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Director of EEHR

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FROM EAST TO WEST. WOMEN JOURNEYS

Edited by Jarosław Pietrzak



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Special issue

FROM EAST TO WEST.
WOMEN JOURNEYS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD TO
ITALY
(XVII–XVIII CENTURIES)

Edited by
Jarosław Pietrzak



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TO ITALY
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EASTERN EUROPEAN HISTORY REVIEW: LA RIVISTA

Il Comitato redazionale e scientifico è lieto di presentare al pubblico la rivista scientifica *Eastern European History Review*.

Con un carattere internazionale e interdisciplinare, una cadenza annuale e una fruibilità *open access* la rivista focalizza i propri interessi sulle dinamiche occorse nell'Europa Orientale durante tutta l'età moderna (XIV-XIX). *Eastern European History Review* è espressione del Centro Studi dell'Università della Tuscia CESPoM (Centro Studi sull'età dei Sobieski e della Polonia Moderna) nato nel 1997 per intuizione del Prof. Gaetano Platania, Direttore Emerito della Rivista.

L'iniziativa editoriale che presentiamo nasce dall'evidente mancanza in Italia di una rivista scientifica relativa alla storia dell'Europa centro-orientale in Età Moderna, nonostante la penisola abbia giocato un ruolo fondamentale per la Storia e la Cultura di una parte integrante del continente, a torto considerata come lontana e periferica.

Consapevoli di questo, il Comitato ha posto quale obiettivo primario della *Eastern European History Review* quello di offrire uno spazio di riflessione e di discussione su temi che appartengono alla storia dell'Europa centro-orientale, e insieme alle relazioni - politiche e culturali - che questa vasta area del Vecchio Continente ha avuto con l'occidente d'Europa, e l'Italia in particolare, incoraggiando il dialogo tra studiosi e esperti di settore, e tra differenti approcci della ricerca scientifica.

Il Comitato Redazionale e Scientifico

EASTERN EUROPEAN HISTORY REVIEW: THE JOURNAL

The Editorial and Scientific Board are proud delighted to present the *Eastern European History Review* under the aegis of Sette Città Editore.

The *Eastern European History Review* is an international and interdisciplinary annually online and open access peer-reviewed journal about studies on Central and Eastern Europe in the Modern Age (XIV-XIX). The Journal is also the expression of the Study Center CESPoM (Centro Studi sull'età dei Sobieski e della Polonia Moderna – Center Study on the Age of Sobieski and Modern Poland) of the University of Tuscia, born in 1997, from an idea of Prof. Gaetano Platania, today Director Emeritus of this journal.

It publishes articles with significant approaches and original interpretations in all research fields concerning Central and Eastern Europe, with specific attention to the History sciences.

The editorial initiative we present comes from the obvious lack of a journal, in Italy, concerning the history of Central and Eastern Europe during the Modern Age, this despite its fundamental role in the history and culture of that part of the continent, wrongly considered distant and peripheral.

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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**SEARCHING FOR HOME AWAY FROM HOME:
ITALY AND THE FORMER POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH IN THE TRAVEL WRITING
OF WALERIA COUNTESS TARNOWSKA AND ANNA COUNTESS POTOCKA, 1800s-1820s**

ABSTRACT

This article explores Italy of the first two decades of the 1800s as described by two countesses from the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Anna Potocka [1779–1867] and Waleria Tarnowska [1782–1849]. Its main focus is on the role the origins of these two women, representative for a larger number of Polish-Lithuanian elite female travellers, had on their experience of Italian culture and society, in which they acted as both members and external observers. Places such as Rome or Naples are analysed as spaces of encounter of Polish-Lithuanian society abroad, as well as international elites of the time of the Partitions of the Commonwealth and the Napoleonic Wars. Further stress is put on similarities and differences between the lifestyles, education and social norms of the Polish-Lithuanian women and the foreign societies, which become apparent based on commentaries and comparisons included in the travelogues analysed. The article concludes with a brief overview of some aspects of the afterlife of these two women's journeys, namely networks and connections of importance which they formed while in Italy.

KEYWORDS: Travel writing, Women's history, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Transnational connections, art collecting.

«I shall really see it! I will see this Rome which, thanks to the education we receive and the history we are part of, is constantly becoming our common capital of the world [...]», wrote Waleria Countess Tarnowska [1782–1849] as she set out from the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on her 1803-1804 travel through Italy. She continued: «This Rome which first awakened the enthusiasm of my youth, these [...] heroes from ages past – I thank them for teaching me what it means to be magnanimous, love one's own country and live bravely»¹. The fact that the young traveller was coming from a great distance, having neither previously explored the Apennine Peninsula nor travelled much elsewhere, did not prevent her from fervently expressing her belonging to the cultural inheritance of Italy. When entering the Eternal City, filled with awe and reverence, the countess confessed her indebtedness to its history and artistic creations for the key role they played in her education and the formation of her value system.

¹ Waleria Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, trans. Monika Chwałek-Oczkowska (Tarnobrzeg: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Tarnobrzega, 2019), 54. Entry from 03.12.1803, Baceano [Baccano]. All the translations of the source materials from French and Polish into English are by the author of this article.

Anna Countess Potocka [1779–1867], who travelled to the same country two decades later echoed Tarnowska's sentiments: «It is with no surprise that one realises just how many emotions and thoughts can be inspired by Rome and its great relics»². Journeys to Italy undertaken by Polish-Lithuanian women in the initial stages of the Partitions of their homeland by the foreign powers (1772–1775) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) were scarce, yet not lacking altogether³. Tarnowska and Potocka were two of several elite female travellers from the former Commonwealth who ventured abroad despite the tumultuous political events taking place across the Continent⁴. With a striking variety of experiences, these journeys can hardly be presented as homogenous, neither following a single pattern, nor simply fulfilling the role of a traditional educational Grand Tour⁵.

- 2 Anna Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826–1827)*, ed. Casimir Stryeński (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1899), 89. Anna Potocka's maiden name was Tyszkiewicz. She was married twice, her second husband's name being Dunin-Wąsowicz. She is at times referred to by different or all of these names by herself, as well as by the scholarship. Here she is referred to as Anna Potocka, as she was bearing this name throughout the period of time (1805–1821) which vastly defined her as an author and a prominent member of international elites of the times. For more on Anna Potocka's life on the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, her travel to France, and political events between years 1794–1820 see her memoir: Anna Potocka, *Wspomnienia naocznego świadka*, ed. Barbara Grochulska (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965).
- 3 For wider context and more information on the Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by the Russian Empire, Habsburg Monarchy and Prussia (1772/1793/1795–1918) see: Richard Butterwick, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1733–1795: Light and Flame* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2020); Andrzej Chwalba and Krzysztof Zamorski, eds., *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: History, Memory, Legacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); Tymoty Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2003); Jerzy Lukowski, *The partitions of Poland: 1772, 1793, 1795* (London: Longman, 1999); William Hagen, "The Partitions of Poland and the Crisis of the Old Regime in Prussia 1772–1806," *Central European History*, 9/2 (1976).
- 4 For some other examples of Polish-Lithuanian elite female travellers see for instance: "Niepospolita kobieta. Teofila Konstancja z Radziwiłłów Morawska (1738–1807)," 2016, accessed 21st January 2020, [https://www.wilanow-palac.pl/niepospolita_kobieta_teofila_konstancja_z_radziwillow_morawska_1738_1807.html]; Alina Aleksandrowicz, *Izabela Czartoryska: polskość i europejskość* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 1998).
- 5 Current scholarship tends to discuss the Grand Tour primarily in the context of the lives of travellers originating from the Western part of Europe. For more on the tradition of the Grand Tour in such context see: Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the grand tour: the British in Italy, c. 1690–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jeremy Black, *The British abroad: the grand tour in the eighteenth century* (Stroud: History Press, 2011); Id., *Italy and the grand tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Id., *France and the Grand Tour* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

What united the travels of the two countesses were their deeply personal motivations for leaving their homeland and for creating their diaries, which will serve as a starting point for the below analysis, as well as their search for Poland-Lithuania abroad. Such searches came in various forms: connections with the national diaspora and uncovering Polish souvenirs in places visited, observing similarities and differences between the social and spiritual life in their homeland and Italy, and networking with artists to bring Italy back to the partitioned Poland-Lithuania in the form of freshly formed art collections.

This article will provide an overview of the significance of the Apennine Peninsula as a space of encounter of Poles abroad and of wider European elites in the early 1800s. It will question the degree to which the origins of Polish-Lithuanian female travellers were formative to their experience of Italy. To what extent were the lifestyles of the authors discussed aligned with those of their Italian and other European counterparts? Were they obscuring or rather manifesting their otherness? Were the networks they important in shaping their sense of identity and belonging, and the formation of the concept of Europeanness? To answer these questions, the multifaceted journeys of Waleria Countess Tarnowska and Anna Countess Potocka to Italy will be approached here as a means through which Polish-Lithuanian elite women communicated their integration into Europe and their commitment to the concept of shared cultural inheritance in the politically uncertain times of the Partitions.

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A CHANGE OF SCENERY THAT “EVENTUALLY BRINGS DISTRACTION”: REASONS FOR DEPARTING ON A JOURNEY

Waleria Countess Tarnowska and Anna Countess Potocka both belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian class of *magnateria*, distinct from aristocratic circles encountered in other European countries of the time. While both classes of *magnateria* and aristocracy could be defined by factors such as wealth, the amount of landed property owned, and social rank, membership of the *magnateria* was most significantly related to a certain lifestyle and influence of a set family unit on the public life of the country⁶.

These two women, whose family members were high-ranking officials in the former Commonwealth, were broadly educated in knowledge of the Bible, ancient mythology, literature, history, politics, and French. Equipped with this comprehensive intellectual formation, they had potential to play important roles in wider European circles, their own country, families, estates, and local communities. Their personal interests, as well as family and public engagement evolved over time, in part thanks to the experiences gained during their life abroad, and relationships formed there, including as art patrons.

Both countesses departed from home for the same reason: to process grief after losing a child, encouraged by those close to them and concerned for their wellbeing.

6 Edward Opaliński, “Elity władzy, elity prestiżu czy elity bogactwa?”, in *Honestas & turpitude: magnateria Rzeczypospolitej w XVI-XVIII wieku*, eds. Ewa Kupczewska, Marta Łopatecki et al. (Białystok: Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 2019), 31-6. In the same book: *Wstęp*, 9 and Andrzej Rachuba, “Magnateria – specyfika litewska”, 63.

Tarnowska lost her first-born son, Kazimierz, in 1803, after which her father suggested she depart on a journey to Italy together with him and her husband. The travel was supposed to play a therapeutic role and help the mother process the past events, as was the activity of creating a travel narrative along the way. The diary, and all the descriptions it contained, was addressed to Tarnowska's daughter, Rozalia, in her first year of life at that time. The illusion of sharing the joys and difficulties of travel with the only remaining child provided a comfort to the countess. Tragically, Rozalia died as well before her parents completed the tour of Italy, at which point the diary changed its tone, and began serving the purpose of addressing this new grief as well.

Potocka defined similar reasons for undertaking a venture abroad on the first pages of her work:

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I have just lost most my beloved child [her daughter, Julia Konstancja]; I was struck by the pain that put my very life in danger, and I was advised to depart for Italy. Whatever grief one might be experiencing, a change eventually brings distraction. One starts by looking without seeing, by listening without hearing, but slowly curiosity and interest, inspired by all the novelty, become dominant⁷.

Both women's motivations to depart for Italy were deeply personal, as was their decision to narrate their accounts, the texts of which often observe that they were not intended for publication.

SEARCHING FOR POLAND-LITHUANIA IN ITALY: FINDING HOME, OR FEELING EXILED?

While writing their diaries from the perspective of mothers and mourners, as well as women and travellers, both Tarnowska and Potocka were through their work also expressing the point of view of Poles and foreigners. When in Italy, they were particularly attentive to searching for Polish-Lithuanian souvenirs in both the physical form of artefacts, and the symbolic form of sites of consequence to their country. They expressed interest in meeting with the Polish-Lithuanian diaspora abroad and found consolation in discussing the memories and current state of the Commonwealth with foreigners in the Italian salons.

When in Rome, Waleria Tarnowska was deeply moved by a sight of Henry, Cardinal Duke of York [1725–1807], the great-grandson of king Jan III Sobieski, and she voiced her feelings of national pride and interest:

Among the cardinals I have noticed, not without tender emotion, the Duke of York, the last of the Stuarts! He moves with great difficulty. His advanced age and misery move me as he is a son of Sobieski's granddaughter, a Pole⁸.

Similarly, when describing St Peter's Basilica and its necropolis to her daughter Rozalia, the addressee of the travelogue, the countess focused on the grave of Maria

7 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie* (1826–1827), 1–2.

8 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 69–71. Entry from 25.12.1803, Rome; See more: Herbert M. Vaughan, *The last of the royal Stuarts: Henry Stuart, cardinal duke of York* (London: Methuen, 1906).

Clementina Sobieska [1702–1735], wife of James Francis Edward Stuart [1688–1766]⁹. Tarnowska and her husband's search for Polish traces abroad also manifested itself in their visit to the grave of St. Stanislaus Kostka [1550–1568] and to the seat of Stanisław Poniatowski [1754–1833], the nephew to the last Polish king¹⁰.

Such instances of the particular focus on elements reminding Countess Tarnowska of her country's ongoing struggles were repeated throughout the journey on multiple occasions. She marked in her diary the day when she met Polish Legions in Italy, calling it a «great event» and «the last sacred memory of our free country, which will however die with us»¹¹. This happened again at the very end of the couples' travel, in Milan, when the count recognised among Polish soldiers two men who had been dependents on his estate at Dzików in the previous decade¹².

Apart from such cherished meetings, reminding the Tarnowski couple of their home country's situation, what was particularly meaningful to the countess was to be able to talk about the ongoing events with those who could understand her. Compatriots encountered on her journey were obvious partners for such conversations: for instance, two Polish priests met in Loreto who shared some wine and fruit with the couple¹³. While in Florence, the spouses' anticipated return to Poland was unexpectedly postponed by their meeting of the Polish prince, Aleksander Sapieha, who was ill at the time. They were not previously acquainted with him, yet as Waleria wrote in her travelogue, «a compatriot abroad and in difficulties becomes a brother»¹⁴.

Countess Anna Potocka, who references fewer meetings with the Polish-Lithuanian community in Italy, did however lead discussions about her country with foreign elites. In a letter sent to her by Princess Catharina of Württemberg [1783–1835], Napoleon's sister-in-law, which clearly constituted a reply to Potocka within an ongoing correspondence between the two women concerning the fate of the Commonwealth, we read:

How could these lines ever express the pain that my soul felt upon reading your letter of the 20th of October [...]. Remember [us to] those exiled from Poland, may their intention, or yours, be to come to Italy? I won't say that we desire it deeply, or that it would make us happy, as I hope that you would not even need such reassurance. I hope that you understand that my husband and I share in all your pains [...]¹⁵.

Tarnowska also found partners for conversation about her country's situation

9 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 71, 129. Entry from 07.04.1804, Rome.

10 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 66, 72. Entries from 15 and 27.12.1803, Rome.

11 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 48. Entry from 24.11.1803, Bolonia.

12 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 231. Entry from 07.06.1804, Milan.

13 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 53. Entry from 29.11.1803, Loreto.

14 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 164. Entry from 03.05.1804, Florence.

15 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826–1827)*, 238–39. Letter dated 31.01.1832, Florence, included in the diary.

among foreigners. On one occasion, Poland became a topic of conversation during a prominent dinner party in Milan. The spouses had met the host of this dinner, Francesco Melzi d'Eril [1753–1816], then vice-president of the Italian Republic, only a day before the event took place on the 6th of June 1804, yet it was the Countess Tarnowska who was seated on one hand side of the host, while the wife of the Spanish ambassador was given place on the other side. Already during their first meeting the countess conducted a lively discussion about European politics, especially Napoleon's proceedings, with the vice-president¹⁶. He clearly found her opinions interesting, as he spent the following evening introducing her to the ladies of Milanese society and even engaging with her in conversation about the future of her own country. The countess quoted this conversation:

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Ah, monsieur – I said – the hope in our hearts died already, but the love of our country and the hatred of our oppressors will never die! [...] It will be inherited by our children! And maybe these children will one day be testimonies to Europe awakening from the apathy, which allowed it to let the country as necessary for Europe's stability as Poland to be ripped apart. – Very necessary indeed – he answered – so necessary, that we should think about regaining it. [...] – But monsieur, Bonaparte turned out to be so indifferent to Poland's destiny!... – Sentimentally, maybe, but politically he cannot be indifferent [-he replied]¹⁷.

Taking these examples into consideration it becomes apparent that despite finding their place in elite society abroad, Countess Tarnowska and her husband, as well as Countess Potocka, were also actively looking for signs of their homeland and people with whom to share this part of their identity. Throughout their journeys, Italy became a space of encounter for Poles abroad, with the international communities there providing forums for debate about the ongoing political events involving the Commonwealth. The countesses' belonging to Poland-Lithuania, manifested even when away from home, was highly formative to their experiences of Italy and its social circles.

FORMING COMPARISONS: SOCIAL LIFE IN POLAND-LITHUANIA AND ITALY

Despite her grounding in the wider European culture, Waleria Tarnowska never ceased to identify with her national community. Thus, her experiences abroad often resulted in interesting comparisons between the realities of Poland-Lithuania and Italy. The acute awareness of the situation her country was undergoing during the Partitions was always present in her mind, causing the countess' particular engagement with the notion of freedom. Upon crossing the border of the former Polish-Lithuanian lands and the Habsburg Monarchy, the countess stated:

[...] in this place we left behind, not without pain, our beloved homeland. Until now, every person encountered was our brother, compatriot, formerly a dignified citizen, now a miserable companion in slavery. We are now entering the strangers' land – no, worse, the enemy's land¹⁸.

16 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 221. Entry from 05.06.1804, Milan.

17 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 229. Entry from 06.06.1804, Milan.

18 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 22-23. Entry from 11.10.1803, Cieszyn.

Subsequently, when entering Italy, Tarnowska exclaimed:

For the first time since the misfortunes of the Partitions, we find ourselves out of the country occupied by the three dreadful powers [the Russian Empire, Habsburg Monarchy, and Prussia] [...]. Here everything is marked by freedom! [...] This great word has always moved people, which has been expressed in a myriad of ways. If the French Revolution has not cheapened it, then nothing will¹⁹.

In the same spirit, while in Venice, the countess did not fail to discuss the situation of the Venetians then subjected to the Habsburg Monarchy due to the French interference, with which she strongly identified. Despite her considerable interest and support for some of the ideals represented by the French Revolution – something unusual for a member of her social class which might be explained by the situation her country found itself in) – Tarnowska could not hide her contempt towards the French for facilitating the change in the status of the Venetian Republic²⁰.

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When observing artistic and scientific achievements witnessed throughout Italy, the countess never failed to highlight the benefactory impact of freedom on the country's development. Upon their visit to Reggio the Tarnowski spouses discovered, to their surprise, a publicly open natural history museum created there by the citizens themselves. They were informed that the people had bought the collection after the death of the original owner, referred to as Spallanzani, a fact which delighted Tarnowska, who exclaimed in her diary: «Oh Liberty, this is your doing! A man can do so much, or at least can do whatever his forces would allow him, when he works for his happiness»²¹.

Rome and Naples were the two cities in which Tarnowska spent most time during her journey and, consequently, in which she had a chance to get most involved in the local social circles²². Having arrived in Rome on the 5th of December 1803, the countess and her husband spent Christmas there before leaving for Naples on the 28th of December. They subsequently passed the carnival season in Naples and came back to Rome on the 4th of March 1804, just in time for Easter. This final stay lasted until the 15th of April. While visiting these two metropolises, the countess paid particular attention to three main aspects of society: the approach towards foreigners, the education and situation of women, and the way of spending free time and celebrating social occasions.

According to Potocka, the elite circles encountered in Italy «consisted mostly of foreigners»²³. Ways of welcoming the newcomers seemed to differ in Rome and Naples, despite the short distance between the two. Tarnowska's first impression of the Eternal City was concluded by her comment that: «I have learnt to love

19 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 46. Entry from 20.11.1803, Verona.

20 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 36. Entry from 06.11.1803, Castel Franco.

21 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 186. Entry from 19.05.1804, Reggio.

22 For more on Roman Enlightened salons see: Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassing Roworth and Catherine M. Sama, *Italy's eighteenth century: gender and culture in the age of the grand tour* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 59-78.

23 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826-1827)*, 119.

Rome greatly. I feel so well here. It is the first city in which a stay turned out to be truly pleasant»²⁴. Because of the December stay in the city being rather short, Tarnowska only got truly involved with the local elites when back from Naples after the Carnival. It was then that she admitted finally understanding Roman society and finding it more sophisticated than in Naples, although in fact «having less of the kind attention for foreigners»²⁵.

Naples impressed the countess with its openness and consideration for the outsiders. She highlighted this fact «honestly and with gratefulness» and confessed that in this respect Naples was like no other country.

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One letter of recommendation is enough [here] to see everything that is worth seeing. They hosted us beautifully, presented to everyone, invited to opera boxes, evenings, concerts, balls – and all that with such kindness, such amount of good will, such a friendly manner. If it were true that more education and common sense would decrease such charming kindness in these people, I wouldn't wish that on them²⁶.

This last remark, moderating slightly the positive judgment of the Neapolitans presented in the diary, was another aspect of the social life to which Waleria Tarnowska would pay particular attention. Their alleged ignorance, and lack of conversancy and education, struck both Polish-Lithuanian countesses. Anna Potocka, echoing Tarnowska, added:

It is certain that the educational institutions established and supervised by Queen Murat [Caroline Bonaparte] now developed intelligence of these charming, yet ignorant, Italians. But it is unlikely that their morality gained as much as did their presumed education²⁷.

Following these initial observations of the state of education, based vastly on comparisons, Tarnowska witnessed an amateur play interpreted by the guests at a party on the feast day of the King of Naples. The performance was meant to be about Poland, but the countess found it deeply inaccurate, especially the costumes. However, what drew her attention was the eight-year-old daughter of the hostess, who to Tarnowska seemed to be the only person playing her role well. With great sadness, the Pole confessed in her writings:

[...] what a great shame that she is being brought up in Naples, where the education of women is so neglected. They can hardly speak French and everything they know about the world is so limited... It is nothing however in comparison to men! They seem completely worthless here, they can hardly formulate a sensible

24 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 72. Entry from 27.12.1803, Rome.

25 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 108. Entry from 15.03.1804, Rome.

26 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 79. Entry from 13.01.1804, Naples.

27 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826–1827)*, 120. See also: Maria Teresa Caracciolo, et al., eds., *Caroline, soeur de Napoléon: Reine des arts* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2017).

sentence, and when they do, one can instantly see that their gallantry is inexistent. I doubt they even know this word²⁸.

Such a poignant comment from Tarnowska suggests that, in her social circles in Poland-Lithuania and elsewhere, she was used to greater brightness and refinement of character among men, as well as women receiving a more comprehensive education, their aptitude in French being more common. Similarly, the countess had strong opinions about the education of children abroad, commenting boldly on the education of the five-year-old Charles II [1799–1883], Duke of Parma, Lucca and Piacenza: «His education was entrusted to the wrong people. This does not forecast anything good»²⁹.

The Countess' ideal of feminine and masculine education was expressed in her laudatory description of Giovanni Fabbioni [1752–1822], a founder of the Natural History Museum in Florence, and his wife. Upon meeting them, Tarnowska noted:

Him – [...] an outstanding writer, Enlightened connoisseur of the fine arts, and in all that so unaffected and natural. [...] [Her –] well-educated, far from being pedantic, but just as far from being ignorant. She is everything that a companion to a great man should be³⁰.

When observing the marital arrangements abroad, the countess tended to compare them with her own union, very equal in nature, and to draw saddening conclusions. Upon meeting a certain Henrietta Dionigi on the last day of her stay in Rome, Tarnowska expressed her compassion for the woman: «Living in Italy, a creature with such intelligence and such a beautiful soul will not find one man who would be worthy of her – so how could one hope she would ever be happy?»³¹.

Similar impressions of a Carnival gathering of 1827, which comprised of harsh judgement and comparisons to the reality known in her homeland, were expressed by Anna Countess Potocka in her description of a Roman ball:

The majority of the party comprised of Dianas, Spanish (costumes), peasants and vestals. I confess that I was stunned to not have seen more taste and novelty in a place that unites so many nationalities. My national pride could not resist a feeling of vanity when I recalled how many of such balls I have experienced in Warsaw, and all superior to this one³².

These remarks made by the second countess were also accompanied by a criticism of the state of education among international elites encountered in Roman salons and summed up in the words: «I encountered more people of deep spirituality on

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28 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 79–81. Entry from 13.01.1804, Naples.

29 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 179. Entry from 11.05.1804, Florence.

30 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 164. Entry from 01.05.1804, Florence.

31 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 142. Entry from 14.04.1804, Rome.

32 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826–1827)*, 110.

[Via del] Corso, among the crowds, than in the salons of Rome»³³.

Likewise, when reflecting on the ways the Italian society entertained itself, Waleria Tarnowska remained unimpressed. During the Carnival spent in Naples, one of the first remarks of the young and inexperienced aristocrat from Poland-Lithuania was: «Italian evenings are boring. Everyone sits in a circle and talks only with their neighbour. As a drink they would serve a cold water or a lemonade [...]. I was truly amused by such a cheap way of receiving guests»³⁴. This comment indicates that the countess, despite leading a fairly quiet life herself when on her own estate, was not used to such limited or inexpensive celebrations. Naples did not leave a favourable impression on Countess Potocka either, as she stated: «The art of conversation is unknown in Naples; its aristocratic society is very inapproachable [for the non-aristocratic circles], so it is very rare to encounter savants or artists in the salons»³⁵. Potocka's writing suggests that she was usually accustomed to more refined circles elsewhere.

Despite the above judgement of Neapolitan receptions, Tarnowska participated in many of them. By the end of Carnival, she stated:

Parties and balls are following one after another. These are the last days of the Carnival. There is also dancing. I participate in almost everything. When one is already accepted into society, one becomes tangled in all the social obligations... But dances, noise, the busy life of the city – all this is not what I like most³⁶.

She was indeed “accepted into society” and, while she provides little detail about this process, she does describe how she remained unintimidated during her introduction to the Queen of Naples. The Queen noticed her at the party organised by the Spanish ambassador on the 31st of January 1804 and requested her presentation a few days later. «And so, I was given an honour and a trouble to be presented at the royal court», complained the countess³⁷. When describing the ceremony itself, Tarnowska did not renounce her irony and confessed:

All this pathetic etiquette, and the importance people think it has, constitutes more of a hassle than a valuable encounter. A couple of generic questions asked one after another, with almost no time for providing an answer – this was the presentation, at least at this court³⁸.

Subsequently, Tarnowska was invited to the palace of Portici, which was supposed to be a particular honour. She commented on this event: «And let me say here that it was more of an honour than of a pleasure. The dancing hall so mediocre [...] and

33 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie* (1826–1827), 111–12.

34 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 79. Entry from 11.01.1804, Naples.

35 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie* (1826–1827), 120.

36 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 92. Entry from 12.02.1804, Naples.

37 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 89. Entry from 31.01.1804, Naples.

38 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 91. Entry from 02.02.1804, Naples.

the ball not too joyous»³⁹. Countess Potocka echoed this scepticism about Italy in concluding some of her own thoughts: «The more I experience Roman society, the more I discover how it is filled with the vanity observed in parochial villages»⁴⁰. When leaving Naples for Rome, Tarnowska declared that her and her husband had seen everything the city had to offer, enjoyed the «good Neapolitan nobility» and not so much the «lazy, insolent and cowardly» peasantry. Nevertheless, there were people whom the countess had begun to call “new friends” and whom she kept missing, among others the Marquise de Saint-Agathe and the Duchess of Piedimonte.⁴¹ Similarly, when Countess Potocka was returning to Rome, about which she voiced multiple unfavourable judgements, she was at times sharing: «I am seeing Rome again, with the feeling one has when one sees one’s dear friend after time of separation»⁴².

During their first stay at Rome in December, the Tarnowski couple attended religious events throughout the periods of Advent and Christmas. The countess was deeply disappointed by her spiritual experience in the Eternal City. She commented on the Christmas Mass at Santa Maria Maggiore that it was «more of a performance than an act of worship of God» filled with «a lot of splendour, sadly more human than Godly». «Even the chants were too unnatural, too tiring, and they did not seem to serve the purpose of Adoration», she concluded with dissatisfaction⁴³. Subsequently, Countess Tarnowska also described the Easter season in Rome as a «public performance» and as «the least pious one in her life», while Countess Potocka likewise referred to the “theatricality” of similar events⁴⁴.

Anna Potocka’s impressions of broader spiritual life in Italy’s international circles were similar to Tarnowska’s. Her scorn was aimed particularly at the British society abroad, which she seemed to detest. When attending Mass in St Peter’s Basilica, the countess noted:

The Ancients were right to prohibit blasphemers from entering their temples. In Rome, the English transform our churches into places of social encounters, where they come to laugh, chat and observe. [...] people speak, and the Basilica becomes one of the salons⁴⁵.

Waleria Tarnowska’s second impression of Rome, which followed the Neapolitan Carnival, was more abounding in the social occasions. The countess, as mentioned above, found Roman society more sophisticated, yet she concluded that the receptions themselves consisted mainly of talking and gambling and would start

39 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 91. Entry from 07.02.1804, Naples.

40 Potocka, *Voyage d’Italie (1826–1827)*, 88.

41 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 97–98. Entries from 27.02 and 01.03.1804, Naples.

42 Potocka, *Voyage d’Italie (1826–1827)*, 144.

43 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 69. Entry from 25.12.1803, Rome.

44 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 119. Entry from 01.04.1804, Rome; Potocka, *Voyage d’Italie (1826–1827)*, 150.

45 Potocka, *Voyage d’Italie (1826–1827)*, 55.

and end too late⁴⁶. During such events, Tarnowska attracted most interesting partners for conversation. On the evening when she met both Cardinal Joseph Fesh [1763–1839] and Pauline Borghese [1780–1825], the uncle and sister of Napoleon, the countess noted down: «Everyone is gambling. I do not like or want to do it. I talk then if I am fortunate enough to find a partner for a conversation». The topic of her conversation with the Cardinal that evening was art. What she talked about with Pauline is unknown, yet the countess noted down in her diary: «I know her only a little, but I trust in her kindness and reason [...]»⁴⁷. She must have become further acquainted with Pauline Borghese following that evening, for when leaving Rome for good it was the Borghese family that Tarnowska visited on her last day, and departed «overwhelmed with their cordiality»⁴⁸.

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The lifestyle of the Polish-Lithuanian elites seems to have aligned with that of their European counterparts closely enough that the travellers were widely accepted into the social circles of Italy. Yet, both countesses were unafraid to form and express judgments of the aspects of Italian lifestyle which they found challenging or unsatisfying. Their private writings cited above helped them to express their integration within the European elites, and at the same time also emphasize their otherness and the social differences observed. The choice of individuals these female travellers connected with was dictated to a certain extent by custom, yet even more so by personal interests and education, as well as norms they were used to in their own country, and for which they were searching elsewhere.

NETWORKING: BRINGING ITALY BACK TO POLAND

In the foregoing sections, we have considered some of the observation made and connections formed by the two Polish-Lithuanian countesses travelling in Italy, who were representatives of a larger group of elite women from their country. Finally, two brief case studies will showcase how substantial the networks formed throughout such travels were to these individuals and to the subsequent influence of Italy (or Italian culture) on the lands of the former Commonwealth over the decades that followed.

While in Italy, Waleria Countess Tarnowska formed multiple friendships which she maintained on her return to her home country and which had significance for the remainder of her life. One of these, shaped while on her journey, was with Antonio Canova [1757–1822]. The countess, calling Canova the «Phidias of our times», lamented on multiple occasions the master's lack of talented disciple. Her diary also references some of the sites she visited during her stay in Rome as having been recommended to her by the artist, making it clear that he actually influenced her travel itinerary⁴⁹. Tarnowska and Canova remained in contact through correspondence in

46 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 181. Entry from 12.05.1804, Florence. The countess made such a comment about the Roman Society, while comparing it to the Florentine one she found much the same.

47 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 108. Entry from 15.03.1804, Rome.

48 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 142. Entry from 14.04.1804, Rome.

49 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 41, 56, 102. Entries from 14.11.1803, Venice, and 05.12.1803, 06.03.1804, Rome.

the afterlife of her journey. The connection proved crucial to the Tarnowski couple's commissioning and subsequent purchase of one of Canova's distinctive sculptures, and contributed to the further development of their art collection. In May 1804 the countess wrote:

Today I received a letter from Canova. It is to us that he will give his replica of Perseus – [...]this statue will be our true family treasure. This is why we decided on such an expense. Besides that, our friendship with Canova was a/the determining factor. He declined Perseus to mighty sovereigns despite them offering a higher price than us⁵⁰.

The sculpture, today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was sent to Poland-Lithuania in 1806 and located at Horochów, an estate belonging to the countess' father, , rather than on the Tarnowski spouses' own estate of Dzików, because of its considerable weight which was feared to be too much for Dzików Castle's floors⁵¹. Waleria Tarnowska exchanged further letters with Canova a year after the arrival of Perseus to her family's estate. These reveal the sculptor communicating to her that he was sending her a plaster version of Medusa's head: he had become concerned that the marble original was too heavy, putting strain on Perseus' arm, and therefore could be replaced with a plaster substitute. The artist then suggested treating the original marble head as a gruesome stand-alone ornament and placing a candle inside it⁵².

Anna Countess Potocka also continued to foster the networks formed during her time in Italy, and these became important for developing further European-wide (Trans-European?) connections. Her long-lasting friendship with Caroline Murat [1782–1839], Napoleon's sister, was proven by a continuous correspondence between the two women. Murat shared in her letters that Potocka's lack of intention to publish her diary had put her at ease in the company of her new Polish-Lithuanian friend. This relationship resulted in Murat arranging for Potocka's daughter's

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50 Tarnowska, *Moje podróże*, 165. Entry from 05.05.1804, Florence; Interestingly, Anna Potocka's opinion on the sculptor, formed mere two decades later, was strikingly different, and unusual for her times. In her private writings, which presumably allowed her high degree of ease in sharing her mind, the countess declared: «I am not sure I can explain well why this artist does not seem to me to be deserving of his reputation. [...]I ruled that he is lacking genius, and has only talent. [...] There is something monotonous in his figures [...]: once we have seen one, we have seen all. It does maybe require some courage to challenge generally accepted opinio. [...]». See: Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826-1827)*, 36-37.

51 Sebastiano Ciampi, *Feriae Varsavienses Seu Vindiciae Literariae et Alia : Quae Vacans Ab Academicis Praelectionibus Scribebat Mense Augusto (Varsaviae: Typis Scholarum Piarum, 1818)*, 15.

52 Antonio Canova, Correspondence with Countess Tarnowska of Dzików, Letter from 21.02.1807, 1807, MS 63, National Museum of Warsaw. First published in Grottowa in 1957, facsimile reproduced in Kaczmarzyk in 1969, 109-11. As quoted in: ; "European Sculpture and Decorative Arts: Perseus with the Head of Medusa," accessed 29th June 2023, [<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/204758>].

marriage proposal⁵³. On one occasion Murat, when in conversation with Potocka, wrote: «Our [mine and others'] conversations always end on you. You see, Madam, at my age I am clearly having illusions, as I try to obscure your absence by constantly bringing you back to memory»⁵⁴.

Here, these two women's travels can be perceived as the primary medium through which they communicated their integration into the wider European society, and into the concept of Europeanness, manifesting their belonging to it during the challenging times of the Partitions. These and other significant networks formed during the ventures to Italy reveal the Apennine Peninsula to be the prime space of encounter of these Polish-Lithuanian women not just with their own compatriots, but also with other social and artistic elites from across the Continent, and a place where many lasting connections originated.

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CONCLUSIONS

The ethnic and geographical origins of Polish-Lithuanian female travel writers, illustrated here by the examples of Waleria Countess Tarnowska and Anna Countess Potocka, were highly significant in shaping their experiences abroad. Italy served as a place of encounter between Polish-Lithuanian and international communities, and the background of these women proved helpful for them to define their sense of place within that context. Both countesses actively participated in the cultural and social life of the cities they visited abroad, while at the same time being perceptive observers of them.

The lifestyle which they were used to in their home country and the expectations with which they entered the salons of Rome and Naples, where they were warmly accepted, to a certain extent already aligned with the lifestyles of Italian and international elites. At the same time, both Tarnowska and Potocka were not without criticism of the social arrangements, entertainments, education and spiritual life they experienced abroad, expressing their judgements without reservation, largely based on comparisons with what they were used to at home.

Balancing the perspective of an insider fully admitted to the foreign salons and that of an outsider voicing criticism in a private travelogue, the experience of travel to Italy helped these women to express in writing their sense of identity and belonging in politically uncertain times. The two countesses' journeys had their afterlife in the intimate networks and lifelong friendships which they both formed, and which turned their travels into a means of Polish-Lithuanian elites deepening their integration into European society as a whole on a cultural and artistic level.

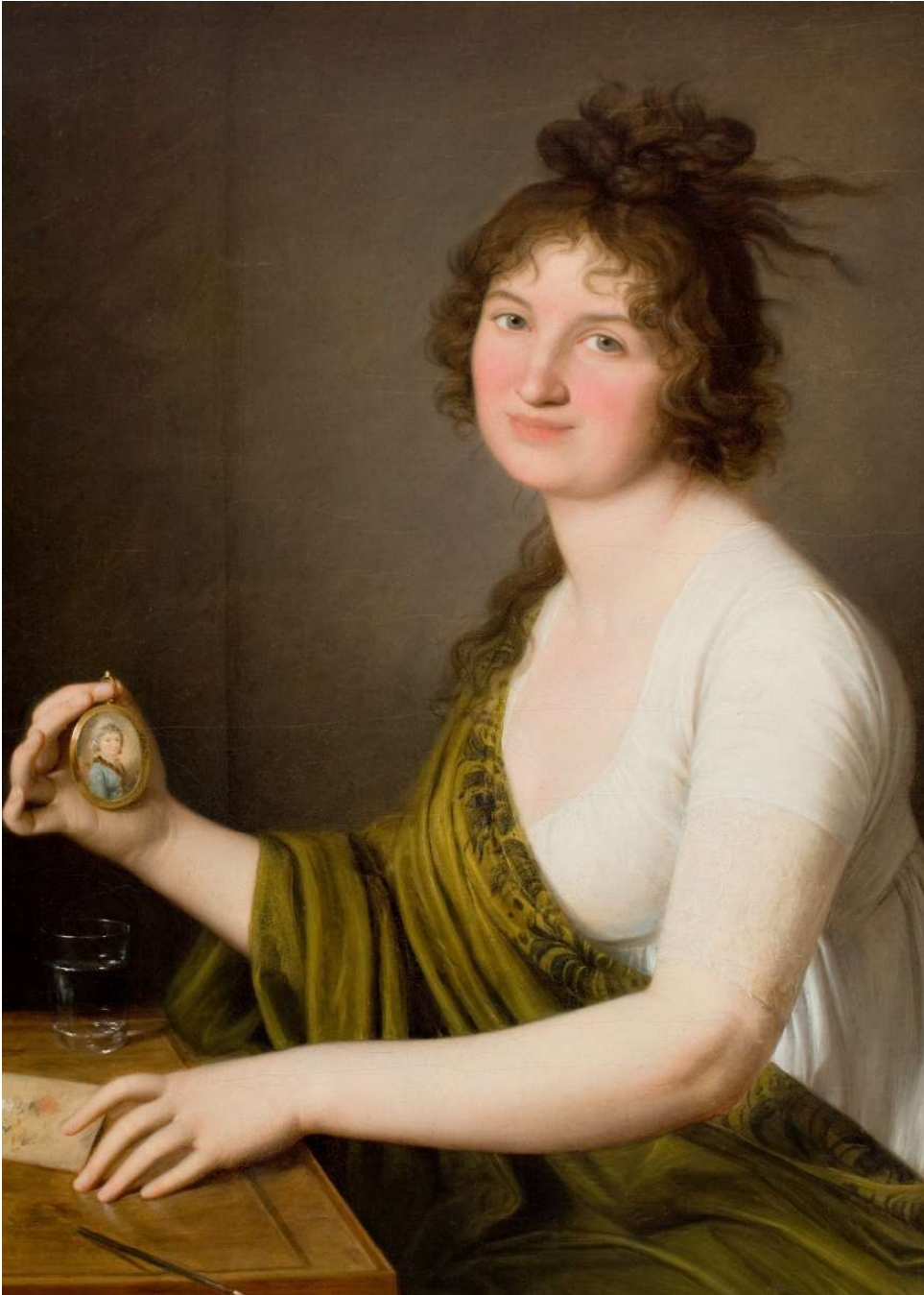
53 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826–1827)*, 214–17. Letters dated 08.02 and 22.07.1827, Trieste, included in the diary.

54 Potocka, *Voyage d'Italie (1826–1827)*, 217. Letter dated 22.07.1827, Trieste.

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FIGURES



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Fig. 1 - Domenico Del Frate, Portrait of Waleria Tarnowska nee Stroynowska, 1805-1806, National Museum in Kraków. (Public Domain)



Fig. 2 - Josef Grassi, Portrait of Anetka Tyszkiewiczówna, 1796, Royal Castle in Warsaw. (Public Domain)



Fig. 3 - Domenico Marchetti, Pauline Borghese Bonaparte as Venus Victrix, 1816, Rijksmuseum. (Public Domain)



Fig. 4 - Ippolito Caffi, Carnival in Rome, the Feast of Moccoletti, 1852, Private Collection. (Public Domain)



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Fig. 5 - François Gérard, Caroline, Queen of Naples and her children, 1809-1810, Musée national du Château de Fontainebleau. (Public Domain)



Fig. 6 - Antonio Canova, Perseus with the Head of Medusa, 1804-1806, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Wikipedia Creative Commons)