Lubomirski had become a Knight in his early youth and later obtained a Papal dispensation to be married, so that on his death his widow continued to administer the Duchy until 1701, when she too died. The Grand Master in Malta, Ramon Perellos, conceded the Duchy to a Polish Knight, Samuel Proski, on condition that he secured the nomination from the two noble estates of the Diet². The lands were, however, too rich a legacy for the greedy claimants to execute the sixth clause of Janus's will: with the support of the Saxon court, Prince Sanguszko moved in, with the dubious claim that his wife was the sole surviving heir to the family of Janus's brother-in-law, disregarding the explicit instructions in the Constitution that succession would not be possible through the female line³.

To strengthen his claim, his mother was a Lubomirski; in Poland inter-family relations were the determinant factor of politics. The Sanguszkos had the support of the Court and would not be dislodged. For nine years the Order, baffled by the distance and the complexity of Polish affairs, was unable to press the matter of its claim, but in 1710, on the death of Proski, the Grand Master charged another Polish Knight, the Chevalier Dombrowski, to maintain the Order's stand⁴. Dombrowski seemed the ideal man; he was the first gentleman of the Queen's entourage, but Perellos did not know that her King, Stanislas Leczynski, was now a fugitive with the Swedish army. In 1711, a Jacobite Scotsman who had been received into the Tongue of Italy as a Knight of Grace, James George Gordon, arrived in Malta with a message from Leczynski; it advised the Grand Master to come to some arrangement with the holdere of Ostrog and to

² AOM 1471. G.M. Perellos to Bailiff Sacchetti, Ambassador in Rome, 28 July 1710.

³ AOM 270. Loc. cit.

⁴ AOM 1330. Bailiff Sacchetti to G.M. Perellos 10 June, 11 Nov. 1719.

accept some financial compensation⁵. Perellos, unwilling to resign a claim of such importance to his Order, which was beginning to feel the pinch of financial stringency owing to the new burden on the Treasury of a squadron of line ships, merely instructed successive Knights to keep their eyes on the Duchy and to be ready to raise the matter again if the internal affairs of the Republic ever became stable.

In 1719, however, the Ostrog claims found a powerful backer in a member of the Czartoryski family. Prince Augustus, a Knight of Malta in the German Tongue, professed in 1699, promised the Grand Master that he would bring the matter up at the next Diet to be convened in 1729⁶. Grand Master de Vilhena at the same time found an opportunity to ingratiate himself with Augustus II, the Saxon King of Poland, when he received his bastard, the Prince of Teschen, as an honoured guest – the young man had come to Malta to do his Caravans as a Knight of the Tongue of Italy – and decorated him on departure with the Grand Cross⁷. But the support of Augustus, the Family and the Papal Nuncio in Warsaw was still not enough to dislodge the Sanguszkos. The matter was deferred from the 1720 Diet to the next; all that had been achieved was an order from the King that a full inventory of the lands should be taken and lodged in the Treasury⁸. In 1722, Czartoryski tried again without success; the combination of Sanguszko and his fellow magnates, who stood to benefit from a project of the *de facto* holder to partition the lands, was too powerful. But the championship of Augustus Czartoryski was a cardinal achievement. With the assistance of a huge fortune, brought to him by the wife he was encouraged, by dispensation, to marry, he was to dominate the political scene for thirty-five years; as a Knight of Malta he was considered the proper claimant of the Duchy of Ostrog; inevitably he would use the Maltese claim as a lever of political control.

The aims of the 'Family' were, shortly, the regeneration of Poland through their own power; the chaotic state of the Republic's affairs was due to a chronic rivalry between the big family combinations and to the uncertainty of the succession. From 1725 onwards, the succession problem assumed in the mind of Augustus II a greater importance than his

⁵ AOM 266. Lib. Conc. Stat. 29 Jan. 1711. Memoire from Stanislas Rex. Received and entered on Aug. 26.

⁶ AOM 1481. G.M. Zondadari to Chev. Dombrowski, Warsaw. 15 May 1720

AOM 1480. G.M. Zondadari to King of Poland. 11 Oct. 1719.

AOM 1331. Sacchetti to Zondadari. 14 Sept. 1720.

AOM 1331. Clement XI to Augustus II (enclosed). 7 Sept. 1720.

⁷ AOM 1486. G.M. Vilhena to Augustus II 8 Aug. 1726; 28 March, 21 Aug. 1728. Teschen had been in Malta for two years.

⁸ AOM 268. Lib. Conc. Stat. 21 May 1728.

earlier plans for political absolutism, from which alone reform could come. With Stanilas Leczynski the French King's father-in-law, an anti-Saxon party looked to France for support, and its leading family was the Potocki. Against this powerful dynasty – whose revenues alone exceeded the annual army budget by four million zloties – the Czartoryskis were bound to range, and the other great families too tended to make some sort of alignment with one side or the other. Strong in support of the Potocki were the Sanguszko and Radziwill families, while the Lubomirskis sat on the fence though tied by family connections to the head of the Sanguszkos, illegitimate holder of the lands of Ostrog. For the next thirty years the Czartoryskis and the Potockis manoeuvred, one to obtain the control of the army, the other to retain what had always been considered their personal domain. As a hetman's baton, the rank of Commander in Chief of the armies in the field, could only be bestowed by a regularly constituted Diet, the Potockis saw to it that the business of every Diet never even reached the election of a President. In this way the claims of the Order of St John were never heard.

In 1753, however, the affairs of Ostrog once more came into prominence. The heir to the Sanguszko decided to renounce the world and end his days in a Convent. In the publicity that attended this decision it was discovered that he had distributed various portions of the Duchy of Ostrog to client and friendly families⁹. The distribution had been largely in favour of the Lubomirskis, the family of his mother; one estate had gone besides to a Potocki, another to a Sapieha. Of the eleven partitions, the second largest, worth 100,000 Polish florins in rents, was made over to Augustus Czartoryski, in an attempt, no doubt, to silence his persistent nagging. The revenues of the entire Ostrog ordination were estimated at close on 300,000 Polish florins – but they were probably more¹⁰.

These dispositions were at once contested by the magnates who had not benefited under the disposition and who claimed that they were impossible without the consent of the Diet. Hetman Branicki, supreme commander of the royal armies, asked Sanguszko to reconsider his action, since the six hundred men that the Duchy was obliged to contribute to the army, albeit of poor quality hitherto, would not be forthcoming under

⁹ Lettres sur la Négociation citées. I. 10 April 1773. AOM Lib. Conc. Stat. 18 Mar. 1754. Letter from Papal Nuncio, Warsaw to Cardinal Secretary of State, Rome.

¹⁰ AOM 270. Lib. Conc. Stat. 14 Dec. 1754. Grand Prior Kollówrath to G.M. Pinto. The full annual value of the lands is never accurately given. The highest figure was 9 million Polish florins, the lowest 100,000. The latter figure represented the value of its rents in 1623. Ibid. 22 June 1754. Relation of Venerable Commissioners. The figure was based on the will of Janus of Ostrog.

the new disposition¹¹. Sanguszko replied that the alternative to his decision was a reversion of the lands to the Order of St John who, being under no obligations to the Republic, would use the revenues for their own purposes. If the lands once passed *in spiritualia*, he said, the Republic would have no claim on them; it was better to dispose of the lands to subjects of the Republic who would, he felt certain, find the six hundred men¹².

The quarrel, newly opened, could only be settled in the Diet, and as no solution to the problem had ever been found there it was unlikely that Branicki's circular to the Senators, calling upon them to champion the Order's claims, would do more than make the situation worse. In this he stated that a single holder, under obligations, would not only field the men but also solve a long standing cause for litigation. Acting upon what he conceived to be his duty, he established a military occupation of the Duchy.

It was at this stage that a proposal first made in 1710 was again raised¹³. It was that the Order should establish, in Poland, a Priory of six or eight Commanderies which would at once provide the men, open the Order to the great families of the State and, perhaps, if the present holders were admitted as the first Commanders, solve the present dispute amicably¹⁴. As soon as Branicki had moved in, the Grand Prior of Bohemia, Emmanuel von Kollowrath, was despatched to Warsaw to see what he could do. He arrived to find the Diet broken up by the Czartoryskis¹⁵. The uproar over the whole business, the actions of both Janus Sanguszko and Hetman Branicki, had proved so bitter that Czartoryski's share of the Ostrog Duchy was in danger. He had consented to the partition in an attempt to disrupt the nobility and to secure a portion at least for the Order, now even that seemed in danger. King Augustus III intervened and appointed a commission of five to examine the situation; this was to draw its expenses from the lands of the Duchy and pay Sanguszko an annual sum of 100,000 florins¹⁶. Kollowrath found that the Czartoryskis, because of their pro-Russian leanings, had lost the ear of the King and were inclined to dispute the commission's legality, and he feared they might form a

¹¹Ibid. Enclosure in report of Papal Nuncio. Letter from Branicki to Sanguszko. 9 Dec. 1753.

¹²Loc. cit. Sanguszko to Branicki, undated

¹³AOM 1471. Sacchetti to Perellos 28 July 1710.

¹⁴AOM 270. Lib. Conc. Stat. 24 May 1754. Proposal of Committee set up by G.M. Pinto to examine the report of Papal Nuncio.

¹⁵Ibid. 13 Mar. 1755. Letter from Kollowrath to Pinto 14 Dec. 1754.

¹⁶The Commissioners were to draw 100,000 florins p.a. from the lands to cover their expenses, so the Duchy was probably valued at over 100,000 florins p.a.

Confederation against it. As principal beneficiaries under Sanguszko's disposition, Kollowrath thought that they were unlikely to champion the Order's claim with any great heat. In that, the Grand Prior did the family an injustice. The Czartoryskis were playing for higher stakes than mere possession of the lands of Ostrog. Prince Augustus, aware that the future stability of Poland depended on the good will of the neighbouring powers, preferred rather to court Russian support than Prussian. He hoped to break the Saxon hold on the Kingdom and to obtain, with Russian support, the election of a Polish king on the death of Augustus III. The Potocki were already scheming for a French claimant, the Prince de Conti, Grand Prior of France and a Knight of Malta, but not for that likely to be particularly vehement in the interests of the Order, and the agreement he had made with Sanguszko to divide the Duchy among the Lubomirskis, who were the holder's principal creditors, and the Potocki had been an attempt to divide the aristocratic opponents to the aims of the Family.

The prompt action of Branicki was no altruistic move on behalf of the Order — he had recently gone over to the Saxon party and intended to spike the Czartoryski guns. The group of lesser magnates, including the Radziwills, who controlled the Commandery of Stowicz, had been won over to the Saxon cause, and the King's commissioners were all members of the anti-Russian group. Kollowrath attributed greed to Branicki himself, who posing as a patriot also had his eye on controlling the revenues of those vast lands himself.

The Grand Prior, designated Minister Plenipotentiary by Pinto, caused some surprise in Warsaw where he requested an audience with the King as an ambassador of the power who had been least consulted during the whole wrangle. His lavish equipage, which the Treasury had allowed him in order to create a good impression, astonished the Poles who had heard and seen little of the Order of St John before. He found the temper of the Court, however, xenophobically suspicious of the Knights; they were suspected of wanting to insert foreigners into key positions in the land. He was forced to admit that the Knights who had hitherto been professed from Poland had cut little figure in the state, but his own impressive appearance did something to break down their suspicions, and he was able to reassure the Senators that the Knights would not form an *imperium in imperio* but would be loyal subjects of their monarch; though one tenth of their landed revenues were sent to Malta, the rest would be spent inside the country. He had to counter another objection: the Order as a religious foundation was forbidden under the law of *mainmorte* of 1726 to inherit lands. He was able to show that this was not so, that the Knights were not strictly a religious order, and that in other countries an involved

judicial arrangement had exempted them from payment of all dues levied on ecclesiastical foundations. Even if they were subject to the law, which he denied, their claim was anterior to the law. He assured them that under Janus of Ostrog's will, the Diet would nominate the Commander, and thus instead of losing the entire revenue as they would were the Knights a religious foundation, where the State had no control of nominations, nine tenths of it would remain in the hands of a Pole.

Finally he argued the case of a Priory with some subtlety. The alternative was that the whole Duchy might fall into the hands of an overmighty subject; instead, the Catholic nobility would be able to form an integral part, a Priory, perhaps a Tongue, in the most celebrated aristocratic and chivalric order in Europe. He circulated his arguments in a report to the Ambassadors of all the foreign powers, and a thousand copies were printed for distribution in Warsaw itself. The immediate result, as Kollowrath saw it, was a flattering interest among the aristocratic Bishops and the greater nobles in the Cross of the Order which they wanted to wear. He was not taken in. He had summed up the situation in Poland and found 'an anarchy that calls itself a Republic, and a country where the laws have no rigour either against magnates who abuse them or against corruption'. Still, in order to build up a 'Maltese' party, it might be desirable to award a lavish sprinkling of Crosses of Devotion, *honoris causa*, on important people¹⁷.

More important, however, was another result of this impasse. The Czartoryskis, aware that they were temporarily outvoted, took off Stanislas Poniatowski, himself a Sapięha and concerned in the succession to a part of Ostrog, and introduced him to the Czarina Catherine II. The results of this move were to be Poniatowski's later return to the Polish throne as Catherine's cast-off lover rewarded with a crown, and as the first effective Polish king since Sobieski. In Malta meanwhile the Czartoryskis were no longer confidently looked upon as the prop of the Order's claim; Kollowrath offered to remain in Warsaw and even to follow the King to Dresden at his own expense, in his own words there to entertain with a good table 'which will keep the Nuncios of the Princes Palatine sweet, for with them more is achieved with a glass of wine than with reason'.

Despite the despatch of five specially worked gold Crosses of Devotion to five Polish bishops, nothing was achieved¹⁸. Kollowrath could not

¹⁷ Kollowrath was personally approached by twelve notables and asked to recommend them for an award of the Cross of Devotion.

¹⁸ The Prince Bishops of Varmia, Cracow and Livonia and the Bishops Count Zaluski and Padocki.

support the expense indefinitely and the Treasury could not afford to subsidise him¹⁹. All they could hope for was that now Sanguszko's illegal hold had been broken, the holding royal commission could not last for ever. Unfortunately the internal affairs of the country grew no more stable and for seventeen years nothing more was heard of the Duchy of Ostrog in Malta. But with the settlement of the first Partition in 1722, the Sacred Council determined to see what it could do, not with Poland herself, but with her neighbours. The Knight chosen for this diplomatic Odyssey was a Veronese, the Chevalier Michael Sagramoso, one of the finest products of the century²⁰. Sagramoso before being entrusted with this mission was already a much-travelled man, and known in most European courts as a scholarly dilettante of great charm and common-sense. He was born in Verona in 1720 and his mother was a Hanoverian. After a disappointing youth he was finally professed a Knight of Malta in 1738, 'a resolute measure taken by Mentor to drag his Telemachus from the confines of Origia', and sent straight to the island to do his Caravans. As a Knight of Malta, Sagramoso was to find happiness, and a challenge to his latent faculties as a diplomat. He was one of the few Knights who had actually lived in Turkey, attached to the French Embassy at Constantinople; while in Germany, visiting his mother's family, he received an offer from Frederick the Great to join his recently founded academy as one of the ten young nobles who were to be trained for diplomacy in the first European forcing house for foreign office officials. In Sweden, he made the acquaintance of Linnaeus, whose avid and enthusiastic disciple he became, always sending the great botanist specimens that he found on his travels. In 1748 he visited St Petersburg, where the fame of his charming manners, wide interests, cultured conversation and exquisite tact ensured a flattering welcome from the Empress Elizabeth, who put a carriage at his disposal and permitted him to visit the naval arsenals at Kronstadt and the military academy at St Petersburg. Elizabeth, anxious to make a good impression with Europeans, and especially Europeans so well connected, treated him as if he were an ambassador and sent him away with twenty sticks of rhubarb, then a rare and valuable remedy against liver complaints. This early visit to the Russian capital in part governed the choice of Sagramoso for his new task; but his high standing with Frederick II was as important. For Frederick on his return from Russia had offered him a ministry. Sagramoso however wished to refuse any post that might tie him down; he wished to be his own master for the improvement of his mind and with four companions he took up residence on the shores of Lake

¹⁹ AOM 1513. Pinto to Kollowrath. 23 July 1756.

²⁰ AOM 273. Lib. Conc. Stat. 23 July 1773.

Geneva, indulging in botanical and mineral quests for his friend Linnaeus, and discussing the problems of the world with the others. But he was at heart a Knight Errant; he left Switzerland for a visit to the Saxon court at Dresden and Warsaw, then for the Elector of Hanover's kingdom across the channel, where at Windsor, George II made him a Gentleman of the Bedchamber. In England, as a good Knight Hospitaller, he inspected the ships and dockyards, and was impressed by the agricultural revolution, then in full swing. He became, in common with many eighteenth century Italians, a fervent Anglophil, and it was said in London that the best passport a visitor could have in England was a recommendation from the Chevalier Sagramoso. In Vienna in 1754, he was received by Kaunitz and Maria Theresa, with whom he discussed the affairs of the Order, and by both of them he was entreated to accept a diplomatic post in the Austrian diplomatic service. It was hardly surprising therefore that at the comparatively early age of forty Pinto appointed him Receiver of the Order in Venice. Here, between his official residence in the city and his personal house at Poiano, he became one of the patrons of intellectual society, the friend of Tiepolo and Goldoni, as well as an experimental farmer on English models, and founder member of the first agricultural academy in Italy at Verona. Then the call came; he was summoned to Malta and sent on a Europeanwide mission to plead the case of the Order of Malta via the ambassadors of all those European powers accredited at Warsaw before the Diet and the Court of Poland²¹.

He made his way to Warsaw by way of London, Vienna and Berlin, engaging the sovereigns there to instruct their ambassadors at the Polish Court to lend their support to his mission. Always glad to bedevil Polish politics, both Joseph II and Frederick agreed; but Sagramoso had then to go on to St Petersburg, where Elizabeth's niece-in-law ruled as the Empress Catherine II. He had met Catherine before in 1748, when he had brought her confidential letters from her brother, the Duke of Anhalt-Zerbst; now he was able to secure her all-important championship for the claim of his Order. Catherine's interest in Malta was now three years old, and she had many reasons for wishing to make herself agreeable to the Knights.

Sagramoso's arrival in Warsaw coincided with letters announcing the death of Pinto²²; the Polish government, embarrassed by his powerful friends, declined to recognise the validity of his status. Accordingly it was not until May, 1773, that Sagramoso was able to present his credentials. In the meantime he built up his party, which included one important

²¹Aurelio Bertola: *Vita di Michele Sagramoso*, (Paris, 1793) pp. 1-143.

²²Lettres sur la Négociation. IV. 3 July 1773.

accession from the ranks of the hitherto unfriendly, the Marshall of the Confederation of Lithuania, a Radziwill, who begged to be allowed to become a Knight. He also approached the Marshall of the Confederation of the Crown, Prince Adam Poninski, one of the possessors of Ostrog lands by the disposition of Janus Sanguszko, with a view to persuading him to set up a commandery from his part of the spoils²³. With his foreign support he was at last able to convince Stanislas Poniatowski, now King of Poland, that justice demanded a Delegation to examine the pretensions of the Order²⁴. The Delegation appointed a Commission and a Diet was convened for September 15th²⁵. However, familiar delaying tactics were employed to delay the meeting of the Commission²⁶.

When at last it was permitted to meet on January 19th, 1774, Sagramoso was able to announce the preliminary foundation of one commandery on the Ostrog estates in the possession of Poninski. This was to be held in the family in perpetuity for his male heirs; either members of the family would possess it as Knights of Malta, or they would have the right of nomination. The value of the estate was 300,000 Polish florins, bringing in an annual revenue of 15,000; the first Knight was to be the Prince himself, who was decorated with the Cross of Devotion and dispensed from the usual vow of celibacy²⁷. Sagramoso hoped the example would be followed; he had given up any hopes that the Order might gain complete control of the estates, but such a solution would satisfy both the possessors, giving them a nominal control, and the Order, bringing in at least the annual tenth to Malta by way of Responcions. The response, however, was not immediate. The Delegates still prevaricated, hoping that the Diet, when it met, would dismiss the Order's case, and in face of this Sagramoso produced his trump card. He told them that the Grand Master had empowered him to offer the Order's pretensions to the Prussian minister. Though Frederick the Great had renounced all claims on the Republic in the Treaty that had concluded the first partition in 1772, he had not renounced the rights he could acquire through his brother, Prince Ferdinand, Prior of Brandenburg, who though a heretic was accepted in Malta

²³Op. cit. V. 30 August 1773.

²⁴Op. cit. VI. 20 Oct. 1773.

²⁵AOM 273. Lib. Conc. Stat. 23 July 1773.

²⁶Lettres etc. VII 28 Dec. 1773. All the members appointed to the Commission, were related to the holders of the lands, and so not disinterested. Sagramoso, in order to appear conciliatory, did not ask the three ministers to exclude them, but he was delayed by the contention of Prince Lubomirski, Palatine of Kiovic and principal possessor, that they should decide whether the other possessors had claims on the same estate as the one he claimed.

²⁷AOM 273. Lib. Conc. Stat. 11 Aug. 1774. The final agreement was signed on 22 May 1774.

as a member of the Order. 'That which is denied to my modest and pacific overtures', he warned them, 'will be then given over to the authority of force.'²⁸

The opposition crumbled. Unwilling to make the Ostrog issue an international one, in which they might retain no interest, the holders of the lands agreed with Sagramoso to found a Priory with six commanderies; 120,000 florins a year were to be assigned by them as a fund from which to support the Commanders. The first holders were to be dispensed from the obligations of celibacy, but their successors had to keep the rules of the Order, and all holders had to show proofs of nobility to the second generation from both sides, both male and female²⁹. In addition to this Priory, eight other families founded commanderies, retaining the *jus patronatus*³⁰. When the final papers were signed, their total endowment amounted to 1,440,000 florins, with an annual revenue of 87,000.

Financially this was more than Sagramoso had ever dared to hope for when negotiations began. From the Priory the Order could expect annual responsions of 24,000 florins, from the Commanderies of *jus patronatus* 8,200. At least now there would be sixteen Knights in the country, while the problem of the regiment of soldiers was to be solved by a special foundation of 300,000 florins to be used for its maintenance.

Sagramoso estimated that in 1774 the full value of the estates of Ostrog was 9,000,000 florins a year: he had managed to rescue a bare 120,000, together with a quittance payment of 5,000 gold ducats from the possessors. In return for this paltry but valuable sum, he signed a formal renunciation of the Order's claims upon the whole estate. The Poles had driven a hard bargain and the Knights had to be content with it. But much at least had been achieved by Sagramoso's gentle insistence on the prestige that Poland was bound to gain from an establishment of Knights: 'It is not by money that he makes his creatures', wrote an admiring witness, 'but he induces them to value a black ribbon with a little cross. Indeed I admire the Knight who finds it possible to satisfy the greed and vanity of those people whom he needs at virtually no cost to his Order.'³¹ The Poles, whose national pride was too easily dissipated in empty shows, found a convenient way out of tedious litigation in which the three neighbouring powers threatened to intervene, and honour was satisfied all round³².

²⁸ *Vita di Sagramoso*, p. 152, Speech of St. to Delegates, related in full. Also *Lettres etc.* XIII, 15 Dec. 1774.

²⁹ AOM 273. Lib. Conc. Stat. 31 Jan. 1776. The Constitutions were signed by Sagramoso on 17 Dec. 1774.

³⁰ The Commandery of Prince Poninski was one of them.

³¹ *Lettres etc.* XII, 24 Oct. 1774.

³² The Priory's foundation was eventually ratified in the Polish Diet on 18 Oct.

The significance for Poland of this arrangement was by now minimal. Interest had shifted from the Duchy of Ostrog, and it is significant that in no place in the new constitution are the Czartoryskis mentioned. To the Poles, the interference of the foreign ministers was one more irritating indignity, and the Priory was far from being a satisfactory foundation. Polish Knights were less eager to pay their dues to Malta than they were to wear the eight pointed Cross. Four thousand florins of the quittance fee were never paid. The receipts from the Order's financial agent in Warsaw show a spasmodic and insufficient series of payments. Indeed the whole foundation had a flimsy and tenuous look about it, as if doomed to die young³³.

The most important aspect of these negotiations was, however, the rapport struck between the Order and the court of St Petersburg. With a Russian minister in Valletta and, in 1775, Sagramoso in Russia on a journey of thanks to the Czarina, this new diplomatic involvement was to have important consequences. Catherine begged Sagramoso to remain at her court as the Maltese minister, but his health which was none too good demanded a warmer climate. He was also tired: it was 'impossible to relate in a simple narrative, the interminable correspondence with nearly every court of Europe, the infinite strange, not to say incredible, stratagems with which I was constrained to sustain the most bitter and obstinate litigation, accompanied by the most tortuous legal methods, and at the same time confronted by political intrigues at once extremely arduous and intricate to unravel'. He deserved a rest³⁴.

But the troubles of Priory were only beginning. It was a puling infant

1776, not without protest. The Prior was Adam Poninski and the six Commanders: Prince Francis Sulkowski, Prince Casimir Sapieha, Prince Calixtus Poninski, Count Simeon Casimir Szolowski, Count Mielzynski and Count Luba. The *Jus Patronatus* were founded by Adam Poninski, Casimir de Plater, Chev. Adalbert Schamosty-Szamowski, Prince Augustus Sulkowski, the Podoszki family, Count Michael de Lopott, Count Joseph-Vincent Plater and the Count of Huslen.

³³ AOM 1620. Letters to Receiver of Order in Poland. The Banker Tepper was made responsible for the collection of the various dues, and so difficult did the task become, and so unpopular did he become with his insistent but hopeless demands, that he begged to be relieved; the Grand Master was able to persuade him to stay by making him a Donat of the Order. The last of the *Jus Patronatus* was founded and all arrangements made by 1775. By as early as 1779 the Priory was in arrears. In 1781 Tepper had reduced them to one year, but nothing further was received from him until 1786 when 108,000 florins arrived in Venice, arrears up to 1784. In Dec., 1788 the last recorded receipt mentions 585 florins arriving in Venice of 48,000 duc. The receipts scarcely covered the expenses incurred in establishing the Order's claim on the lands — all it had gained was a membership of dilatory Polish Knights, amounting, with the honorary crosses awarded, to 22.

³⁴ AOM 273. Lib. Conc. Stat. 19 May 1778. Relation of Sagramoso.

beset by ailments: the project of admitting the Polish Priory into the German Tongue was balked by the earnest opposition of the whole chapter and of the Bailiff of Brandenburg, Ferdinand Hompesch, the future Grand Master. They refused to allow Knights who were obliged to show only eight quarterings to belong to a Tongue which had to show sixteen³⁵. Then various Knights tried to get the dispensations of celibacy to apply to their children³⁶. The Prior and his Receiver quarrelled, and the latter sent back to Malta an extremely unflattering picture of the Prior. 'The dissipation in which Frater Poninski lives, and the chaos into which his particular affairs have got, deprive him of any leisure to carry out his duties as Grand-Prior.... It would seem important that the Grand Council of Malta should enlighten him (upon his dependence on the Grand Master), and explain to him the dangers to which he will be exposed if he continues to neglect his duties as he has been.'³⁷

The most serious deficiency was the reluctance of the new Knights to pay their Responsions, and when the Bailiff Stecki, ex-Commander of Posen, died, his family refused to disgorge his spoils³⁸. But the state of the whole country was reflected in miniature in this unhappy little foundation. 'The new establishments in Poland', wrote the Count de Borch to de Rohan, 'are the work of Your Highness and are capable of immortalizing you in the eyes of the Order, who, in this new colony, will recognize for ever the wisdom and zeal of its august head. But you know, Monseigneur, what sort of people these Poles are to-day, full of good will, but feeble by themselves; they cannot guarantee any establishment among themselves unless a foreign power goes surety for its solidity. Russia, more than any other of the neighbouring powers, is in a position to furnish this support. Render, Monseigneur, this nation favourable to the Order by working on the arm that directs it.'³⁹

³⁵AOM 1530. De Rohan to Count Colloredo, Grand Prior of Hungary. 19 Aug. 1776.

AOM 1366. De Breteuil, Ambassador in Rome to De Rohan, 1 July 1777.

³⁶The Platers wished to resign their commanderies to their infant children and yet to remain within the Order as Knights. Poninski, though not a professed Knight because of his married status, wanted in the absence of a professed Knight to decorate his own two sons and a nephew with the Cross of Malta. AOM 1240. De Rohan to Adam Poninski, Warsaw, 15 Oct. 1777.

³⁷AOM 1242. Francis Sulkowski to De Rohan. 14 Dec. 1778.

³⁸AOM 1532. De Rohan to Papal Nuncio, Warsaw, 9 Sept. 1780. De Rohan to Bailiff de Brillane, Ambassador in Rome. 23 Sept. 1780. Further correspondence on same subject to Sagramoso in Naples, 17 Mar. 1781. AOM 1533.

³⁹AOM 1240. De Borch to De Rohan, 22 Aug. 1779. Borch was trying to obtain the Cross of Devotion for Zacchary Czernichev, Governor General of White Russia and one of the principal ministers at the court of Catherine II. Borch wanted to use the Governor's influence to recover some sequestered lands belonging to his family.

De Rohan took the hint. In 1783 the Polish Priory was admitted into the Anglo-Bavarian Tongue and acquired the status of a Tongue in addition. The Elector of Bavaria and George III were quite content to see the Tongue become the Anglo-Bavaro-Polish Tongue, and Mgr Ghigiotti, the Polish King's private secretary, convinced Poninski that the arrangement was a good one⁴⁰. But these artificial injections were of no avail; the Polish infant died at length, not from internal weakness, but from suffocation. In 1793 the Second Partition swallowed up Volhynia and with it the Duchy of Ostrog. Poninski's commandery vanished into Russia and in the confused state of Polish affairs before her extinction in 1795, all possibility of controlling the Priory was out of the question. It had long ceased to pay its dues. The straitened finances of Malta after the Convention's decree confiscating all her lands in France made it desperately necessary to scrape together every penny that was due to her. The time had come to see what could be gained from wooing the Czarina. The way to St Petersburg was now open and was to lead to the curious anomaly five years later of an Imperial Grand Master in the person of Catherine's son, the Czar Paul I.

⁴⁰AOM 1582. De Rohan to Sagramoso. 5 July 1783. 14 Sept. 1783. 6 Dec. 1783.