

PROJECT SUMMARY FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The strong relationships between the Republic of Two Nations and the Kingdom of France throughout the modern era are perfectly illustrated by outstanding historical figures such as Henry of Valois—an elective Polish king and hereditary sovereign of France, Louise-Maria of Gonzague—the princess of Nevers who became the queen of Poland, or Stanislas Leszczyński—an ephemeral ruler of the Republic who finally received a nominal governance of the Lorraine and Bar duchies. These exchanges between France and Poland from the period of the henrician election in 1573 to the collapse of the *Ancien Régime* and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, define the chronological context of the present research project, realized in the framework of a *cotutelle* doctorate. Nevertheless, this is not so much the diplomatic relations between the two countries that constitute the main topic of this thesis but the cultural ties so creatively developed at this occasion, in particular in the field of political thought.

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the French and Polish intellectual societies reinforced their contacts. This phenomenon took different forms: travels, meetings, correspondences, publications of texts and translations of works dealing with this second world, at the same time so distant and so close. Since then, each new event which brought the two countries nearer renewed the interest of French thinkers towards the distant land of the Sarmats. This involvement is palpable through many books about Poland printed at this time. These texts were written by prominent French authors like Bèze, Bodin, Montesquieu, Voltaire or Rousseau, but also by men of letters less known today like Boucher, Rubis, Coyer or Mallet du Pan. Many travelers, diplomats, soldiers or courtiers also spread knowledge about the Republic of Two Nations on the banks of the Seine river. After their return to France, they described their adventures and shared their thoughtful observations—thanks to print—with curious readers. Some of these accounts encountered a very favorable reception and had been edited many times during their author's lifetime. This is notably the case of the memoirs of Jean Choisin, Jean Le Laboureur or Gaspard de Tende. These various old printings compose our corpus of sources.

Among the characteristics of modern Poland, its political system, unique in Europe, certainly received the greatest number of comments. Whereas in most European countries, a centralized and absolute model of monarchical power was promoted and introduced, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth followed the path of privileges, noble liberties and king's power control by advisory and representative institutions (senate, *sejm*, *sejmiki*). It significantly contrasted with what was happening in France, where after the sixteenth century civil wars, the society progressively accepted the absolute power of the sovereign. As a consequence, the contacts of the French with the Republic of Nobles constituted a confrontation with a different—though not entirely unknown—political culture. This aspect is the main issue of our research. The aim is to show how the French reacted to this Polish-Lithuanian divergence, and above all how it impacted their political ideas.

Taking into account the large extent of such an issue, we have chosen a guideline that leads the entire research. It concerns the relationship between the king and the nobility of the Republic of Nobles. This issue is essential for two reasons. First, it is the relationship between the governors and the governed that defines the nature of a monarchy or a political regime in general. Second, this matter was the main subject of many disputes *inter Maiestatem ac Libertatem* of this period.

Finally, the proposed issue enhances the understanding of modern French absolutism and Polish republicanism. Indeed, the various, uneven, both positive and negative French judgements about the king and the nobility of the Republic reflected the diverse trends of the Gallic political thought. Absolutism then appeared only as one—even though victorious—of the possible institutional solutions. Moreover, an analysis of the significant place of the Sarmatian state in the French political literature pinpoints the important value of this model in European debates.