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Edizioni **SETTE CITTÀ**
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t. +39 0761 303020 – info@settecitta.eu

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POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH.
POLITICAL GAMES, SOCIAL COMMUNICATION,
DIPLOMACY

Edited by
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EASTERN EUROPEAN HISTORY REVIEW: LA RIVISTA

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Quite the contrary is true, in fact. Main objective of the journal is to create a space for reflection and discussion on topics pertaining to Central and Eastern Europe, but also relations with Continental Europe, encouraging dialogue between scholars and experts in the field, and between different approaches of scientific research.

The Editorial and Scientific Board

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THE SPANISH MONARCHY IN THE FREE ROYAL ELECTIONS IN POLAND: ASPIRATIONS AND DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES (16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES)

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the involvement of the Spanish Monarchy in the royal elections of Poland-Lithuania during the 16th and 17th centuries. Spanish intervention, closely coordinated with the Austrian branch of the Habsburgs, was framed within a family strategy to maintain influence in Central Europe. Spanish diplomats supported imperial candidacies, prioritizing the Emperor's interests over their own, which limited their autonomy in the process. Over these two centuries, diplomatic strategy shifted from dynastic expansion, aimed at placing a Habsburg family member on the Polish throne, to a more pragmatic policy that sought to secure Spanish interests by backing other favorable candidacies. Despite the diplomatic and financial efforts deployed, Spanish interventions faced significant obstacles, including distrust between the branches of the House of Austria and financial constraints. An analysis of the cost of these interventions reveals that, while a Habsburg never ascended the throne, most elected monarchs were aligned with the interests of the House of Austria, ensuring Spain's sustained influence in the region. This paper provides a comprehensive view of the diplomatic, financial, and political complexities surrounding Spanish intervention in the Polish-Lithuanian elections.

KEYWORDS: Spanish diplomacy; Poland-Lithuania; Elections; Habsburg dynasty; Dynastic expansion.

INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Monarchy in the 16th and 17th centuries showed great interest in the elections of Poland-Lithuania. Each electoral convocation affected the political balance of Central-Eastern Europe, with the potential to alter the continent's hegemony. For the emperor, placing an allied king on the Polish-Lithuanian throne guaranteed the stability of the northeastern border of his hereditary territories. In contrast, for the French and the Turks, the elections represented an opportunity to undermine the Habsburgs and extend their influence in Eastern Europe. All of this led to increasing foreign interference in the royal elections, including intervention by Spanish diplomacy. This interference was proportional to the strength of the family alliance between the Habsburgs of Madrid and Vienna, the foundation of Spanish strategy in Central Europe. Moreover, Poland-Lithuania offered Spain the opportunity to recruit troops to fight France, as well as access to ports from which to disrupt the trade of the United Provinces. Thus, placing a king favorable to the House of Austria on that throne became a key objective of Madrid's northern strategy during these two centuries.

Studies on Spanish intervention in the royal elections have focused on particular cases¹. Notably, the 1587 election, which brought Sigismund III to the throne, has been the subject of several studies, which is understandable, given that it was the moment when Spanish diplomacy deployed the most resources and showed the greatest commitment. However, comprehensive studies on Spain's overall participation in these events are practically nonexistent². This work aims to provide a general overview of Spanish activity in the various elections, analyzing the common features of its intervention to offer a global perspective.

- 1 About the 1573 election, see: Raimundo A. Rodríguez Pérez, "Servir al Rey, servir a la Casa. La embajada extraordinaria del III marqués de los Vélez en Viena y Polonia (1572–1575)", in *La dinastía de los Austria: las relaciones entre la Monarquía Católica y el Imperio*, coord. José Martínez Millán, Rubén González Cuerva, vol. 1 (Madrid: Polifemo, 2011), 439–78. In the case of the royal election of 1575: Miguel Conde Pazos, "Diplomacia en la bancarrota: Felipe II ante la segunda elección real de Polonia-Lituania (1575–1576)", *Chronica nova: Revista de historia moderna de la Universidad de Granada*, 47 (2021): 139–67; Rubén González Cuerva, "La Monarquía al servicio de la dinastía: la Emperatriz María de Austria y la elección del rey de Polonia (1573–1590)", in *Gobernar, conservar y reformar. Agentes y prácticas en la Monarquía Hispánica (siglos XVI–XVIII)*, eds. Guillermo Nieva Ocampo, Henar Pizarro Llorente, and Marcelo Paulo Corream (Salta: CIUNSa–La Aparecida, 2021), 41–62. In the case of 1587: Conde Pazos, Miguel, "The Hispanic Monarchy Facing the Accession of the Vasa Monarchy. Don Guillén de San Clemente's Embassy to Poland (1588–1589)", in *The House of Vasa The House of Austria. Correspondence from the Years 1587 to 1668*, ed. Ryszard Skowron (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), 95–115; Matylda Urjasz-Raczko, "La estrategia diplomática de Felipe II frente a la Tercera Elección Libre en La República Polaco-Lituana, 1586–1589", *Studia historica. Historia moderna*, 36 (2014): 213–32; Javier Hipólito Villanueva, "El trono de Polonia en disputa: el papel del archiduque Ernesto de Habsburgo, 1587–1592", *Tiempos modernos: Revista Electrónica de Historia Moderna*, 9/37 (2018): 123–47; For the 1573 royal election: Miguel Conde Pazos, "La elección real de 1648 y la Monarquía de Felipe IV. Diplomacia en Polonia en un periodo de crisis", in *Actas de la XI Reunión Científica de la Fundación Española de Historia Moderna: comunicaciones*, eds. Antonio Jiménez Estrella, and Julián José Lozano Navarro, vol. 1 (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2012), 69–80; 1669 election: Miguel Conde Pazos, "Elección de Miguel I como rey de Polonia a través del embajador español en Viena, el conde de Castellar (1669)", in *De la tierra al cielo: Líneas recientes de investigación en historia moderna*, ed. Eliseo Serrano Martín, vol. 2 (Zaragoza: Fundación Española de Historia Moderna, Institución Fernando el Católico, 2012), 543–58, edición digital; 1674 royal election: Miguel Conde Pazos, "La misión diplomática de don Pedro Ronquillo en Varsovia con motivo de la elección de Juan Sobieski como rey de Polonia en 1674", *Pedralbes: Revista d'història moderna*, 38 (2018): 187–227.
- 2 The main exception is: Matylda Urjasz-Raczko, "Diplomacia española ante las primeras elecciones libres en la República Polaco-Lituana. ¿Planificación o improvisación?", in *España–Europa Oriental: el alejamiento geográfico y la proximidad cultural. Seminario científico internacional de Hispanistas*, coord. Bohdan Chuma et al. (Lviv: Astroljabija, 2010), 11–25.

OBJECTIVES OF SPANISH DIPLOMACY

Historiography has tended to view Spanish action in the Polish-Lithuanian elections as an exotic and distant endeavor, always marked by failure. The fact that neither Ernest of Austria nor any other archduke obtained the Polish crown during the 16th century seems to reinforce this view, as this was the great objective of Spanish diplomacy in Poland during the reign of Philip II. Nor does Don Pedro Ronquillo's opinion of the 1673 election, which placed John Sobieski on the throne, offer a more optimistic outlook regarding the 17th-century elections. In a letter to the Marquis of Los Balbases following the election, Ronquillo summed up: «My lord, as bad as the election could have been, so it has turned out»³. However, before passing judgment, it is necessary to understand the general objectives of Spanish diplomacy in these elections: its maximum program, of course, but also its other objectives, which were often achieved through a realistic and pragmatic policy.

The Spanish Monarchy began to take an interest in the Polish-Lithuanian throne in the 1560s. After a period of withdrawal following Charles V's abdication, the Madrid court renewed its interest in the events of Central-Eastern Europe due to its confrontation with the Ottoman Empire and its search for new allies for the Holy League⁴. During these years, Spain sought to open a new land front in the Balkans and the Danube, with Poland being key due to its influence over Moldavia. By the end of the 16th century, both in Rome and Venice, and later in Madrid, there was a growing understanding of the impact of Cossack raids in the Black Sea, which diverted Ottoman naval resources from their operations in the Mediterranean. At the same time, the Commonwealth was seen as a battleground for confessional struggles, a "religious hell", according to a papal nuncio, where Catholicism was threatened by Calvinists and Lutherans⁵. The papacy urged Philip II to strengthen his position in the region and to engage more actively in the defense of the Catholic Church.

These two elements – the containment of the Ottoman threat and the defense of the Catholic faith – were very much on Philip II's mind when he decided to intervene in the first two elections (1573–1575)⁶. Shortly afterward, a third objective was added: control of the Baltic. The wars in this sea during the 1560s severely affected the economy of the Netherlands, further undermining its fragile stability. During the 1570s, some Spanish ministers advocated for a greater presence in the Baltic, from which the Dutch imported much of the food they consumed and where naval supplies could be acquired at low cost. This initiative, once again, was supported by

3 D. Pedro Ronquillo to Marquis of Balbases, Warsaw, 16 V 1674, in Antonio Rodríguez Villa, *Misión secreta del embajador Don Pedro Ronquillo en Polonia (1674): según sus cartas originales al marqués de los Balbases, embajador a la corte de Viena* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Biblioteca de Instrucción y Recreo, 1874).

4 Matylda Urjasz-Raczko, *Rzeczpospolita wyobrażona dyplomacji Filipa II. Studium spotkania kultur politycznych* (PhD Thesis: University of Warsaw, 2015).

5 Paweł Jasienica, *The Commonwealth of Both Nations. The Silver Age* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1987).

6 AGS, Est., Leg. 674, "Minuta de despacho de Felipe II al conde de Monteagudo", Madrid 5 IX 1572, f. 61.

Vatican diplomacy, which during the papacy of Gregory XIII (1572–1585) increased its activity in Sweden, Poland-Lithuania, and Muscovy⁷.

The candidacy of Archduke Ernest, promoted from Madrid during the first three elections, went far beyond these objectives. With Ernest on the Polish-Lithuanian throne, the House of Austria would have completed the absorption of the Jagiellonian legacy in Central-Eastern Europe, following the model of Hungary and Bohemia. Furthermore, had he won the throne in 1587, the possibility of further expansion into Muscovy, where there were also dynastic ambitions, would have opened up⁸. Thus, dynastic expansion became the primary objective of Spanish diplomacy during the three elections of the 16th century.

However, some nuance is necessary. Although Philip II was motivated by a dynastic spirit, he did so primarily in favor of his favorite nephew, Archduke Ernest, the only one he considered sufficiently committed to religion to guarantee the kingdom's stability and, at the same time, support the other objectives of the Monarchy in the region. By contrast, his commitment to his other nephews was always lesser, given their independent character and irenic education, and it even bordered on disapproval, as evidenced in the debates that took place in Vienna in 1587⁹. Philip II also did not support the election of Maximilian II as king in 1575, as he saw it as a threat to the region's stability: besides triggering a war with the Ottoman Porte at a time when the Monarchy lacked resources, it could have affected the internal situation of the hereditary territories¹⁰. Some observers might point to Philip II's support for Archduke Maximilian throughout 1587. However, this only occurred after Ernest's candidacy was dismissed, and primarily to support Maximilian's release by Jan Zamoyski. In other words, what was at stake was not the future of the Polish crown, but the prestige of the House of Austria.

The 1573 experience was the Spanish first contact with Polish reality. The 1575 election was the first time their diplomats realized how volatile the election could be, easily leading to civil conflict. It also made clear that there was a significant bloc of opposition to Habsburg candidacies in the Commonwealth and that a maximum program, such as dynastic expansion, could severely harm other Spanish interests in the region, such as the commitment to contain the Ottoman Empire or the stability of Hungary. This led the Marquis of Almazán, ambassador in Vienna, to adopt a realistic stance, suggesting the potential benefits of Stephen Báthory's rise to the throne, both for the Catholic faith – Báthory's good relationship with the Jesuits was

7 On Spanish interest in the Baltic and the Polish space, see: Radosław Skowron, "El mar Báltico en la estrategia española de guerra en los Países Bajos, 1568-1648", in *El Mar en los siglos modernos. Actas X Reunión Fundación Española de Historia Moderna*, coord. Isidro Dubert, and Hortensio Sobrado Correa, vol. 2 (Santiago-Ferrol: Xunta de Galicia, 2009), 345-59.

8 AHN, Est., Leg. 1417, s.f.: "Proposición de Lucas Pauli, enviado por Rodolfo II [...]", February 1588.

9 AGS, Est., Leg. 693, s.f., D. Guillén de San Clemente to Philip II, Prague 3 III 1587.

10 AGS, Est., Leg. 674, f. 159, Philip II to the Count of Monteagudo. Madrid 28 XII 1574.

well known – and for the fight against Ottoman expansionism¹¹. In other words, he proposed sacrificing the dynastic expansion program in favor of other objectives of the Monarchy. However, his advice had little impact, and years later, in 1587, Philip II made his greatest effort in favor of Ernest's candidacy, mobilizing resources and diplomats.

The failure of that attempt, followed by the humiliation of Maximilian's imprisonment – coinciding with the disaster of the Spanish Armada – led to a change in Spain's strategic objectives. And once again, papal diplomacy was behind this shift. The reconciliation between Austria and the Vasa dynasty, established under the mediation of Ippolito Aldobrandini – future Clement VIII – inaugurated a new policy by Sigismund III, who, lacking support in Poland-Lithuania and after losing the Swedish throne, sought backing from the Polish Catholic hierarchy and Rome. In the medium and long term, this led to a rapprochement with the House of Austria at a key moment in European history, on the eve of the Thirty Years' War. Thus, both the Austrian and Spanish branches of the family saw that many of their objectives in the region could be pursued through support for the king and his family¹². In this context, the dynastic expansion option, which had dominated Spanish strategy during the 16th century, was abandoned, and both in 1632 and 1648, the diplomacy of Philip IV supported the candidacies of Sigismund III's sons.

That strategy was reinforced by a policy of marital unions, which led Sigismund III's sons to align themselves with many of the Habsburgs' objectives in Europe. In particular, the election of Ladislaus IV as king was seen as a guarantee for Spanish projects in the Baltic and the Empire, as he had personally been supported by the Vasa family when he was a prince. The election of John Casimir Vasa in 1648 was more complicated, as he had shown little interest in Habsburg interests, and the Spanish diplomacy's preferred candidate was his brother, Charles Ferdinand. However, on this occasion, Spanish diplomacy refrained from pushing the candidacy of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, proposed from Vienna, as it was considered unrealistic and detrimental to other Spanish interests in the region. Instead of outright rejecting it, they simply ignored it, advising the archduke not to participate¹³.

The 1648 election introduced a new problem that had been virtually neutralized since Henry III's flight in 1574: rivalry with France¹⁴. After the first election, the French had attempted to redirect their electoral strategy with little success. However, in 1648, Cardinal Mazarin's diplomacy pursued two parallel strategies. One, barely known, proposed the candidacy of Prince Condé for the throne, although this

11 CODOIN, vol. 113, The Count of Monteagudo to Philip II, Prague 20 VIII 1575, p. 162.

12 Miguel Conde Pazos, *La quiebra de un modelo dinástico: Relaciones entre la Casa de Austria y los Vasa de Polonia (1635–1668)* (Madrid: Polifemo, 2022), 87-128.

13 AGS, Est., Leg., 2351, "Consejo de Estado", 23 IV 1648; AGS, Est., 2351, the Duke of Terranova to Archduke Leopold, Linz 27 VII 1648.

14 About this recovery of French diplomacy in Poland-Lithuania, see: Maciej Serwański, *Francja wobec Polski w dobie wojny trzydziestoletniej (1618–1648)* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1986).

option did not prosper¹⁵. The other strategy, very similar to Spain's, consisted of supporting one of Sigismund III's sons. In this case, the French decisively supported John Casimir, whose friendship they had cultivated since his time as a cardinal in Rome¹⁶. Thus, his election in November 1648, although it might have seemed like a French success, was not perceived as a failure for Spain¹⁷.

Future elections took on new significance with the rise of France on the European stage. They became another front in which Spain fought against French hegemony in Europe. As the Marquis de La Fuente noted, Poland-Lithuania had been transformed into the «stage for the rivalries of others»¹⁸. The main objective of Spanish diplomats in the subsequent elections was to oppose French candidacies by supporting more viable contenders. In 1669 and 1674, this candidate was Charles of Lorraine. However, both elections were decided by the nobility of the Commonwealth in favor of native candidates. The first, in 1669, was a success for Spanish interests, as Michael I quickly married an Austrian archduchess¹⁹. The second, in 1674, which Don Pedro Ronquillo attended, was seen in Madrid as a disaster, not because a French prince ascended, but because John Sobieski, a Polish noble supported by Louis XIV, was elected.

At this point, French diplomacy experienced the same frustration that Spain had a century earlier: it was impossible to promote its own candidates and establish avenues for dynastic expansion. It was much more realistic to achieve objectives by supporting other candidacies. The French would learn this lesson again in 1697, with the failure of Prince Conti²⁰.

DEPLOYED STRATEGIES

From the earliest elections, Spanish diplomacy developed a series of strategies for intervening in the Polish-Lithuanian elections, tactics that were maintained for two centuries. Some of these were conditioned by the nature of the relationship between

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- 15 Allegretti reported on this candidacy and the potential dangers it could pose to the House of Austria, as he could subsequently aspire to the crown of the Holy Roman Empire: AGS, Est. Leg 2430, "Razones del príncipe de Condé para el reino de Polonia".
 - 16 Regarding the prince's attitude, see: Miguel Conde Pazos, "Entre franceses y españoles: el Cardenalato del príncipe Juan Casimiro Vasa y la diplomacia hispana en Italia (1643–1648)", *Libros de la Corte*, Extra 1 (2014): 33–51.
 - 17 Marta Pilat Zuzankiewicz, "La elección y coronación de Juan Casimiro Vasa, rey de Polonia, en las relaciones de sucesos españolas", in *Las relaciones de sucesos en los cambios políticos y sociales de la Europa Moderna*, eds. Jorge García López, and Sònia Boadas Cabarrocas (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2015), 297–308.
 - 18 AGS, Est., Leg. 2372, The Marquis de la Fuente, Gratz 9 VII 1660, f. 73.
 - 19 Miguel Conde Pazos, "Miguel I de Polonia y la reconstrucción de la política de colaboración dinástica de la Casa de Austria (1669–1673)", *Tiempos modernos: Revista Electrónica de Historia Moderna*, 9/36 (2018): 331–54.
 - 20 Aleksandra Skrzypietz, "François-Louis de Bourbon, prince de Conti: un prince du sang français sur le trône polonais?", *Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles*, 18 (2021) [<https://journals.openedition.org/crcv/19516?lang=en>].

the Spanish Monarchy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was seen from Madrid as an extension of Vienna's sphere of influence. Although from the Republic the Spanish could plan actions against the Dutch, Swedes, and Turks, or recruit troops, the main party interested in the outcome of these elections was the Emperor, as he was the most affected. This meant that, in the context of the royal elections, Spanish diplomacy prioritized the interests of the Austrian branch of the Habsburg family. Thus, we can speak of a conditioned relationship. Regarding Spanish diplomatic activity during the elections, it was completely subordinated to the Emperor's interests. Spanish diplomats never acted independently nor pursued their own objectives. Their work focused on supporting the imperial diplomats, with whom they collaborated closely. They also did not attempt to build a support group among the Polish nobility to promote their own candidates but contributed to the formation of the candidacies of princes promoted by Vienna. In other words, Spanish representatives did not promote Spanish candidacies but rather favored the ascension of a joint candidacy of the House of Austria.

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However, this does not mean that their role was entirely passive in favor of imperial diplomacy. Spanish weight and initiative in the creation of this family candidacy were decisive in most cases, although they varied depending on the moment and the people involved. Spanish influence was notable in the first three elections, partly due to the authority that Philip II exercised over his cousins and his ability to mobilize significant resources. His minister at the imperial court, the Count of Monteagudo, played a key role in designing Ernest's candidacy and selecting the imperial ministers responsible for defending it. Among his greatest achievements was the appointment, in 1573, of Wilhelm of Rosenberg and Vratislav of Pernstein as those in charge of promoting Ernest's candidacy, both known for their connection to the Spanish faction²¹. However, his success was more limited in the elections of 1574-75, when he attempted to exclude Andreas Dudith from the preliminary negotiations, considering him an apostate²².

The opposite occurred in the elections of 1669 and 1697 when the Spanish opinion was hardly considered. Both cases occurred at times when Spanish influence in Vienna was weakened: the first, just a few months after the signing of the secret partition agreement of the Monarchy; the second, amid the conflict over the succession of Charles II, with the War of the Holy League still unresolved²³.

A key factor was the trust between the different members of the House of Austria, as well as between their ministers. Maximilian II distrusted Philip II's ambitions, which led him to reject, in 1573, the substantial subsidy that Philip offered to promote

21 To learn more about this group: Pavel Marek, *La embajada española en la corte imperial (1558–1641): Figuras de los embajadores y estrategias clientelares* (Praga: Karolinum, 2013).

22 AGS, Est., Leg. 673, Count of Monteagudo to Philip II, Prague 16 IX 1575, f. 92.

23 Luis Antonio Ribot García, "La sucesión de Carlos II: diplomacia y lucha política a finales del siglo XVII", in *Estudios en homenaje al profesor Teófanés Egido*, coor. María de los Ángeles Sobaler Seco, and Máximo García Fernández, vol. 1 (Valladolid: Caja Duero 2004), 63-99.

Ernest's candidacy, as he did not want to be indebted to him²⁴. For his part, Philip II also did not trust the Emperor's promise to accept the Polish crown solely to pave the way for Ernest's succession, considering it impractical²⁵. In 1587, the election revealed the conflict between the archdukes vying for the Polish throne and the lack of authority of Rudolf II over his brothers²⁶. Part of the failure of that election was due to internal divisions within the family.

This trust issue persisted in the 17th-century elections. In 1648, the Duke of Terranova, Philip IV's ambassador in Vienna, questioned the maneuvers of the Empress Mother and the Tyrolean branch to get Ferdinand III to support John Casimir in exchange for a marriage promise. In fact, he felt relieved when he realized that Ferdinand III would not send any representative, as the Spanish ambassador opposed supporting John Casimir. However, the most serious case probably occurred in 1668, when the Spanish ambassador, the Count of Castellar, was not informed of the imperial diplomats' negotiations, believing until the last moment that Leopold I would support the candidacy of the Duke of Neuburg. This error was due both to the ambassador's lack of skill – particularly his unfamiliarity with court circles and the role of the Empress Mother – and to the extreme secrecy with which the imperial representative, Christoph Leopold Schaffgotsch acted in the election. This same secrecy would be repeated in the development of 1674 election, leading his Spanish counterpart, Don Pedro Ronquillo, to complain about the lack of information, as this made him feel disoriented²⁷.

This conditioned relationship affected how Spanish diplomacy planned its entire intervention in the elections, concentrating its efforts on the embassy at the imperial court. From there, Spanish diplomats obtained information about the Polish and Lithuanian electoral system, the various candidacies, and the existing noble factions in the kingdom. Many of the decisions were also made at the imperial court, in most cases in mutual agreement with the Emperor's ministers, reinforcing the idea that Spanish diplomacy was conditioned by imperial interests during the elections. The Spanish diplomats who intervened in the elections also operated from Vienna, where most of the financial aid was managed²⁸.

The role of Spanish diplomacy in the elections was mainly to support the candidates proposed by the king and the Emperor, projecting symbolic, political, and economic value. The Spanish crown was perceived as a wealthy and universal monarchy, capable of offering social promotion opportunities to Polish and Lithuanian electors²⁹. The

24 AGS, Est., 1486, "Copia del memorial que el Marques mi señor embia dentro del pliego de su majestad sobre los negocios del señor Constantino Magno", f. 125.

25 AGS, Est., Leg. 675, Philip II to Maximilian II, Madrid 8 XII 1575, f. 85.

26 AGS, Est., Leg. 2449, Philip II to Don Guillén de San Clemente, Madrid 10 II 1587, f. 9.

27 Conde Pazos, "La misión diplomática de don Pedro Ronquillo".

28 Rubén González Cuerva, "The Spanish Embassy in the Empire, Watchtower of Poland (1590-1624)", in Skowron, *The House of Vasa*, 115-43.

29 BNM, Ms. 18768, "Summaria Relacion delo que contienen las oraciones de todos los embaxadores de los príncipes que pretendían el Reyno de Polonia en Abril y

possibility of opening new trade routes was also considered, although this point was rarely exploited in the electoral processes. However, what most interested the Polish-Lithuanian nobility were the financial subsidies. As the expressive Don Pedro Ronquillo succinctly put it: «this business is nothing but money, money, money»³⁰. Spanish diplomats soon perceived the Polish-Lithuanian nobles as venal individuals, willing to sell their votes for large sums of money, making each election a very costly enterprise. In addition, Spanish diplomats sometimes acted as mediators between the imperial representatives and nobles of the Commonwealth. The Polish perception of German ministers was not always positive, so Spanish diplomats often recommended including Czech and Silesian nobles to defend the family's candidacies³¹.

Another strategy used in the elections was to win the support of the Catholic Church and its hierarchy. This support was directed in two areas: the Polish ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Roman curia. As mentioned, the confessional issue was crucial in the early elections, and the sense of threat among members of the Catholic Church led many high-ranking ecclesiastics to support the House of Austria's candidacies, which were seen as a guarantee for their position. This sentiment was exploited by the Spanish, though not always with the best results. In the 1573 election, both the nuncio and much of the clergy favored the candidacy of Henry of Valois, skillfully presented as another defender of Catholicism. In the 1575 and 1587 elections, there was a division among the clergy. Although Spanish diplomacy hoped to create a united bloc within the Polish clergy, this never happened, and ecclesiastical figures of great authority, such as Archbishop Stanisław Karnkowski, played a key role in the rise of candidacies opposed to the House of Austria³². There were also important allied ecclesiastics in the 17th century, such as Archbishop Andrzej Leszczyński in 1648 or Primate Florian Czarotyski in 1674.

Spanish diplomacy also worked within the curia to win the papacy's support for its candidacies, especially by trying to secure the backing of the nuncios sent to the elections. These nuncios wielded great influence over the decisions of the Polish clergy, as demonstrated by Cardinal Commendone in 1573³³. Spanish diplomats were successful in winning over several key nuncios, such as Hannibal de Capua

Mayo del año de 1573", ff. 171-73.

30 D. Pedro Ronquillo to the Marquis of Los Balbases, Warsaw 25 IV 1674, in Rodríguez Villa, *Misión secreta*, doc. 1.

31 AGS, Est., Leg. 670, Count of Monteagudo to Philip II, Vienna 14 II 1573, f. 100; Another strategy to gain votes was to emphasize Ernesto's Bohemian roots: Ibid., Leg. 668, "The proposal of Don Pedro Fajardo for the states of Poland", n.d., f. 43.

32 AGS, Est., Leg. 675, "De Cracovia a 24 de Abril. El Batory entro aqui el dia antes [...]", f. 107; Johan A. Pärnänen, *Sigismund Vasa et la succession au trône de Suède 1592-1594* (Väitöskirja: Helsingfors, 1912).

33 Dorota Gregorowicz, "The Role of Papal Diplomats in the Interregnum's Parliamentary Practice of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (16th-17th centuries)", *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, 1 (2016): 119-48.

in 1587 and Giovanni de Torres in 1648³⁴. Although both nuncios remained firm in their loyalty to Rome, their support was crucial for the work of the Spanish diplomats³⁵.

This backing was essential for Spanish diplomacy in operational terms. The agents sent did not usually speak Polish, and their relationships with the imperial representatives were not always smooth. Much of the information that Spanish diplomats received about the election's progress and the Polish factions came from the nuncio's circle. Some of their secretaries even ended up collaborating with Spanish ministers³⁶. In fact, some nuncios continued to provide information to Spanish authorities about Poland-Lithuania during their stay in the kingdom after the election.

Over time, Spanish diplomacy understood the importance of having a deep knowledge of Polish-Lithuanian reality if it wanted to succeed in the elections. The first election of 1573 is seen as a reunion between the Spanish Monarchy and Poland-Lithuania³⁷. The failure of Ernest's first candidacy was attributed in part to the lack of knowledge of Polish customs. This election allowed the Monarchy to understand the functioning of the elective system, the limitations of royal authority, and the relevance of noble factions. From then on, Spanish diplomacy sought to identify the determining factors in the elections to exploit them. Among them were the internal differences between Poles and Lithuanians. The Lithuanian nobility was seen as more inclined toward the House of Austria's candidacies, and its aristocracy wielded more influence than in the Crown of Poland. Therefore, offering subsidies or promises to the leading Lithuanian lineages could be more effective than trying to win over the Poles. The promise of greater autonomy or the pacification of the Muscovite front were also considered potential cards to play. In 1575 and 1587, and even in 1674, the possibility of intervention from Lithuania was raised to force the election, compelling the Poles to accept an Austrian candidacy or break the union with the Lithuanians³⁸. However, this long-term option proved unviable due

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34 Ryszard Skowron, "Nuncjusz i ambasador. Korespondencja Annibala z Capui z Guillénem de San Clemente (1586–1591)", in *Od Kijowa do Rzymu: z dziejów stosunków Rzeczypospolitej ze Stolicą Apostolską i Ukrainą*, eds. Mariusz R. Drozdowski, Wojciech Walczak, and Katarzyna Wiszowata-Walczak (Białystok: Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy, 2012), 453–67.

35 Ryszard Skowron, "Współpraca nuncjuszy apostolskich w Polsce z dworem madryckim w latach 1578–1598. W kręgu koncepcji politycznych i praktyki dyplomatycznej", in *Nuncjatura apostolska w Rzeczypospolitej*, eds. Teresa Chynczewska-Hennel, and Katarzyna Wiszowata-Walczak (Białystok: Benkowski Publishing & Balloons, 2012), 161–75.

36 AGS, Est., Leg. 2351, Nuncio Torres to the Duke of Terranova, "Chomin" 26 V 1648.

37 Ryszard Skowron "El espacio del encuentro de los confines de Europa: España y Polonia en el reinado de Felipe II", in *Felipe II (1527–1598): Europa y la monarquía católica*, dir. José Martínez Millán, vol. 1/2 (Madrid: Parteluz, 1998), 881–92.

38 An example in: AGS, Est., Leg. 675, the Marquis of Almazán to Philip II, Vienna 5 VI 1576, f. 52. On the attitude of Lithuanians in the elections of the 17th century: Aleksandra Ziober, *Postawy elit Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego wobec elekcji*

to Muscovy's opposition and the fragmentation of the Lithuanian noble bloc, which, like the clergy, did not act as a united group.

AMBASSADORS AND AGENTS

Of the eight elections that took place during the 16th and 17th centuries, Spanish diplomacy sent official representation to four of them, either in the form of extraordinary embassies or with lower-ranking agents. Besides being costly, these missions faced a series of challenges, which explains why diplomatic representation was not always sent. As mentioned, Spanish activity was monitored from the imperial capital, and in most cases, it was carried out by ministers within the circle of the Spanish ambassador³⁹. It is not our intention to list all the diplomatic missions, but rather to address the common points and challenges they faced.

In the first election of 1573, Philip II opted to send an extraordinary embassy to demonstrate to the Poles the interest and respect he had for them. For this mission, Don Pedro Fajardo, the future 3rd Marquis of Vélez, a prestigious figure linked to the network of Don Luis de Requesens y Zúñiga, was selected. As mentioned, this mission served as a reencounter between the Spanish Monarchy and the Polish-Lithuanian world. During his stay in Warsaw, Fajardo gathered a large amount of documentation that would prove useful in future elections. However, his mission failed in part due to a lack of knowledge about Polish customs and traditions. Fajardo refused to yield precedence to other representatives who had arrived earlier, especially the French envoy. Additionally, the Poles' demands regarding the inheritance of Bona Sforza contributed to his eventual non-participation in the electoral parliament⁴⁰.

In 1587, Philip II again decided to send an extraordinary embassy, this time under the direction of the imperial ambassador himself, Don Guillén de San Clemente. This idea was not entirely new, as during the 1575 election, the imperial ministers had already suggested to the Count of Monteagudo that he travel to Poland-Lithuania to demonstrate Spain's commitment to the Habsburg candidacies. However, Monteagudo had little hope in these candidacies and considered it too risky to compromise his prestige⁴¹. San Clemente's mission in 1587 sought to demonstrate that Philip II had strengthened his support for these candidacies. As San Clemente himself noted in his letters, his arrival at the electoral diet caused great anticipation among the Poles and Lithuanians, who believed he brought large sums of money⁴². San Clemente, a Catalan by origin and part of the circle of Luis de Requesens and Juan de Zúñiga, faced an especially difficult task in Warsaw, as he attempted to promote Ernest's candidacy as a peaceful option to avoid civil conflict

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Władysława IV Wazy i Michała Korybuta Wiśniowieckiego (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2020).

39 González Cuerva, "The Spanish Embassy in the Empire".

40 Rodríguez Pérez, "Servir al Rey, servir a la Casa".

41 AGS, Est., Leg. 673, Count of Monteagudo to Philip II, Regensburg 24 X 1575, f. 78.

42 Conde Pazos, "The Hispanic Monarchy Facing the Accesion".

between Chancellor Jan Zamoyski's supporters and opponents⁴³. However, this option did not succeed.

In the next election of 1632, Spanish diplomacy chose to maintain a low profile. This was due to the complex international situation and the presence of a significant group within Poland-Lithuania hostile to the Habsburgs. On previous occasions, Philip IV's envoys in Warsaw had warned of the danger for Prince Ladislaus Vasa to appear too closely aligned with Spanish interests, particularly ahead of his election⁴⁴. Therefore, sending a delegation to support him could have been counterproductive. In contrast, the imperial diplomacy, while showing discreet support for the prince, was harshly criticized by the nobility⁴⁵. In any case, Spanish diplomacy sent the Count of Siruela to congratulate the king as soon as his ascension to the throne was known.

26

In 1648, the initial intention of the Madrid court was to send an extraordinary embassy to demonstrate its commitment. To that end, the then-ambassador to Venice, the 1st Marquis de La Fuente, was appointed, receiving instructions directly from the king⁴⁶. However, the appointment came too late, and the marquis faced economic difficulties in leaving Venice. Since the nobles of the Commonwealth wanted to conclude the election quickly due to the Cossack crisis, the Marquis de La Fuente ultimately did not travel to the region, although Spanish representation was still present, as we will see later⁴⁷.

In the next election, in 1669, there was no Spanish representation. By then, relations with the Viennese court had deteriorated, and the imperial embassy had remained vacant for months. Additionally, the fear of a diplomatic conflict with Louis XIV over matters of precedence, following the London incident of 1661, led Spanish diplomacy to reduce its presence at many European courts⁴⁸.

For the 1674 election, it was decided to send another extraordinary embassy. This decision was made due to the growing importance of collaboration with Vienna in Europe to contain Louis XIV's aggressive foreign policy and the need for Leopold I to have freedom of action on both the Polish-Lithuanian and Hungarian fronts to intervene on the Rhine⁴⁹. The person chosen to travel to Warsaw was Don Pedro

43 About the ambassador: Javier Arienza Arienza, "Don Guillén de San Clemente, un embajador hispano en la Corte de Bohemia", in *Las relaciones checo-españolas*, coord. Josef Opatrný (Praga: Karolinum, 2007), 93-102.

44 AGS, Est. 2328, "La Junta del Báltico", Madrid 28 IX 1627, s.f.

45 BNE, Ms. 11262, "Discurso que el Conde de Henspergens, embajador de la Magestad Cessarea de Ferdinando Segundo, dijo al Reyno de Polonia, junto en Cortes, para que eligiesen por Rey al Serenissimo Vladislao, hijo de Segismundo Tercero", f. 35.

46 AHN, Est. Leg. 2661, "Al marqués de la Fuente, orden de lo que debe hacer en la jornada que hace a Polonia", Madrid 5 VIII 1648, f. 181.

47 AGS, Est. Leg. 2430, Marquis of la Fuente to Philip IV, Venice 19 IX 1648.

48 Miguel Ángel Ochoa Brun, "El incidente diplomático hispano-francés de 1661", *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 201/1 (2004): 97-160.

49 Silvia Z. Mitchell, *Reina, madre y estadista: Mariana de Austria y el gobierno de*

Ronquillo, a minister of noble lineage who, like Fajardo a century earlier, belonged to a family of great standing. At the time, Ronquillo was in the imperial capital conducting business for the king. His mission was marked by a lack of resources and the need to protect the interests of the widowed Queen of Poland, Archduchess Eleonore. Although Ronquillo was highly critical of the election's outcome, he held some hope regarding the elected monarch, John III Sobieski, whom he considered a valuable asset for the House of Austria if he could be drawn to their cause. This prediction by the Castilian nobleman proved to be quite accurate⁵⁰.

These embassies represented a significant expense for the Spanish treasury, as they mobilized considerable entourages, especially the one led by Don Guillén de San Clemente. However, they did not always generate the admiration expected. On the contrary, part of the nobility was suspicious of Spain's intentions and exhibited hostility. Additionally, some ministers used the elections to try to resolve pending disputes with Spain. In 1573, the most prominent issue was the inheritance of Bona Sforza, a conflict that had remained unresolved for years and whose resolution was demanded by the Poles from Don Pedro Fajardo. This problem would resurface in later elections. During the years of Madrid's rapprochement with the Vasa family, the Spanish court accumulated a series of debts and unresolved matters, including the return of the Wismar fleet, which the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth could demand⁵¹. Due to these circumstances, Spanish diplomacy sometimes opted not to send representation or to send a lower-profile agent.

The case of the 1575 election is difficult to define. Officially, Philip II did not send any representation, but the Count of Monteagudo did employ an unofficial agent, Constantino Magno, an Italian financier whom the Spanish ambassador had connected with the emperor and empress. Constantino lent large sums of money at low interest to support the Austrian candidacies in the election, hoping to win Philip II's favor and secure a position or pension in Italy for his family. He also sent periodic reports from Warsaw to the Count of Monteagudo, detailing the election's progress. He was even the first to inform of Maximilian's election, and his brother Carlo traveled to Spain to communicate the news to Philip II. However, his ambitions were frustrated when the Poles ultimately elected Stephen Báthory, and Philip II refused to reward his services, arguing that they had been in the emperor's interest, not his own⁵².

In 1648, a lower-profile agent was chosen: Allegretto de Allegretti, a man close to Empress Maria, who in 1648 was appointed by the ambassador in Vienna, the Duke of Terranova, to travel to Warsaw⁵³. Allegretti, of Ragusan origin, had an excellent

España (Madrid: CEEH, 2023), 196-207.

50 Conde Pazos, "La misión diplomática de don Pedro Ronquillo".

51 Regarding Spanish Baltic policy during the Vasa period and the debts accumulated by the Austrian Habsburgs of Madrid: Ryszard Skowron, *Olivares, los Vasa y el Báltico: Polonia en la política internacional de España en los años 1621-1632* (Warszawa: DIG, 2008).

52 Conde Pazos, "Diplomacia en la bancarrota".

53 His instructions in AGS, Est., 2352, "Instruction and order given by the Duke of Terranova to Alegreto Allegreti, with a letter from the Duke dated on 6 VI 1648".

command of several languages, which allowed him to deal directly with the nobility of Poland-Lithuania. Initially, his mission was only to gather information and prepare the way for the eventual arrival of the Marquis de La Fuente. However, when the marquis did not travel, his mission gained greater importance, and he came to represent Philip IV's interests in the election. Allegretti fulfilled his task efficiently, providing the embassy with valuable information about Polish realities: the kingdom's main factions, the role of Queen Marie Louise Gonzaga, and Chancellor Jerzy Ossoliński⁵⁴. Although he was later criticized for basing his reports mainly on information from Adam Kazanowski's circle, the truth is that, as he would demonstrate in later missions in Constantinople and Moscow, Allegretti was a sharp and competent observer⁵⁵.

28

THE COSTS OF SPANISH INTERVENTION

Determining the precise costs of the Polish-Lithuanian elections for Spanish diplomacy is complicated. The figures vary, and although large sums are sometimes mentioned, many of them were contingent on the nobles' effective support in the final vote, or even on the success of the candidacy, which limited the actual expenses. Naturally, mobilizing a large entourage also involved considerable costs. According to San Clemente, in 1587, he brought to Warsaw a retinue composed of sixty horses, dozens of nobles and servants, carriages, and tents⁵⁶. However, this was likely an exceptional case, as in other instances, the entourages were smaller. The travel allowances available to us do not indicate large amounts either. For example, Don Pedro Fajardo, who after his first stay at the imperial court lacked sufficient funds, requested a travel allowance of 4,000 ducats for his mission to Poland in 1573⁵⁷.

Decades later, in 1648, the Spanish court approved a 6,000 escudos allowance for the Marquis de La Fuente, which proved insufficient for him to leave Venice in time or arrived too late to be used⁵⁸. The same amount was approved for Don Pedro Ronquillo in 1674⁵⁹. In general, these sums were insufficient to cover representation needs, and it was common for diplomats to complain about the lack of resources. In Ronquillo's case, his situation worsened due to his prolonged stay in Poland-Lithuania, where he accompanied the widowed queen to her court in Toruń, being forced to organize a series of costly festivities⁶⁰.

54 We find many of Allegretti's reports in the "Consultas de Oficio de Alemania" at the Simancas Archive: AGS, Est., Leg. 2430.

55 Regarding this Ragusan agent, see: Miguel Conde Pazos, "Allegretto Allegretti: un diplomático de Ragusa al servicio de los Habsburgo", *Hispania: Revista española de historia*, 81/269 (2021): 621-50.

56 AGS, Est., Leg. 692, D. Guillén de San Clemente to Juan de Idiáquez, Prague 24 VI 1587, f. 99.

57 AGS, Est., Leg. 674, Philip II to the Count of Monteagudo, Madrid IX 1572, f. 58.

58 AGS, Est., Leg. 2352, "La Junta de Estado", 29 VII 1648

59 AGS, Est., Leg. 2393, The Marquis of Los Balbases, Vienna 5 V 1674, n.d.

60 AHN, Est., 1294, "Relación jurada y firmada de los gastos secretos y extraordinarios

The expenses to win the favor of the Polish-Lithuanian nobles during the elections were significantly higher. As already mentioned, this aspect was considered crucial to ensure success. Spain's financial commitment depended entirely on the economic situation. In 1573, circumstances seemed favorable: the success of Lepanto was still recent, and the Spanish treasury seemed healthy, so Philip II was able to offer 100,000 escudos to support Ernest's candidacy, financed through a loan in Genoa. However, as mentioned earlier, Maximilian II was reluctant to use this money and did not request it until it was too late. According to Don Pedro Fajardo, the lack of funds was the main reason for Ernest's candidacy's failure in the first election, asserting that with 60,000 escudos, it would have been possible to change the course of the election⁶¹.

Two years later, the financial situation had deteriorated significantly. By then, Philip II had declared bankruptcy, and the rebellion of the Genoese nobility had dismantled the Monarchy's credit circuits in Europe. As a result, the Spanish embassy in Vienna was left in virtual economic isolation. Despite this, the Count of Monteagudo managed to gather significant funds. Initially, he delivered 9,000 florins to Empress Maria, which later increased to 30,000, mainly intended for Lithuanian nobles. Additionally, Monteagudo mediated Constantino Magno to lend substantial sums to the imperial couple to support the candidacies. According to a document, the Milanese financier lent the Vienna Habsburgs a total of 130,000 florins, which they still owed him years later⁶². The Spanish embassy also owed him 30,000 escudos in 1582, probably the same amount the ambassador gave to the empress at the start of the election⁶³.

The 1587 election represented the greatest financial commitment. Initially, Philip II allocated 30,000 florins to gain the support of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility, but this amount increased considerably when the election became a conflict between Archduke Maximilian and Chancellor Jan Zamoyski. At the request of his sister, the Empress Mother, and the imperial ambassador, Philip II approved aid of 100,000 escudos, which was later doubled to 200,000 when Maximilian was captured⁶⁴. However, it seems that not even the initial 30,000 florins were spent, as San Clemente refused to deliver them to Maximilian when he marched into the campaign⁶⁵.

que yo Don Pedro Ronquillo he hecho por el real servicio de su majestad en el ministério de embiado extraordinário a Polonia desde primero de marzo de mil setecentos y tetenta y quatro que pase a aquel empleo hasta fin de mayo de 1675 que pase a Inglaterra”, ff. 49 and ss.

61 AGS, Est. Leg. 670, “Extract of a letter from Don Pedro Fajardo to the Count of Monteagudo”, n.d., f. 28.

62 AGS, Est., Leg. 675, Count of Monteagudo to Philip II, Wien 11 I 1576, f. 8.

63 AGS, Est., Leg. 1486, “Copia del memorial que el Marqués mi Señor embia dentro del pliego que su Majestad sobre los negocios del señor Constantino Magno”, f. 125.

64 Sara Veronelli, and Félix Labrador Arroyo, *Diario de Hans Khevenhüller, embajador imperial en la corte de Felipe II* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2001), 338.

65 AGS, Est., Leg. 693, Don Guillén de San Clemente to Philip II, Prague 18

The financial commitment was much more modest in the following elections. In 1648, extraordinary spending of 14,000 escudos was approved for the election, a significant amount given the Monarchy's situation at the time, but totally insufficient to decisively influence the results⁶⁶. At that same time, Baron de Auchy proposed promoting the candidacy of the Prince of Neuburg with a loan of between 200,000 and 300,000 escudos, noting that this was the minimum amount necessary to guarantee success⁶⁷.

The situation worsened even further during the 1674 election. Don Pedro Ronquillo mentioned only a payment of 3,000 Hungarian florins that he borrowed, and which were distributed once again among the Lithuanian nobles. To the ambassador's further displeasure, the imperial agents distributed these funds in the name of Leopold I, not Carlos II, which tarnished the prestige of the Spanish crown⁶⁸. In any case, this sum was far from the amounts that, according to Ronquillo, were managed by Louis XIV's representative, who reportedly offered up to 400,000 livres to the Polish-Lithuanian nobles. We have no record of significant disbursements for the elections of 1669 or 1697.

Of course, money was not the only means used by Spanish diplomacy to win the support of the Polish-Lithuanian nobles. During the early elections, the possibility of promoting trade between the kingdoms and the formation of elites in Italy and Spain was discussed, although these aspects did not seem to interest the Poles very much. Instead, the perception among Protestant nobles that the King of Spain represented Catholic intolerance led many to distance themselves⁶⁹. This image did not improve after Poland-Lithuania was consolidated as a Catholic kingdom, as the kings of Spain continued to be seen as absolutist monarchs opposed to the Polish system of liberties, an image that would later also be extended to Louis XIV of France. Other proposals to gain support included, for example, the bestowal of one or two Golden Fleece orders among the most influential nobles, an option Don Pedro Ronquillo suggested but was not approved in Madrid⁷⁰.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, Spanish diplomacy engaged in intense activity during the successive royal elections of Poland-Lithuania. It did so within the framework of its family strategy of close collaboration with the Austrian branch – a strategy that, since the late 16th century, allowed the Madrid court to maintain an important position in Central Europe. During the elections, Spanish diplomats collaborated with imperial ministers in favour of a candidacy for the family as a whole, not just for a candidate

September 1587, f. 142.

66 AGS, Est., Leg. 2352, "La Junta de Estado" 29 VII 1648.

67 Auchy proposed using the town of Juliers as guarantee for this loan: AGS, Est., 2349, "Consejo de Estado", 31 X 1647.

68 AGS, Est., 2393, The Marquis of Los Balbases, Vienna 20 September 1674, n.d.

69 Janusz Tazbir, "La opinión polaca sobre España en los siglos XVI–XVIII", *Hispania: Revista española de historia*, 51/178 (1991): 559–87.

70 AGS, Est., 2393, D. Pedro Ronquillo, 22 II 1674, s. f.

of the King of Spain. This shaped much of their actions, prioritizing the emperor's interests in the region, who was truly the most affected by the outcome of the election. On the other hand, their activities had to navigate significant obstacles, beginning with the distrust between members of the House of Austria and the reluctance of imperial ministers toward those of the King of Spain.

Throughout these two centuries, the objectives of diplomacy in the elections evolved. During the 16th century, the goal was to place a member of the family on the Polish throne, thereby completing the absorption of the Jagiellonian legacy initiated at the beginning of the century. However, for Philip II, this goal went beyond promoting his favourite nephew and mere dynastic expansion. He also saw it as the best means to safeguard the Spanish Monarchy's interests in the region: containing Ottoman expansionism, defending the Catholic Church, and controlling Baltic trade. The failure in all three elections demonstrated the illusory nature of that project, as well as the danger it posed to other Spanish interests in the region. Therefore, from the 17th century onwards, a much more pragmatic and realistic policy was adopted, based on securing Spanish interests by supporting other candidacies. Papal diplomacy played an important role in this shift. The projects of dynastic expansion were abandoned, even when promoted from the imperial court. The possibility of an Austrian candidacy for the Polish throne was perceived by Spanish diplomats as a quixotic endeavour, potentially destabilizing for the House of Austria's interests. Time proved the wisdom of that judgment, especially when the French court attempted to elevate its princes to the Polish throne, resulting in similar failures.

Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the diplomats sent by the Spanish Monarchy to the royal elections of Poland-Lithuania shared several characteristics that influenced the development of their missions. First, they usually belonged to prestigious noble families, such as Don Pedro Fajardo or Don Pedro Ronquillo, emphasizing the importance Madrid placed on these events. However, a constant limitation was their lack of knowledge about Polish-Lithuanian customs and internal politics, which sometimes led to diplomatic errors, such as Fajardo's protocol issues in 1573. Moreover, their actions were frequently subordinated to imperial diplomacy, prioritizing the interests of the Austrian branch of the Habsburgs, which limited their autonomy.

Despite this, Spanish diplomats demonstrated great mediation skills, acting as key intermediaries between imperial diplomats and Polish nobles. Nevertheless, their success largely depended on the financial resources available, as the Polish nobility, described as venal, demanded large sums of money to influence their electoral decisions. This dependency on capital proved to be a significant barrier, especially during times of financial crisis, such as in the 1587 and 1674 elections, which restricted the success of the candidacies Spain supported. In short, although Spanish diplomats skilfully negotiated, their lack of local knowledge and financial dependency limited the impact of their interventions in these electoral processes.

As for the costs of Spanish participation in the Polish-Lithuanian elections, they were significant and often exceeded what the Spanish Monarchy could sustain, especially during times of financial crisis. The resources allocated not only covered the usual diplomatic expenses, such as maintaining entourages, but also large sums used to win over the Polish nobles, who were willing to sell their support to the highest

bidder. For example, in the 1587 election, Philip II approved 30,000 escudos to support the candidacy of Ernest of Austria, although even the initial amounts were not fully spent due to the diplomats' caution. The lack of funds was a recurring issue, as evidenced in the 1674 election, where Don Pedro Ronquillo could only dispose of a very limited sum, which severely affected the ability to influence the outcome. Payments to nobles, travel allowances for diplomats, and lavish festivities to gain prestige amounted to significant expenses that were often inadequately covered, making the missions insufficient against the competition from other powers like France. Furthermore, Spain's economic instability, exacerbated by the bankruptcy at the end of the 16th century, further restricted its capacity for effective intervention in the Polish-Lithuanian electoral processes.

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In conclusion, the Spanish Monarchy's diplomatic intervention in the royal elections of Poland-Lithuania during the 16th and 17th centuries was an ambitious effort but one limited by various factors, leading to a more realistic policy that secured Spanish interests in the region. And it was indeed successful. Although there was never a Habsburg monarch on the Polish-Lithuanian throne, the majority of the monarchs were sympathetic to the House of Austria, which ensured the Spanish Monarchy's influence in this eastern region.

ABBREVIATION

AGS: Archivo General de Simancas.

Est.: Estado.

AHN: Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid).

Est.: Estado

BNE: Biblioteca Nacional de España.

CODOIN: Colección de Documentos Inéditos de la Historia de España.

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