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HENRY VALOIS'S COURT AND ELECTIVE KINGSHIP IN THE POLISH–LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH, 1573–1574*

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ABSTRACT. *Henry Valois (1551–89) was elected king of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1573 and arrived in Poland in January 1574. After five months, Henry fled Poland–Lithuania upon inheriting the French throne from his brother, Charles IX. As Henry III of France, he was branded a violent tyrant, who allowed his mignons to run the kingdom and isolated himself from his subjects. Historians have done much to rehabilitate Henry's reputation, but his first experience of kingship in the Commonwealth has been neglected in these reassessments. This article uses the previously unstudied treasury accounts of Henry's Polish court to re-examine his experience of the Polish–Lithuanian elective, parliamentary monarchy as crucial to the development of his characteristic style of kingship and court. Some of these practices were a response to the challenges posed by the Polish political system to a newly elected king. This allows us to recover a lost political connection between Poland and France. Secondly, the article demonstrates Henry's active engagement in the Polish–Lithuanian politics, challenging the narrative that he was a passive king anticipating his return to Paris. Instead, Henry planned to cement his rule in Poland by mounting his own faction and pursuing a bold diplomatic agenda.*

'I'm finally beginning to feel and understand that I am king', Henry Valois reportedly said upon his arrival in Poland in January 1574.¹ The fourth son

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¹ Emmanuel de Noailles, *Henri de Valois et la Pologne en 1572* (3 vols., Paris, 1867), II, p. 406.

of Henry II of France and Catherine de Medici, twenty-two-year-old Henry was elected king of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1573, following the death of the last Jagiellonian king, Sigismund II August. Before his arrival in Poland, Henry was one of the key figures in the French Wars of Religion. Across Europe, he was believed to be at least partly responsible for the St Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572), during which Catholics brutally murdered thousands of Protestants.² Henry also commanded the Catholic forces at the siege of Protestant-held La Rochelle (1572–3), his first significant military experience. After only five months in residence as king of Poland–Lithuania, Henry fled Poland in June 1574 and returned to France upon inheriting the French throne from his brother, Charles IX. When he failed to return within the deadline set by the Polish nobility, Henry was deposed and a new king, Stephen Bathory, was elected in 1575. Before his election and flight, Henry was seemingly the ideal prince, but by the end of his life he was branded a violent tyrant and idle monarch, who allowed his mignons, or favourites, to run the kingdom and isolated himself from his subjects.³ These accusations stemmed in part from the fact that Henry's French subjects found his style of kingship and court difficult to accept because it contrasted so sharply with that of his father and brother.⁴

Henry's short Polish–Lithuanian reign provides historians of more familiar early modern kingships and courts an entrée into the history of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. It also throws into sharp relief how early modern kingship was not a singular, transnational phenomenon, but its varieties were strongly conditioned by differing political cultures and expectations. Indeed, Henry's expectations of his new role were surely shaped by his experience of the French court and its focus on the monarch's personal needs and tastes as the main source of secular authority.⁵ This placed him at odds with the Polish–Lithuanian model of elective kingship and the clear sense that the Commonwealth was a descendant of the Roman Republic.⁶ At the same time, Henry's Polish reign shows that a monarch's kingship could be transnational, shaped by international networks and experiences gained in different political contexts. Henry's attempts to navigate and subvert the Polish court, a state institution largely controlled by appointed officers rather than the king's

² Arlette Jouanna, *La Saint-Barthélemy: les mystères d'un crime d'état (24 août 1572)* (Paris, 2007), pp. 131, 167, 170–3, 181–2; Janusz Tazbir, 'Polskie echa nocy Św. Bartłomieja', *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce*, 20 (1975), pp. 21–44.

³ Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III: roi shakespearien* (Paris, 1985), p. 128.

⁴ For example: Monique Chatenet, 'Henri III et "l'ordre de la cour": évolution de l'étiquette à travers les règlements généraux de 1578 et 1585', in Robert Sauzet, ed., *Henri III et son temps* (Paris, 1992), pp. 133–9.

⁵ John Adamson, 'The making of the ancien-régime court, 1500–1700', in John Adamson, ed., *The princely courts of Europe, 1500–1750* (London, 2000), pp. 7–41.

⁶ On republican ethos, see Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Dyskurs polityczny Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów* (Toruń, 2018), pp. 31–76.

household, not only reflected his immediate needs but, as this article contends, presaged his later French reign.

Henry's experience as the elected ruler of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth has been overlooked in attempts to understand his French kingship. Modern anglophone and francophone historiography has been largely concerned with revising our understanding of Henry inherited from Bourbon historians.⁷ Pierre Chevallier, Jacqueline Boucher, Nicolas Le Roux, Michel Pernot, and Robert Knecht have done much to rehabilitate Henry's reputation and represent the complexities of his French reign and character.⁸ On Henry's Polish reign, anglophone and francophone historians use works by Pierre Champion and the marquis de Noailles, which are respectively c. 80 and 150 years old, based primarily on French sources, and perpetuate old stereotypes of Poland–Lithuania.⁹ The Chevallier and Knecht biographies devote less space to Henry's five months in residence as king of Poland–Lithuania than the five weeks he spent in Venice following his flight from Cracow. Similarly, Le Roux's magisterial work on the development of Henry's *mignons* nonetheless does not closely consider the impact of the Polish political system and court.¹⁰ Any significant or long-term impact of Henry's first experience of kingship in a state very different to France is therefore lost.

This neglect of Henry's Polish–Lithuanian kingship is also notable given that until the end of his life Henry both self-identified and was thought of as 'Roi de Pologne' as well as 'Roi de France'. The first medal that names Henry 'Roi de Pologne' portrays him with Charles IX to commemorate the Polish election of 1573.¹¹ Another medal, pressed in 1574, names Henry 'Francorum et Polonorum Rex'.¹² Even after Henry was deposed by the Polish nobility in 1575, he continued to identify himself as the king of Poland. Medals from 1575, 1577, and 1588 identify him squarely as Roi de France et Pologne and some include images of Henry's two crowns on the

⁷ L. Maimbourg, *Histoire de la ligue* (Paris, 1683); F. E. de Mézeray, *Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France*, I–III (Amsterdam, 1667–8).

⁸ Chevallier, *Henri III*; Jacqueline Boucher, *La cour de Henri III* (Rennes, 1986); Nicolas Le Roux, *La faveur du roi: mignons et courtisans au temps des derniers Valois* (Paris, 2001); Nicolas Le Roux, *Un régicide au nom de Dieu: l'assassinat d'Henri III (1^{er} août 1589)* (Paris, 2006); Michel Pernot, *Henri III: le roi décrié* (Paris, 2013); Robert J. Knecht, *Hero or tyrant: Henry III, king of France, 1574–1589* (Farnham, 2014).

⁹ Noailles, *Henri de Valois*; Pierre Champion, *Henri III, roi de Pologne (1573–1574)* (Paris, 1943). A notable exception is a volume edited by Robert Sauzet which includes short papers delivered at a conference 'Henri III et son temps' with five papers by Polish historians on aspects of Henry's Polish rule and relationship between Poland and France: Sauzet, ed., *Henri III*.

¹⁰ Le Roux, *La faveur*, pp. 150–8.

¹¹ Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, SR 183, reproduced in Pierre-Gilles Girault and Mathieu Mercier, eds., *Fêtes & crimes à la Renaissance: la cour d'Henri III* (Paris, 2010), p. 82.

¹² BnF, département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, SR 200, reproduced in Girault and Mercier, eds., *Fêtes & crimes à la Renaissance*, p. 86.

reverse.¹³ Even French coins minted in Henry's time bear his Polish title.¹⁴ Not only was Henry thought of and represented as king of Poland during his lifetime, it was also an enduring part of his legacy. A book of Henry's ordinances for the order of the Holy Spirit published in 1594 reproduces on the cover his double coat of arms: the French fleurs-de-lis together with the Commonwealth's Polish eagle and Lithuanian Pahonia.¹⁵ These items were collected in an exhibition 'Fêtes et Crimes à la Renaissance: La Cour d'Henri III' held at Blois in 2010. The beautifully illustrated catalogue includes essays on aspects of Henry's reign and court written by experts, but even though the objects tell the story of his dual identity, no essay contextualizes his Polish–Lithuanian experience.¹⁶

That we little understand how Henry might have been shaped by his Polish kingship is compounded by the fact that the last significant Polish study of Henry's reign is Stanisław Grzybowski's 1980 biography, which focuses on the religious issues that surrounded Henry's election and both kingships.¹⁷ This followed Maciej Serwański's 1976 biography, which focused on French–Polish diplomacy and the impact of Henry's election on the relationship between Poland and France until the coronation of Henry's successor, Stephen Bathory, in 1576.¹⁸ These biographies make extensive use of Polish sources, but neither has been translated into English or French, which means that their influence is largely limited to Polish historiography. Henry's reign does feature in important recent work on the constitutional history of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, but this focuses almost exclusively on the election, propaganda, and creation of the contractual documents, viz. the Henrician Articles and *pacta conventa* (discussed below), but otherwise tends to reproduce the Serwański and Grzybowski narratives.¹⁹

This study seeks to address these multiple imbalances by using the previously neglected treasury accounts of Henry's Polish court held at the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw. The accounts were mostly written in the hand of Mikołaj Socha, the dispensator, whose job was to deal with provisions for the

¹³ BnF, département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, SR 196, 204, 227, reproduced in Girault and Mercier, eds., *Fêtes & crimes à la Renaissance*, pp. 87, 117.

¹⁴ BnF, département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, monnaie royale (Henri III), 32, 33, 34, reproduced in Girault and Mercier, eds., *Fêtes & crimes à la Renaissance*, p. 88.

¹⁵ Girault and Mercier, eds., *Fêtes & crimes à la Renaissance*, p. 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Stanisław Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy* (Wrocław, 1980).

¹⁸ Maciej Serwański, *Henryk III Walezy w Polsce: stosunki polsko-francuskie w latach 1566–1576* (Cracow, 1976).

¹⁹ Dariusz Makilla, *Artykuły henrykowskie (1573–1576)* (Warsaw, 2012); Felicia Roşu, *Elective monarchy in Transylvania and Poland–Lithuania, 1569–1587* (Oxford, 2017); Ewa Dubas-Urwanowicz, 'Polskie opinie o Henryku Walezym. Oczekiwania a rzeczywistość', *Przegląd Historyczny*, 81/1–2 (1990), pp. 59–73; Ewa Dubas-Urwanowicz, 'Bezkrólowie – czas integracji czy podziałów?', *Przegląd Historyczny*, 85/1–2 (1994), pp. 35–43; Miia Ijäs, *Res publica redefined? The Polish–Lithuanian transition period of the 1560s and 1570s in the context of European state formation processes* (Frankfurt am Main, 2016).

court. They record, among other things, preparations for Henry's arrival, coronation expenses, daily lists of food and drink consumed at court often with notes on the king's daily activities, and details of receiving and dispatching ambassadors. These documents can be difficult to interpret because the Polish court remains a notoriously understudied area. Marek Ferenc's recent study of the court structures of the last Jagiellonian, Sigismund August, is an invaluable aid when making sense of Henry's accounts but does not attempt to interpret the role of the court in politics and the political system of the Commonwealth.²⁰ The last article to discuss the structures of the court of Stephen Bathory, elected after Henry was deposed, is now over a hundred years old and is similar to Ferenc's study in its focus.²¹ As Urszula Augustyniak argued in her study of Vasa kingship, more work is needed on understanding the functioning of the royal court in the Polish–Lithuanian elective, parliamentary monarchy.²² We still lack a historical understanding of how the structures and workings of the Polish court after the fall of the Jagiellonian dynasty related to the political structures of the Commonwealth, what its role was in governing the Commonwealth, and what challenges a newly elected foreign monarch might face in taking control of the court.

This article makes a twofold argument. First, it argues that Henry's Polish episode was crucial to the development of his characteristic style of kingship and court. By giving us a detailed insight into Henry's day-to-day activities and the workings of his court, the treasury accounts allow us to see that Henry's behaviour presaged the trademark characteristics of his later French kingship. Furthermore, this article shows that some of these practices, which were later thought outlandish in France, were a response to the particular challenges posed by the Polish political system to a newly elected king. James Collins was right to point out that historians too often think of the direction of political or intellectual influence as from West to East and Henry's example is a clear example of a reverse trajectory.²³ Henry's Polish rule was not an episode disconnected from his later rule in France. Indeed, his French kingship should be seen

²⁰ Marek Ferenc, *Dwór Zygmunta Augusta: organizacja i ludzie* (Oświęcim, 2014). There is a more general overview of the Jagiellonian court (1386–1572) in Urszula Borkowska's magisterial study of the dynasty: Urszula Borkowska, *Dynastia Jagiellonów w Polsce* (Warsaw, 2011), pp. 93–228.

²¹ Franciszek Fuchs, 'Ustrój dworu królewskiego za Stefana Batorego', in J. Filipowski, ed., *Studia historyczne wydane ku czci Prof. Wincentego Zakrzewskiego* (Cracow, 1908), pp. 33–172. Fuchs also summarizes the short document found by Stanisław Kutrzeba at the Bibliothèque nationale de France bound with advisory texts about Poland, briefly describing some of the lower court offices and service positions: Stanisław Kutrzeba, ed., *Wykaz urzędów i służby dworu królewskiego w Polsce z czasów Henryka Walezego* (Cracow, 1902).

²² Urszula Augustyniak, *Wazowie i królowie rodacy: studium władzy królewskiej w Rzeczpospolitej XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1999), p. 17.

²³ James B. Collins, 'Wschód uczy Zachód – wpływ polskiej myśli konstytucyjnej na kulturę prawną w świecie zachodnim w latach 1572–1810', in Adam Jankiewicz, ed., *Lex est Rex in Polonia et in Lithuania... Tradycje prawnoustrojowe Rzeczypospolitej – dowiadzenie i dziedzictwo* (Warsaw, 2011), p. 151.

as the continuation of the style of kingship he inaugurated in Poland in response to Polish circumstances. This allows us to recover a lost political connection between Poland and France, because through Henry the Polish political system had an impact on the French monarchy. This is particularly important because Henry's rule in France during the Wars of Religion helped usher in the absolutism of the seventeenth century.²⁴ To show this connection, this article examines the genesis of Henry's *mignons*, the politics of separating the king's table from the rest of the court, the use of countryside residences for secret dealings in important state matters as means of excluding the parliament, and faction building.

The second thread of argument demonstrates Henry's active engagement in Polish–Lithuanian politics, both internal and external, and challenges the widely accepted narrative that he was a passive king awaiting his imminent flight to Paris.²⁵ The unfortunate tendency to marginalize Poland's political importance and underestimate the extent of its relationships with Western European realms contributes to such representations of Henry's Polish reign.²⁶ But Charles IX's swift demise without an heir was not inevitable, and Henry was far from banking his political career on it. By using new evidence from the financial accounts, this article contends that Henry planned to cement his rule in Poland by mounting his own faction and shape the Commonwealth in the long term, and that his diplomatic agenda was more complex than simply keeping the peace on the eastern border until such a time as he deserted the throne.²⁷ Too often Henry's Polish reign has been approached from the perspective of his subsequent flight, or by exoticizing rather than contextualizing the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Seeing Henry's behaviour as intrinsically connected to his style of kingship rather than as a measure of his disdain for the Commonwealth and shifting the focus from the flight to his daily activities helps us better understand Henry as an active king, who shaped, admittedly for a short time, Polish politics and court culture.

I

Henry was elected into a unique system of elective and parliamentary monarchy, the outline of which had existed since the late fourteenth century. He was preceded by Sigismund II August, the last of the Jagiellonian dynasty, members of which had been elected for close to 200 years in order to maintain the personal union between the Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of

²⁴ Nicolas Le Roux, *Le roi, la cour, l'état de la Renaissance à l'absolutisme* (Seysssel, 2013), p. 9.

²⁵ Serwański, *Henryk III*, pp. 185ff; Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, pp. 124–5.

²⁶ Katarzyna Kosior, *Becoming a queen in early modern Europe: east and west* (New York, NY, 2019), pp. 3–4, 15–21.

²⁷ Serwański, *Henryk III*, pp. 185ff; Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, pp. 124–5.

Lithuania.²⁸ In 1569, shortly before Sigismund August's death, Poland and Lithuania were linked by a constitutional union at the parliament of Lublin, removing the union's dependence on the dynastic principle and opening the way to the so-called free elections, whereby any member of the European royal and princely houses could be a candidate. The establishment of the elective monarchy was accompanied by the rise of the Polish nobility, and the gradual development of the *monarchia mixta*, a system of government that theoretically gave equal powers to the king and the two parliament chambers – the Senate, which consisted of state and church officers, i.e. wealthy nobles appointed by the king for life, and the Chamber of Envoys, which included lower-ranking members of the nobility known as *szlachta* sent from local *sejmiks*.²⁹ The parliament had to consent to new legislation, taxes, and war, but the king also had significant powers because he appointed state officers and presided over the Senate.³⁰ Within this extraordinary political system, based in its principles on the Roman Republic, service to the Commonwealth rather than birth was the mark of status and power.³¹ Notably, given the pervasive religious conflict of the period, the Protestant nobility enjoyed a relatively low level of persecution under Sigismund August, and many considered freedom of religion part of their political privileges.³²

This is the context in which Henry became a candidate to the Polish throne in the summer of 1572. The French were already aware of the imminent election in 1566, when Catherine de Medici's Polish dwarf, Jan Krassowski, alerted her to the opportunity Sigismund August's death would create for Henry.³³ The electoral campaign began in earnest in August 1572 with the arrival in Poland of Jean Monluc, an experienced diplomat and Catholic bishop. Henry faced several rivals, but all were significantly disadvantaged one way or another. Most Polish nobles feared that the Habsburg candidate, Archduke Ernest of Austria, would seek to undermine the parliamentary system of government and make Poland–Lithuania another realm under the Holy Roman Empire; Protestants found him particularly difficult to stomach.³⁴ Ivan IV of Muscovy openly wanted to annex the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and made it a condition of his election, which fast rendered it unlikely. Jan III Vasa of Sweden was married to Catherine Jagiellon, Sigismund August's sister, which was to his advantage, but his Protestantism eventually proved too much for

²⁸ On the Polish–Lithuanian union, see Robert I. Frost, *The Oxford history of Poland–Lithuania*, 1: *The making of the Polish–Lithuanian union, 1385–1569* (Oxford, 2015).

²⁹ Augustyniak, *Wazowie i królowie rodacy*, p. 32.

³⁰ On parliamentary monarchy, see Almut Bues, 'The formation of the Polish–Lithuanian monarchy in the sixteenth century', in Richard Butterwick, ed., *The Polish–Lithuanian monarchy in European context, c. 1500–1795* (New York, NY, 2001), pp. 58–81.

³¹ Benedict Wagner-Rundell, *Common wealth, common good: the politics of virtue in early modern Poland–Lithuania* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 17–32.

³² Bues, 'The formation of the Polish–Lithuanian monarchy', p. 63.

³³ Serwański, *Henryk III*, pp. 16–18, 29.

³⁴ Roşu, *Elective monarchy*, pp. 56–8; Ijäs, *Res publica refedined*, pp. 174–9.

the Catholic Polish magnates. By the time of the election parliament, Henry remained the only viable candidate, though the Habsburg candidate retained some supporters particularly among ecclesiastical senators (i.e. bishops and archbishops).³⁵ Henry, it was supposed, would make France a lasting ally against the Habsburgs, raising the possibility of an alliance that included the Ottomans. However, Henry's central role in the St Bartholomew's Day massacre was a problem for opponents of religious persecution and especially those who had friends among French Protestants.³⁶ That Henry was not discounted can be attributed to Monluc's ability to present him as a tolerant prince and the massacre as an attempt to crush a rebellion against Charles IX.³⁷ Nevertheless, important Polish Protestant nobles like Jan Firlej, marshal of the crown, and Hieronim Bużeński, treasurer of the crown, remained sceptical.³⁸

The nobility gathered near Warsaw on 5 April 1573 to elect their new king. All nobles were entitled to a vote and many came to Warsaw to take part in the election despite the difficult state of the roads following the winter. After much debate, collecting votes started on 3 May and it became clear by 9 May that Henry had the majority. The archbishop of Gniezno proclaimed Henry the king elect on 11 May to the displeasure of some Protestants under the leadership of Jan Firlej, who only accepted the nomination on 16 May.³⁹

If the end of the Jagiellonian line opened the opportunity to choose the new king, it also brought a constitutional development in terms of how the transfer of royal power would work in practice after the long period of relative stability provided by the Jagiellonian dynasty. Felicia Roşu argues that concern over legal codification was a broader characteristic of sixteenth-century European succession crises and that elections constituted points of 'constitutional renewal' in Poland–Lithuania and Transylvania.⁴⁰ Issues that had been largely settled over the course of the long relationship between the Jagiellonians and the nobility now had to be codified and sworn by each king. This resulted in the development of the two documents henceforth presented to newly elected monarchs. The Henrician Articles, named after Henry for whom they were first written and the only Polish king after 1572 never to sign them, established the limitations on the king's power; the nobility's privileges, particularly the right to rebel should the king overstep his boundaries; the king's income and contribution to the running of the state; the king's responsibility to keep a permanent council made up of senators, and uphold the role of parliament in the political system and elective principle of the monarchy. The second document, the *pacta conventa*, henceforth drawn up for each newly elected monarch, contained a personalized set of obligations in terms of the financial and military assistance

³⁵ Serwański, *Henryk III*, p. 93; Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, p. 94; Roşu, *Elective monarchy*, p. 61.

³⁶ Tazbir, 'Polskie echa', p. 22.

³⁷ Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, pp. 90–1.

³⁸ Serwański, *Henryk III*, pp. 53–4, 101–3.

³⁹ Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, p. 94.

⁴⁰ Roşu, *Elective monarchy*, pp. 7, 15.

the new king owed the Commonwealth and the basis of the new alliance with his native realm.⁴¹ Furthermore, in January 1573, at the convocation parliament preceding the election, the nobles approved the acts of the Warsaw Confederation, guaranteeing peace between all religions and freedom from persecution for members of all faiths. Though rejected by many Catholic nobles and the Polish episcopate, the Warsaw Confederation acts were presented to Henry as part of the Henrician Articles. Henry was also confronted with a further document called *postulata polonica*, in which the Polish–Lithuanian Protestants demanded that persecution of Protestants in France ceased.⁴² Religious issues outlined in these documents remained a bone of contention throughout Henry's short reign.

The *pacta conventa*, Henrician Articles, and *postulata polonica* were brought to Paris in August 1573 by the Polish ambassadors who were to escort Henry to Poland. They were Adam Konarski (bishop of Poznań), Olbracht Łaski (voivode of Sieradz), Jan Tęczyński (castellan of Wojnice), Jan Tomicki (castellan of Gniezno), Andrzej Górka (castellan of Międzyrzecz), Jan Herburt (castellan of Sanok), Stanisław Kryski (castellan of Raciąż), Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł (court marshal of Lithuania), Jan Zamoyski (starosta of Bełżec), Mikołaj Firlej (starosta of Kazimierz), Jan Zborowski (starosta of Odlanów), Aleksander Proński (son of the voivode of Kiev), and Mikołaj Tomicki of Tomice.⁴³ As Catholic and Protestant members of the Senate and Chamber of Envoys, they were received with much ceremony by the French royal family.⁴⁴ However, Henry was not keen to sign any of the documents, as he reportedly felt that these conditions made him more a doge of Venice than a king. Several issues were particularly contentious. The financial settlement outlined in the *pacta conventa* required Henry to make an annual payment of 450,000 florins into the Commonwealth's coffers, pay off Sigismund August's debts, furnish the Baltic sea fleet, guarantee free trade with France and its colonies in the New World, and finance the exchange of academics and students between the Jagiellonian University and the University of Paris.⁴⁵ Instead, Henry proposed that he would bring an annual income of 450,000 florins to Poland for his personal rather than the state coffers. Also contentious was the insistence of the Poles that Henry would not appoint foreigners to offices of state or bring Frenchmen with him to Poland. Henry refused, saying that Valois kings had

⁴¹ Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, p. 93; Roşu, *Elective monarchy*, pp. 142–5. A detailed legal history of the creation, legal form, and contents of the Henrician Articles: Makilla, *Artykuły henrykowski*.

⁴² Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, p. 92; Roşu, *Elective monarchy*, pp. 141–2.

⁴³ Serwański, *Henryk III*, pp. 109–10.

⁴⁴ Ewa Kociszewska, 'War and seduction in Cybele's garden: contextualising the *Ballet des Polonais*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 65 (2012), pp. 809–63; Ewa Kociszewska, 'La Pologne, un don maternel de Catherine de Médicis? La cérémonie de la remise du decretum electionis à Henri de Valois', *Le Moyen Âge*, 118 (2011), pp. 561–75.

⁴⁵ Serwański, *Henryk III*, pp. 95–6.

traditionally been served by people of different nations but in the event he agreed to bring only a few Frenchmen with him, who would leave soon after his coronation. Henry was also reluctant to swear to uphold the Warsaw Confederation, especially since he knew that many of his Catholic subjects, including important senators, were opposed.⁴⁶ As such, the Polish delegation did not present a unified front and much time was lost to debate until finally, or so the story goes, Jan Zborowski, a prominent Lutheran, shouted ‘Si non iurabis, non regnabis!’ (‘if you do not swear, you will not rule!’).⁴⁷ Henry confirmed the Henrician Articles during a festive mass in the presence of his brother on 19 September 1573 and promised to swear to all the documents with the agreed alterations once he came to Poland.⁴⁸

Henry was not necessarily hostile to the underlying principles of the Polish political system. In the memorandum he wrote after the disastrous siege of La Rochelle in 1573, which cost the lives of many French soldiers, including some of his close friends, he proposed reforms to the French monarchy predicated on a critique of a system that rewarded birth rather than the service of soldiers and office-holders to the state.⁴⁹ It was the first such document to be written by a member of the French royal family. Henry was also well-briefed on the workings of the Polish system by Guy du Favre de Pibrac, his translator and adviser chosen by Catherine de Medici, but still he avoided swearing the *pacta conventa* and other documents despite his coronation on 21 February 1574.⁵⁰ The reasons are suggested by the detailed briefs prepared by Guy de Lansac, one of the diplomats who led Henry’s election campaign, and Antonio Maria Graziani, who visited Poland as the secretary to the papal nuncio.⁵¹ Both advised Henry to centralize the political system and Graziani even suggested that the Commonwealth was ripe for absolutism, arguing that the king’s power to appoint state officers, who by these appointments became members of the Senate, could be used to strengthen his power. Henry was stalling, but the Poles were losing patience. The coronation parliament, which took place in Cracow between 21 February and 3 April, was largely concerned with trying to force Henry to sign the *pacta conventa*, Henrician Articles, and *postulata polonica*, but Henry managed to use the polarization of the parliament,

⁴⁶ Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, 96–7.

⁴⁷ Serwański, *Henryk III*, p. 144; Grzybowski claims that two different speeches were confused to create Zborowski’s legendary outburst: Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, p. 97; Makilla, *Artykuły henrykowskie*, pp. 90–2.

⁴⁸ Makilla, *Artykuły henrykowskie*, pp. 64–8.

⁴⁹ Mark Greengrass, *Governing passions: peace and reform in the French kingdom, 1576–1585* (Oxford, 2007), p. 24.

⁵⁰ Le Roux, *La faveur*, p. 147.

⁵¹ ‘Mémoire du Sieur de Lansac’, Noailles, *Henri de Valois*, II, pp. 519–25; Antonio Maria Graziani, ‘Informatio de rebus Poloniae ad Henricum regem 1574’, in Józef Korzeniowski, ed., *Scriptores rerum polonicarum*, xv (Cracow, 1891), pp. 207–14.

particularly over freedom of religion, to postpone it until the next session of the parliament in September.⁵² By then, of course, he was back in France.

II

From the start of his French reign, Henry surrounded himself with a group of young men who served as his advisers and gentlemen of his chamber. They both had and controlled access to the king, attracting much criticism concerning their effeminacy, debauchery, and general bad influence on the king. Nicolas Le Roux demonstrates that the siege of La Rochelle in 1573 and his travel to Poland–Lithuania in the autumn/winter of the same year were crucial in the formation of these friendships.⁵³ However, the accounts suggest that these favourites, known as the *mignons* from 1575, also had their genesis in the structures of the Polish–Lithuanian court. Le Roux focuses on the formation of ‘la maison du roi de Pologne’ before Henry set off from France and rightly shows the significance of the long journey to Poland via Germany in cementing the ‘entourage of friends’. This was clearly important, and Henry was making a statement by knowingly disregarding the condition he agreed to in Paris – to only bring a few Frenchmen with him.⁵⁴ However, Le Roux does not allow for how Henry’s response to the Polish court, presented to him fully formed as a *fait accompli*, had the effect of consolidating his dependence of the *mignons*. The court that awaited Henry’s arrival in Poland was filled with people appointed by the late Sigismund August. In part, the Poles insisted that Henry did not bring a French entourage with him because it was bound to be the source of significant political tension.

Again, it is important to recognize the significance of the transition from the Jagiellonians. In a hereditary monarchy, Henry would have grown up knowing his father’s or older brother’s officers. If he came to the throne, he would already have formed personal relationships with the existing officers of the court; and the hereditary system gave him considerable latitude to appoint his own companions to manage his court. Under the Jagiellonians, the formation of these traditional power relationships was still possible to some extent, but not under the conditions of the free elections. Henry had crossed the continent to find his court controlled by men he did not appoint or even know, men who might not have supported him in the election. His position was not helped by the fact that state offices in Poland were generally appointed for life, so it was difficult for Henry to remove inconvenient nobles appointed by his predecessor.

⁵² On the coronation parliament, see Rafał Jaworski, ‘Spis posłów koronnych na sejm koronacyjny w 1574 roku’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 124 (2017), pp. 295–321; Makiła, *Artykuły henrykowskie*, pp. 94–100.

⁵³ Le Roux, *La faveur*, pp. 132–5, 149.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–8.

Moreover, the most important officers of Henry's Polish court, the marshal of the crown, the chancellor of the crown, and the treasurer of the crown, were high-ranking senators with linked state and court responsibilities. These men were also prominent players during the election and not all supported Henry. Jan Firlej, the marshal of the crown and a prominent Protestant, opposed Henry's election to such an extent that after it was announced, he gathered his supporters and set up a separate camp; it took three days of negotiations for Firlej to acclaim the election. As marshal of the crown, the second minister after the primate, he was responsible for policing and the king's security, but also for internal affairs including management of royal audiences and embassies, calling Senate meetings, and organizing royal elections.⁵⁵ Another important office on the boundary of state and court was the chancellor of the crown. He put the royal seal on documents, something he could refuse if he thought that the document was unlawful, even if it had been signed by the king. He was also 'the king's lips' and made all parliament speeches on his behalf, as well as being the head of the royal judicial court which dealt with royal cities and lands.⁵⁶ Henry was in luck, as the existing chancellor, Walenty Dembicki, was his early supporter.⁵⁷ However, it remained the case that Henry could not displace any of these important senators who effectively controlled his court, even if he was able to appoint a small number of Poles to vacant offices during the coronation parliament, including a new marshal of the crown following Firlej's death.

The accounts give us insight into the lack of Henry's autonomy regarding his income, expenditure, and how the court was run, as well as demonstrating the particular importance of Hieronim Bużeński, the treasurer of the crown, to the organization of the daily life of Henry's Polish court. Bużeński became Sigismund August's secretary in 1552 and advanced to the position of treasurer in 1569. Henry's biographers barely mention Bużeński, but between September 1573 and June 1574, he paid various sums of money into the 'royal purse'. According to Alexander Jagiellon's statute from 1504, the treasurer was in charge of state finances, both incomings and outgoings, minting coin, paying the army, including the collections of taxes for that purpose, and the management of vacant crown lands. It was also the treasurer's prerogative to pay money into the royal purse and he had some control over how it was spent.⁵⁸ The treasurer reported to the parliament, which had oversight of all state (including

⁵⁵ Ferenc, *Dwór Zygmunta Augusta*, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Zbigniew Góralski, *Urzędy i godności w dawnej Polsce* (Warsaw, 1998), pp. 81–90. For a brief francophone summary of these roles, see A. Wyczański, 'Le personnel politique d'Henri de Valois en Pologne', in Sauzet, ed., *Henri III*, pp. 111–13.

⁵⁷ Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, p. 90.

⁵⁸ *Volumina legum*, ed. Jozafat Ohryzko, II (St Petersburg, 1859), pp. 17–18, and a statute from 1607 reinforcing the previous documents: *Volumina legum*, II, p. 439; Michał Bobrzyński, 'Sejmy polskie za Olbrachta i Aleksandra', in Michał Bobrzyński, *Szkice i studia historyczne* (Cracow, 1922), pp. 238–9.

royal) expenditure. Bużeński was also the *żupnik krakowski*, the director of the company which traded salt from the royal mines in Wieliczka and Bochnia, one of the king's main sources of income.⁵⁹ In effect, Henry's income and expenditure were scrutinized and controlled by a state officer whom he had not appointed and with whom he did not necessarily have a close relationship.

Moreover, Bużeński was a Protestant and a signatory of the Warsaw Confederation; he had become sceptical about Henry's candidature following the St Bartholomew's Day massacre but eventually supported Henry as an evil lesser than a Habsburg. He famously cautioned Jean Monluc, the French diplomat who led Henry's electoral campaign, that Henry 'would find in this kingdom more reasons to be afraid of the nation than the nation to be afraid of his severity, should he wish to endanger their lifestyle and civil liberties'.⁶⁰ This certainly helps to explain why Henry was so determined to ensure that his French income was his private fund. Had it become part of the state treasury, Bużeński would have controlled that too. Henry's struggle reflects the broader controversy as to whether royal revenue should belong to the king or the Commonwealth and be controlled by the treasurer of the crown under the periodic scrutiny from parliament. Only in 1589–90 was the crown treasury finally separated into state and court treasuries with revenues from specific lands and enterprises (such as the Wieliczka and Bochnia salt mines) designated to provide for the king and his court; parliament retained scrutiny of the expenses.⁶¹

Henry not only had to deal with the treasurer, but also with the extensive network Bużeński used to distribute funds. He often sent money 'through the hands of' (Pl. 'przez ręce', Lat. 'per' or 'per manis') several men, including Jan Bużeński, his own nephew.⁶² For some of these men, working for Bużeński was a career path. For example, Bużeński's secretary, Walenty Krzepicki, was ennobled by Stephen Bathory in 1580 on his employer's recommendation.⁶³ Furthermore, Bużeński was assiduous in his duties, which gave him significant insight into Henry's daily life. One example of this was his coordination of Henry's journey to Poland. Wine and expensive spices were sent to Henry's planned overnight stops in Germany and Bużeński arranged for envoys to be sent to greet Henry along the way. The entry from

⁵⁹ Antonina Keckowa, *Żupy krakowskie w XVI–XVIII wieku (do 1772 roku)* (Wrocław, 1969), pp. 272–6.

⁶⁰ Quoted by Serwański, *Henryk III*, pp. 53–4.

⁶¹ *Volumina legum*, II, pp. 289, 312.

⁶² Also: Romissowski (Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD), ASK 1 340, fo. 248v; 325, fo. 190r; 364, fo. 3r), Targosz (AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 209r), Starczowski (ibid.), Jan Krzecki (ibid., fo. 145r), Sebastian Rudnicki (ibid., fos. 127v, 155r, 208v), Walenty Krzepicki (ibid., fo. 155r), Jan Brzenski (AGAD, ASK 1 325, fo. 190r), Jan Bużeński (ibid., fo. 190v; 364, fos. 3r, 127r).

⁶³ 'Nobilitatio Valentini Krzepiczki (stemma Róža)', in Adolf Pawiński, ed., *Akta Metryki Koronnej co ważniejsze z czasów Stefana Batorego, 1576–1586. Źródła dziejowe*, XI (Warsaw, 1882), pp. 87–91.

November 1573 states that Walenty Krzepicki bought twelve *półkowki* and ten barrels of wine for this purpose ‘on the treasurer of the crown’s orders’.⁶⁴ On Henry’s entry into Poland, servants, cooks, trumpeters, and further members of an ‘entourage’ – even horses with grooms – were sent ahead to Poznań, where Henry made his first appearance in January 1574.

After the greeting in Poznań, Henry travelled south towards Cracow. In Kalisz, Henry stayed in a townhouse belonging to the Chwalczewskis, a prominent regional family. In advance of his arrival, close to fifty florins was spent on improvements including new membranes and glass for fitting windows (the accounts detail that a Jewish craftsman was paid), locks and keys, chimney improvements, various pieces of tableware, and even four tables and ten benches.⁶⁵ Henry was also provided with various luxuries on his journey, such as limes, lemons, oranges, and pomegranates delivered from Cracow.⁶⁶ Fifteen *grosz* (silver coins) covered ‘the damages done by the French’ in an inn en route to Cracow.⁶⁷ In all, the accounts report that close to 12,000 *grosz* was spent on the king’s travel from Paris to Cracow.⁶⁸

Bużeński took an active interest in making provisions for the court and exercised control over the distribution of luxury goods, especially when it came to Henry’s Frenchmen. In March, Bużeński ordered Jacob ‘the Frenchman’ to collect a small barrel of wine for Pibrac; good wine was very expensive in Poland, because it had to be largely imported.⁶⁹ The treasurer also took a broader interest in special provisions for guests. On 22 April, the ‘second’ ambassador of the voivode of Wallachia arrived, and the accounts report that he received the usual fare of beef, veal, capons, and bread. ‘Nothing was given’ on 23 April, ‘but Mr Treasurer ordered on 24 April that the kitchens should prepare a dinner [for the ambassador]’.⁷⁰ Normally, there would have been a court treasurer, a less senior officer, who managed the royal purse, but Sigismund August did not reappoint the office after Jan Lutomirski died in 1567, leaving Bużeński in sole charge until 24 May 1574.⁷¹ Henry then appointed Jakub Rokossowski, another signatory of the Warsaw Confederation. Rokossowski dealt with issues like paying the salaried members of Sigismund August’s court in May 1574.⁷² He also probably took

⁶⁴ AGAD, ASK 1 340, fo. 247v. A *półkówek* was smaller than a barrel. If we compare values from the same account, a *półkówek* of wine cost 34 thalers and a barrel cost 48 thalers.

⁶⁵ AGAD, ASK 1 244, fos. 53r–55v.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 57v.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 73r.

⁶⁸ AGAD, ASK 1 340, fo. 245r.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 250v; Jarosław Dumanowski, ‘Wino, oliwa i post. Morze Śródziemne w kuchni staropolskiej’, in Robert Kusek and Joanna Sanetra-Szeliga, eds., *Czy Polska leży nad Morzem Śródziemnym?* (Cracow, 2012), pp. 387–418.

⁷⁰ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 16v.

⁷¹ Krzysztof Chłapowski and Stefan Ciara et al., *Urzednicy centralni i nadworni Polski XIV–XVIII wieku: spisy* (Kórnik, 1992), p. 129; Ferenc, *Dwór Zygmunta Augusta*, pp. 27–8.

⁷² AGAD, ASK 1 340, fo. 253r.

over some day-to-day decisions about provisions. However, Bużeński was chiefly responsible for provisioning the royal court for the majority of Henry's Polish reign and, as the treasurer of the crown, had oversight of the money paid into the royal purse for the entirety of Henry's reign.

This hospitality organized by Bużeński was not unconditional and shed light on the tensions caused by the question of Henry's French entourage. As already noted, Henry did not adhere to the Paris agreement that he would only bring a few Frenchmen who would leave soon after the coronation. The list printed in Lyon in 1574 reveals that Henry's entourage consisted of eighty-five Frenchmen with their own entourages, meaning at least 465 people on horseback, plus numerous non-riding Frenchmen.⁷³ Clearly, Henry's preparations for taking up his throne in Poland generated much interest and were broadcast by the Valois across France. Le Roux calls this the 'formation of the Polish king's household' and 'institutionalization of the entourage of friends'.⁷⁴ This might have been what the French thought at the time, but the Poles clearly did not recognize Henry's entourage as their king's household and refused to provide for them on the journey through Germany to Poland. Board was given only to the duc de Nevers (Louis de Gonzague), the marquis de Maine (Charles de Lorraine, duc de Mayenne), the marquis Elbeuf (Charles de Lorraine), the French king's ambassador (Pomponne de Bellièvre), the emperor's ambassador, the Swiss guards and their captain, some of the Gascon troops (promised in the election) with their captain Roger de Bellegarde (Henry's trusted companion), musicians, and drivers.⁷⁵ Even if some of Henry's entourage, including Pibrac, were likely to eat at the king's table and entourages of other important Frenchmen at their tables, the provisions made were not enough to feed such a large number of people.⁷⁶ This evidence matches the complaints made by Frenchmen at the time that they were not given accommodation or otherwise provided for once arrived in Cracow, also corroborated by the accounts.⁷⁷ If Henry wanted to provide for them, he would have to do it from his own income and he clearly realized the full extent of this by the end of March when Frenchmen began leaving Poland and returning to France, grumbling about their abominable treatment. Serwański claims, with a certain dose of Polish fatalism, that Henry was paving the way for his return to France by systematically sending his entourage ahead of him; this is part of the 'flight narrative' which dominates the understanding of Henry in the Polish historiography.⁷⁸

⁷³ *La catalogue des princes, seigneurs, gentilshommes et autres qui accompagnoient le roy de Pologne* (Lyon, 1574).

⁷⁴ Le Roux, *La faveur*, pp. 142, 146.

⁷⁵ AGAD, ASK 1 244, fos. 19r-46r.

⁷⁶ For example: *ibid.*, fo. 45r-v.

⁷⁷ Serwański, *Henryk III*, p. 185.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-6.

The new evidence from the accounts brings this narrative into question, allowing an alternative explanation that fits better with the complaints made by the Frenchmen at the time. The refusal to house and feed Henry's large French entourage, a decision which would have been taken jointly by Bużeński (who controlled the funds) and Firlej (who was responsible for court accommodation), served as a reminder that the election conditions had real material implications and Henry's relaxed approach would not be tolerated. Henry was simply not prepared to pay for his extensive entourage from his own pocket, so some of them had to go back. This also allows us to understand the roots of the conflict between the mignons, especially Bellegarde, Nevers, duc de Retz (Albert de Gondi), Rambouillet, and René Villequier, Le Roux points to as the main reason for the French exodus.⁷⁹ The conflict was partly about Henry's decision to curb his spending on food for his entourage, despite Villequier's argument that Henry could afford to spend as much as 1,000 livres tournois monthly.⁸⁰ As such, the squabbles were also over the king's favour, which is unsurprising when we consider that the Polish system barred Henry's companions from holding important court offices as a sign of influence and prestige. The context of the Polish court helps us understand that Henry's favour could be the only sign of distinction for these young ambitious men. Bellegarde, who held an official position as the captain of the Gascon troops Henry brought with him to aid in the Muscovite war, was seemingly winning on that front and other mignons were jealous. Pibrac is an interesting exception, as the Poles clearly recognized his importance as Henry's translator with regular food deliveries following the arrival in Poland; he was the only Frenchman to be provided for like this during Henry's residence in Poland.⁸¹ Lastly, there were real political advantages to sending many of the French entourage away, because to fulfil partially the promises Henry made in Paris would be a welcome show of goodwill following the turbulent coronation parliament.

All of this demonstrates that the royal court functioned as part of the Polish–Lithuanian state apparatus and was closely incorporated into its structures. A consequence of these structures was that a newly elected monarch would feel isolated and managed by people with whom he did not have a personal relationship. In these circumstances, having his own trusted people, a court within a court, so to speak, was important especially in his first months of kingship. With time, Henry would have had the opportunity to shape the Commonwealth and his court through appointing people as offices became vacant, but he left too soon to make significant changes. In any case, he would never have been able to appoint his French companions to state

⁷⁹ Le Roux, *La faveur*, pp. 150–5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁸¹ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fos. 27r, 37v, 39r, 40v, 42r, 44r, 47v, 50r, 57r, 61r, 65v, 70r, 75r, 81r, 97r, 103v, 109r.

offices in the Commonwealth. One could be forgiven for thinking that elective monarchy would foster a transnational royal court in Poland, but the accounts make clear that this was possible in the main only outside of the formal court structures. In this, we find the structural genesis of Henry's mignons, some of whom had accompanied him to Poland, including François d'O, Jacques de Caylus, Charles de Balzac d'Entragues, Le Guast, François d'Espinay, and Nicolas d'Angennes (Rambouillet), who quickly came to positions of power during Henry's French reign. Indeed, Knecht suggests that Henry's French household was monopolized by the people who were with him in Poland.⁸² Though the financial accounts do little to illuminate the workings of Henry's mignons in Poland, his correspondence offers occasional glimpses of his attempts to bypass the Commonwealth's establishment. For example, en route to Poland, Henry wrote to Rambouillet, his special ambassador, to ensure that the rooms prepared for him in Cracow, and 'especially the offices', had secret exits.⁸³ In another letter, he asks Rambouillet to make sure that his rooms were decorated in the French style—a request that Bużeński and Firlej would be more than likely to challenge. Indeed, Henry referred to his so-called 'mignons' as 'ma troupe' ('my team'), an obviously less derogatory term.⁸⁴ The accounts allow us to see why Henry might have felt that he needed a team of his own in the context of the Polish court, while Henry's extensive entourage justified Polish fears that the free elections risked the court becoming an essentially foreign establishment.

III

Soon after Henry's return to France, the French nobility criticized his new ordinance that during mealtimes he would be surrounded by his closest courtiers and served by the gentlemen of his chamber—the mignons.⁸⁵ No one was to speak to him and onlookers were to stay behind a barrier erected especially for this purpose. The barrier was removed when some courtiers left the court in protest, but from 1578, Henry started using the antechamber as his dining room. Outraged courtiers in Paris marked these practices out as foreign, making scathing remarks about 'novelties' Henry brought back from Poland 'to mark him off from the human race'.⁸⁶ This accusation was not groundless. In Poland, Henry kept a close ring of trusted Frenchmen around him and limited the access of his Polish courtiers during mealtimes in a way that set a precedent for his later behaviour in France. However, we might also recognize how this was a personal response to immediate difficulties. Facing

⁸² Knecht, *Hero or tyrant*, p. 195.

⁸³ Grzybowski, *Henryk Walezy*, pp. 106–7.

⁸⁴ Le Roux, *Le faveur*, p. 210.

⁸⁵ The ordinance in full: Le Roux, *Le roi*, pp. 64–6.

⁸⁶ Knecht, *Hero or tyrant*, pp. 193–6; Monique Chatenet, *La cour de France au XVI^e siècle: vie sociale et architecture* (Paris, 2002), pp. 112–16, 179–84.

the close scrutiny of his new subjects and unable to appoint his companions to court offices made for a difficult start to Henry's Polish reign. His inability to communicate in Polish or Latin was a significant difficulty too, especially because much of Henry's time was spent in Senate meetings of which he could have understood very little. Notwithstanding Monluc's promises that Henry was fluent in Latin, he only knew French and very little Italian.⁸⁷ By dinner-time, Henry would have had enough of his Polish subjects and problems of translation.

The daily lists of food ingredients and weekly summaries of cellar outgoings document Henry's strategy of inclusion and exclusion. Socha, in whose hand this part of the accounts is written, was the dispensator closely working with Bużeński. He distinguished two tables, one called 'the king's' or 'the French' and the other 'the Polish' or 'the lords' table. The distinction was already present during Henry's coronation feast on 21 February, three days after he arrived in Cracow. The accounts list separately the food delivered 'first to the king's kitchens', including 2 oxen, 18 rams, 13 calves, 5 deer, 7 'chunks of lard', a turkey (lit. 'Indian chicken'), 120 capons, 50 black grouse, 10 partridges, 40 geese, 3 hazel grouse, a wood grouse, 100 eggs, a pot of butter, pears, apples, and 'some tiny birds for roasting on a spit'.⁸⁸ Then follow provisions 'for princes, ambassadors, and Crown [Polish] lords', including 2 oxen, 8 calves, 8 deer, 10 lambs, 11 geese, 10 hares, 30 black grouse, 8 turkeys, 16 partridges, 10 suckling pigs, 57 capons, 6 rams, 4 pig's heads, a pig for roasting, 10 smoked beef tongues, 10 fresh beef tongues, cooked black sausage, sausages, *obwarzanki* (ring-shaped bread), 2 pieces of lard, a large pot of butter, 20 spits of tiny birds and 10 of bigger birds, milk, 960 eggs, apples, pears, wheat and wholemeal flour, onions, black mustard, a turnip, pike, vinegar, honey, horseradish, and cheese, to only name some.⁸⁹ The amount of food prepared for the king's table suggests that he was probably eating with some chosen comrades. That they were French is corroborated by the weekly summary of the cellar, which included beer and bread consumed that week, tallied up on Saturday 27 February (Saturdays were the usual day for such summaries). The barrels of beer and loaves of bread were segregated into just two categories: those for the 'French dinners' and the 'Polish dinners'.⁹⁰ Even if there was any question as to which category the king's table would belong to, on other occasions later in the year Socha interchanges 'French' with 'the king's' table as opposed to the 'Polish' or 'lords' table.⁹¹ Urszula Borkowska's work on the Jagiellonian court has examined the separate kitchens and tables provided for the king's and the queen's separate establishments – the king ate with his

⁸⁷ Świętosław Orzelski, *Bezkrólowia ksiąg ósmioro czyli dzieje Polski od zgonu Zygmunta Augusta r. 1572 aż do r. 1576*, transl. Włodzimierz Spasowicz, 1 (St Petersburg, 1856), p. 249.

⁸⁸ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 25r–v.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, fos. 25v–27r.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 30r–v.

⁹¹ For example: *ibid.*, fos. 65v, 75r, 79v–87v, 92r, 94v–96r.

court – indicating that the division between ‘Polish’ and ‘French’ tables in 1574 was unprecedented.⁹² Access to Henry was restricted, just like in his French ordinances, marking his preference for a formal separation from much of his court.

IV

In older Polish accounts, Henry is most often represented as passive, because the dominant narrative about his reign comes from Świętosław Orzelski, one of his most vitriolic critics. This is hardly surprising, for Orzelski was a member of the Chamber of Envoys, which was particularly concerned with the need for Henry to uphold the Henrician Articles and other documents to guarantee the perpetuation of the parliamentary monarchy. Orzelski reports that until the end of March, as the parliament debated the Henrician Articles, *pacta conventa*, and *postulata polonica*, Henry pretended to be ill and locked himself in his rooms to play cards with his French companions and entertain French ladies.⁹³ Grzybowski, challenging Orzelski's account, says the illness was most likely real, if not serious, and Henry spent much of the time working, taking council with his personal advisers, preparing parliamentary speeches later delivered in Latin by Pibrac, and writing letters, many of which have been published.⁹⁴ The lists of medicines Henry was taking confirm his illness and suggest that the cause was severe indigestion. On 9 April, Good Friday, a pharmacist was paid just over two florins for making a concoction of prunes, figs, rice, small and big raisins, and rosehip vodka, all ingredients associated with improving digestive health.⁹⁵ Henry was particularly indisposed in the run up to the Easter weekend, because on Maundy Thursday (10 April) he broke his fast to eat a capon ‘for medicinal reasons’.⁹⁶ What is more, Henry occasionally had small quantities (usually a quart at a time) of rosehip vodka served with meals.⁹⁷

Henry's digestive health was almost certainly hindered by the Polish fasting regime during Lent. Jarosław Dumanowski's pioneering work on early modern Polish food culture provides crucial context for Henry's time in Poland. Dumanowski shows that the Polish fast strictly excluded all meat and dairy, such as butter, milk, and eggs.⁹⁸ Instead, Poles ate salted sea fish delivered

⁹² Borkowska, *Dynastia Jagiellonów*, pp. 293–5.

⁹³ Orzelski, *Bezkrólowia ksiąg*, I, pp. 249–50.

⁹⁴ *Lettres de Henri III roi de France*, ed. P. Champion, I (Paris, 1959).

⁹⁵ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 52v.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 52r.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 23v, 37v.

⁹⁸ Jarosław Dumanowski, ‘Kuchnia w czasach Sobieskiego’, in Jarosław Dumanowski, Maciej Próba, and Łukasz Truściński, *Księga szafarska dworu Jana III Sobieskiego, 1695–1696* (Warsaw, 2013), p. 33.

in barrels and oily freshwater fish cooked with large quantities of exotic spices.⁹⁹ These were served at the Jagiellonian court on fasting days.¹⁰⁰ Foreign travellers to Poland were often surprised by how traditional Polish fasting traditions were, especially when compared with Western Europe, where fasting regimes gradually slackened following the Reformation and allowed dairy products. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did French priests fleeing the Revolution disseminate a more relaxed fasting tradition. Henry, however, was not ready to adhere to Polish custom, which made contrasting food cultures a potential site of conflict.

Henry clearly enjoyed elements of the fasting fare, particularly perch, which was prepared ‘especially for the king’ on several days in March.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the eggs, milk, and butter Henry was served throughout Lent was in clear breach of the Polish tradition. These were not the most radical changes Henry made. The list of food consumed on 27 March starts with a note that ‘new instructions were given regarding food’.¹⁰² That day the usual fare of fish was augmented with ‘half a calf for the king, five capons, a young goat, and pigeons’.¹⁰³ Similar menus were served thereafter until the end of Lent, and dairy products continued to be served on all fasting days, Fridays and Saturdays, until Henry’s departure. Dumanowski’s research demonstrates that this subversion of Polish fasting culture had no long-term effect.

V

Henry might have found his French entourage good company and useful when his personal business needed attention, but they were of limited use in running the Commonwealth. In September, parliament would have attempted again to force Henry to sign the *pacta conventa*, the Henrician Articles, and the articles of the Warsaw Confederation. The accounts indicate that in May 1574 Henry used the royal hunting lodge in Niepołomice to establish his own Polish–Lithuanian faction in preparation for the coming parliament. Historians working with other sources, including parliamentary diaries and letters, have missed this because these documents preserve limited evidence of Henry’s private or even secretive approach to politics, well known from his French reign. Knecht points out that this tendency reached its height in the 1580s when Henry secluded himself from court for weeks at a time and culminated in the secret council and assassination of the Guises at the Château de Blois in 1588.¹⁰⁴ By the end of his life,

⁹⁹ Józef A. Włodarski, ‘Wykorzystanie leczniczych właściwości zbóż, warzyw i owoców w kuchni staropolskiej’, in Beata Możejko and Ewa Barylewska-Szymańska, eds., *Historia naturalna jedzenia: między antykem a XIX wiekiem* (Gdańsk, 2012), p. 321.

¹⁰⁰ Borkowska, *Dynastia Jagiellonów*, pp. 297–8.

¹⁰¹ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fos. 34v, 37v, 43v, 46r.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, fo. 44r.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Knecht, *Hero or tyrant*, p. 132.

Henry's way of conducting his council was widely considered secretive, if not sinister, and largely controlled by the mignons.¹⁰⁵ Henry's reclusive tendencies and propensity for managing political issues away from the main royal seat had precedent in his Polish reign. His visit to Niepołomice, which has attracted little attention in scholarship, is crucial to any understanding Henry's *modus operandi*.

In Orzelski's narrative, Henry's disgraceful stance at the parliament swiftly moves to the pleasant holiday he took afterwards. He reports that

having left the entire court in Cracow, the king went with the marshal of the crown and Radziwiłł, court marshal of Lithuania to Wieliczka [a significant salt mine], where he rode down to the bottom of the salt shafts and examined all interiors of these mines. Then, to rest after so much toil and anxiety, he went to Niepołomice, where he rode on horseback every day, hunted, and entertained himself in other similar ways; then he returned to Cracow.¹⁰⁶

The trip was politically important in ways Orzelski missed, perhaps purposefully, including the fact that the salt mine, although managed by Bużeński, was the main source of Henry's income as the king of Poland. The marshal of the crown was Andrzej Opaliński, appointed by Henry following the death of Firlej and one of six significant appointments made by Henry at the coronation parliament. Opaliński supported Henry from the start of the election and even advised Jean Bazin, one of Henry's ambassadors in Poland during the election, how to best promote their candidate in letters to local assemblies in 1573.¹⁰⁷ Henry's other companion, Mikołaj Krzysztof 'the Orphan' Radziwiłł, the court marshal of Lithuania, was another early supporter. He was one of the original ambassadors sent to Paris and opposed the articles of the Warsaw Confederation when they were presented to the king elect.¹⁰⁸ Both Opaliński and Radziwiłł were staunch Catholics – Opaliński's appointment in place of Firlej was an early step to reduce Protestant influence in the Senate – and firmly opposed guaranteeing Protestants any rights. They also held prominent state offices in both realms of the Commonwealth. What Orzelski trivializes as courtly 'entertainments' were in fact a way for Henry to form and cement personal relationships with men who were crucial in running the Polish–Lithuanian state, men who might help him play the divided parliament come September.¹⁰⁹

There can be little doubt that the Niepołomice trip was an opportunity for Henry to develop a political faction and plan. Whatever his political stratagem was, the accounts reveal that it involved many prominent figures. Usually

¹⁰⁵ Le Roux, *Le roi*, pp. 62–3.

¹⁰⁶ Orzelski, *Bezkrólewia ksiąg*, 1, pp. 287–8.

¹⁰⁷ Serwański, *Henryk III*, p. 136.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁰⁹ Orzelski, *Bezkrólewia ksiąg*, 1, pp. 269–70. For summaries of views held by particular senators, see *ibid.*, pp. 276–81.

meticulous in recording the life of the court, the accounts give two dates for the trip. The food account book records that it lasted from 21 to 29 May, while the spices account book claims that Henry was already in Niepołomice on 17 May. A likely explanation is that Henry was in Wieliczka that day, since Orzelski reports it as his first stop. Spices including pepper, saffron, ginger, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, and cumin, as well as rice, small raisins, gold sugar, and almonds were provided for a Pentecost feast. The king's guests were the margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, George Frederick, the duke of Legnica, Henry XI, and 'senators of the Crown'.¹¹⁰ We know that the margrave was campaigning to be granted oversight of ducal Prussia, a vassal state of the Polish crown, due to the insanity of his cousin, Duke Albert Frederick.¹¹¹ Henry of Legnica was also in trouble, as his financial debts were being scrutinized by the Habsburgs. Another account included in a separate list of foreign ambassadors specified that they were joined at dinner by 'the Infanta' – Princess Anna, Sigismund August's fifty-year-old sister whom Henry was expected to marry.¹¹² She was the richest woman in the kingdom and wielded influence among the notoriously Catholic nobility of Mazovia, the region bordering ducal Prussia. Henry's plans clearly involved his brother, as the presence of the French king's ambassador is mentioned on 22 May. Orzelski only lists two senators, Opaliński and Radziwiłł, but the accounts use a collective term 'lords of the council' ('pany rady') to describe the people Henry dined with on Friday, 21 May.¹¹³ Normally, the accounts can be relied on to name the people Henry was seeing if there were only a couple of them. The use of a collective term makes it likely more than two senators were present. A significant contingent of both Frenchmen and Poles was there, because for the rest of the week, Socha referred again to the 'French' and 'Polish' tables and meals.¹¹⁴ Interestingly, on Sunday, 23 May, 'lords of the council and courtiers', the latter likely meaning Henry's Frenchmen, ate dinner together, while the king ate on his own.¹¹⁵ All the evidence suggests that Henry was putting together a largely Catholic political faction in preparation for the divided parliament in September and, despite rumours that Charles IX was seriously ill, fleeing Poland was not uppermost in his mind.

VI

Henry clearly sought to rule and shape the Commonwealth, but he was also actively involved in managing the state's foreign policy. To begin with, the list of ambassadors sent to Henry's coronation gives us an insight into how far

¹¹⁰ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 212r.

¹¹¹ This request was finally granted by Henry's successor, Stephen Bathory, in 1577.

¹¹² AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 244v.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, fos. 79v–81r.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, fos. 86r–87v.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 82r–v.

Poland was part of the European diplomatic landscape. The accounts specify that board was provided for the ambassadors sent by the king of Hungary (Maximilian, also Holy Roman Emperor), king of Sweden (John III Vasa), king of France (Charles IX), duchess of Brunswick (Sophie Jagiellon, Sigismund II August's sister), voivode of Transylvania (Stephen Bathory, elected king of Poland after Henry), and voivode of Wallachia (Alexander II Mircza).¹¹⁶ A separate list of other foreign princes and ambassadors who arrived during Henry's time in Poland, includes the above mentioned margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, who stayed at least until 3 June, the duke of Legnica, the duke of Cieszyn (Waclaw III Adam), and ambassadors Lord Pracher (from the king of Hungary), Jan Farkacz (from the voivode of Transylvania), and Petraszko Lupolowicz (from the voivode of Moldova).¹¹⁷

Perhaps the most important diplomatic issue Henry faced was the dilemma over whether to seek an alliance with the Crimean Tatars and the Ottomans against Muscovy. This was implied in his election promises, but Henry's Polish biographers claim that Henry opted for peace with Ivan IV instead. Again, this interpretation is determined by the assumption that Henry was already preparing for his imminent flight in June and therefore sought to maintain the political status quo. Henry was certainly in talks with the Muscovites, but the situation was not straightforward. Ivan Andrzejowicz Baduka, the Muscovite ambassador, was 'detained for a long time' from mid-March first in Narew, now in north-eastern Poland, and then in Cracow (from 1 April) before being allowed to address the Senate.¹¹⁸ Hieronimo Lippomano, the Venetian ambassador to Poland at the time, reports that the king himself was unavailable and the Senate refused to open the letters without him.¹¹⁹ Henry also sent his own ambassador, Bartłomiej Zawadzki, to Muscovy, but the date of this embassy is uncertain.¹²⁰ Significantly, Zawadzki is described as 'salariatus', meaning he was a salaried member of Henry's court, as opposed to an 'aulicius', a higher-rank courtier who could keep horses and servants at the king's expense.¹²¹

As Ivan's ambassador was held in Narew and Cracow, Henry was in negotiations with the Tatars to a more significant extent than we have so far understood. Historians tend to focus on Henry's bewilderment at receiving letters from the khan requesting traditional gifts, which is in line with our main narrative source for Henry's reign.¹²² Orzelski famously reports that

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, fos. 12r–16r.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 215r–217v.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fos. 217v–218r; AGAD, ASK 3 1, fos. 1063r–1086v.

¹¹⁹ Noailles, *Henri de Valois*, III, p. 576.

¹²⁰ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 219r.

¹²¹ On the distinction, see Ferenc, *Dwór Zygmunta Augusta*, p. 13.

¹²² Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean khanate and Poland–Lithuania: international diplomacy on the European periphery (15th–18th century)* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 101–2.

the Tatars came and tried to force their due gifts with threats, but they left with nothing, only Olbracht Łaski received them and gave them some presents according to their custom, with which he won their great approval. They then claimed that only Łaski is worthy of a crown, not Henry who spends time with whores, has spindly legs, and is a skinny weakling.¹²³

The accounts help us nuance this narrative. Most importantly, there were two Tatar embassies, the first of which was sent specifically to the Senate ('SAC M R' is crossed out and 'Senatores Regni' superscribed) and counted only twenty people on horseback, including a separate named ambassador for each member of the khan's family and important officers.¹²⁴ This is probably the embassy Orzelski describes. The meeting with the Senate on 6 April must have been fruitful, because a second (Lat. 'alterius') embassy counting a hundred people closely followed to see the king and the Senate on 1 May and stayed in Cracow until 8 June.¹²⁵ What is more, Lippomano reports that in a meeting Henry promised to think on the proposals of war on Muscovy, but it is difficult to pinpoint which embassy he refers to in a letter possibly misdated to 7 March.¹²⁶

Orzelski is also wrong to claim that the Tatars left without the customary gifts from the king. Both Tatar embassies brought gifts and the second embassy received them as well, particularly in the form of London cloth and damask cloth, a significant expense at over 428 *grosz*.¹²⁷ The accounts specify that the gifts were from both the king and the Senate. The ambassador of the voivode of Moldova was also part of the discussions with the Tatars, unsurprisingly, given that Moldova bordered Tatar Crimea.¹²⁸ The Senate's role in the meetings with the Tatars was entirely in line with the Henrician Articles, which stated that the king had to receive foreign ambassadors in the presence of the Senate.¹²⁹ The departure of the ambassadors after the king returned from his congress at Niepołomice with at least two but quite likely more senators and the French king's ambassador also suggests that their proposals were a topic of discussion. The Tatar–Ottoman line of diplomacy, which after all complemented the Valois alliance, was pursued after Henry fled the country, because the accounts record the presence of Ahmed, the Ottoman *causz* (ambassador), in September.¹³⁰ Ahmed was sent by the grand vizier to discredit any potential Austrian candidates in the following election with a revelation that

¹²³ Orzelski, *Bezkrólowia ksiąg*, I, p. 281.

¹²⁴ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fos. 222r–224v.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, fos. 227v–235r.

¹²⁶ Noailles, *Henri de Valois*, III, pp. 566–8.

¹²⁷ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fos. 225r–226v.

¹²⁸ AGAD, ASK 1 364, fo. 224v.

¹²⁹ Makilla, *Artykuły henrykowskie*, pp. 210–12.

¹³⁰ AGAD, ASK 3 1, fo. 1087r. A nameless Muscovite ambassador was in Poland around the same time: AGAD, ASK 1 364, fos. 219v–220r.

the Habsburgs were seeking the Porte's endorsement.¹³¹ War with Muscovy, peace with the Porte, and keeping the Tatars in check were also written into the *pacta conventa* of Henry's successor, Stephen Bathory.¹³² Although we cannot know for certain what decisions Henry was making at these meetings during his time in Niepołomice, he was doubtless actively engaged in the shaping of the Commonwealth's internal and foreign policy.

VII

To contextualize Henry's French kingship in terms of his Polish kingship helps us to understand better the development of his characteristic style of kingship and court as shaped by two different political systems and cultures. His time in Poland–Lithuania should be understood as one of the most important formative experiences of young Henry, alongside the St Bartholomew's Day massacre and the siege of La Rochelle. The financial accounts of Henry's Polish reign give us a new perspective on his time in the Commonwealth. They help us understand the challenges of his daily life, particularly the constraints on his authority regarding the organization of his court, his income and expenditure, and the scrutiny he faced on these counts. The key characteristics of Henry's kingship, known so well from his later French reign, should be understood in the context of his first experience of being a king. This experience was as unique as the conditions under which an elected Polish monarch had to function. The 'republic of nobles' exercised significant power over the royal establishment and there was no easy way for a newly elected monarch to dislodge existing officers of the court. This left very little space for forming a transnational or French establishment. The early genesis of Henry's mignons, his reclusive style of governing, and preference for being surrounded by people he was close to at mealtimes shows how the future king of France was first moulded by the Commonwealth's political system.

Finally, the accounts suggest that the conventional narrative of Henry's flight is a reductive view of his short Polish reign, not least because it assumes that Charles IX's quick demise without an heir was inevitable. Henry clearly did not have such firm assumptions himself and he could not bank his entire future on reports of his brother's ill health. It is possible Orzelski understood the significance of Henry's trip to Niepołomice, but his account, written in the aftermath of Henry's shocking departure, relentlessly centres Henry's disinterest in Poland, helping create the 'flight narrative' so persistent in the Polish historiography on Henry. It remains difficult to recover with any certainty plans that never came to fruition, but the accounts provide strong circumstantial evidence that Henry was formulating such plans by working with powerful Catholic interests. As such, Henry's flight was an immediate response to a short-term

¹³¹ Roşu, *Elective monarchy*, p. 94.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

crisis, neither predetermining his actions in the Commonwealth nor suggesting he regarded the Polish crown as a short-term prospect. That he retained his claim to the Polish crown suggests his few months in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth cannot be dismissed as an insignificant ‘episode’ but are instead central to any understanding of his kingship; that the Polish–Lithuanian nobility could not indefinitely tolerate Henry’s absence reminds us of the centrality of the crown and the court to the functioning of the Commonwealth’s parliamentary system.