

## CHAPTER I

## EARLY SAXON PERIOD, 1696–1733

THE interregnum which followed the death of King John Sobieski and the subsequent election were of great consequence both to Europe and to Poland. To the former, since on the outcome of the election to the Polish throne depended the freedom of action of the Emperor Leopold who, conscious of the fact that a war over the Spanish Succession was becoming more and more probable, was compelled to concentrate all his forces on the western front. With a Bourbon as neighbour in Warsaw, it was no easy task for a Hapsburg to push his claim to the Spanish throne. The list of candidates for the throne of Poland contained ten names, of whom three were French, with the Duke François Louis de Conti as the most prominent; one Italian, don Livio Odescalchi, the nephew of Pope Innocent XI; one Pole, Prince James Sobieski, and five Germans, most of whom, e.g. Max Emmanuel, Elector of Bavaria, Louis, Margrave of Baden, and Frederick Augustus of the house of Wettin, Elector of Saxony, were warriors of no mean repute.

To the Republic, this moment was equally important, for on the election depended not only her foreign policy but also her interior development. If Prince James counted on the charm of his name in the field, he was to meet with bitter disappointment. The Lubomirskis and the Sapieha House, taking advantage of the disgruntled, unpaid troops, stirred them up against hetman Jabłonowski, Sobieski's devoted friend. True, a special Commission had succeeded in pacifying the rebel soldiery, but the best period for agitation had passed. Popular displeasure with Queen Maria Casimira and the Prince was in evidence during the Convocation, 29 August–27 September, of that year. The French ambassador, l'abbé Polignac, spared not millions in his effort to win the votes of the chief magnates, and of the provincial leaders. He was morally certain of victory, for, on the one hand, he claimed the support of Cardinal Radziejowski, Poland's Primate, the Sapiehas and the Lubomirskis, while the nation, tired of war and compelled to make many sacrifices in favour of the rebellious army, earnestly longed for peace; and peace with Turkey and the recovery of Podolia with the Ukraine were the terms offered by Louis XIV, if Conti were elected. One by one Prince James, the Elector of Bavaria, the Margrave of Baden, the Princes of Lorraine and Neuburg with-

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drew from the campaign. There remained but one name—the name of him who was the last to register, Frederick Augustus of Saxony. In May of that year, uncertain of his future lot, he betook himself secretly to the monastery of Baden, near Vienna, where a few weeks later (2 June) he renounced Protestantism; in fact, he permitted his agents to announce publicly, long before, that he would be a prudent defender of Catholicity and that he would restore to Poland her lost possessions at his own cost. After the French Embassy had prodigally spent its gold, the Saxon agents, Fleming, Beichling and Przebendowski, intensified their propaganda, chiefly among the friends of the Sobieski Family. The representatives of the other Germanic courts supported them. Russia categorically asserted that she would consider Conti, who was a friend of the Sultan, her enemy. On the day of election, 27 June, huge crowds acclaimed Conti King. The number of voters who, on the next day, “signed” the election of Augustus, however, more than doubled the number of John Sobieski’s electors in 1674. Hence Dąbski, the Bishop of Kujawia, proclaimed the elector of Saxony, now Augustus II, King of Poland.

The Wettin waited for this information with an army recruited with the aid of Saxon and Jewish money. Passing through Silesia, he made his way to Poland, and in Piekary, on 27 July, he solemnly promised to observe the *Pacta Conventa*. No one opposed him, for Conti could not easily make up his mind as to the advisability of accepting a crown which was so uncertain and so distant.

The French Party failed to send a representative either to the Act of Coronation of Augustus II or to the Diet which followed it. Hence, as Conti approached Danzig with six French frigates, he not only did not receive a hearty welcome from the Germans, but failed to meet any Poles ready to espouse his claim, and therefore, on 6 November, he set sail for France.

The Primate, powerless in his wrath, realized that he was fighting for a lost cause, and at the Assembly held in Warsaw, 26 August, organized his followers into a “*rokosz*” in order that he might later bargain with the victor for a compromise favourable to his own party. This bargaining between Augustus and the “malcontents” went on for many months, until it reached a crisis at the Pacification Diet, in June 1699, which ratified Augustus’ *Pacta Conventa* and buried the enmity between the various Lithuanian parties. The opposition merely masked its bitter disappointment, however, and this mask would be thrown off at the first reverse of the King, who in their eyes was a usurper.

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For two generations, the common link binding two nations, one numbering twelve millions and predominantly Catholic, the other Protestant and counting two million inhabitants, was the person of the sovereign, enterprising, wealthy, and belonging to a dynasty that commanded the respect of all Europe. At first sight, this union appeared wholesome, for it brought about a beneficial exchange of products. In return for their enormous natural wealth, the Polish-Ruthenian population could procure not only the products of the highly organized Saxon industry, but, what was of greater value, it could adopt a superior material culture from the industrious and thrifty Saxons. The points of difference between these nations were religion and geography (Silesia). Silesia, foreign in name, was germanized merely on the surface. Racially and linguistically, it was thoroughly Polish. The only possibility of acquiring this necessary corridor was by combating the Hapsburgs. This, however, was not the goal of Augustus' policy in 1697. The exchange of temporal and spiritual goods between Poland and Saxony was something beyond his reach; the annual income of 3,000,000 zł., forthcoming from Poland, he squandered to satisfy his whims and fancies and to bribe the citizens. The enormous fortunes extorted from the electorate, he sank in wars, whose arena, target and victim were destined to be the Kingdom of the Jagiellons and Vasas.

The secret of this fiasco lay more on the side of the monarch, and to a lesser degree in the nature of his new subjects. Augustus the Strong, a perfect athlete in form, a veritable Don Juan, a hedonist and an egoist, dreamed that he was destined to be the Louis XIV of the East. Yet, while other autocrats and especially the Hohenzollerns succeeded in identifying their policy with their country's welfare, he was of the opinion that the world existed for his personal enjoyment. He chose Poland as the object of his experiment, for in some occultist tract he had read a prophecy that fate would lead him through Warsaw to fame in Constantinople. He estranged the Saxons by his cynical apostasy. By a series of outrageous betrayals he poisoned the life of his wife Christiana Eberhardina Hohenzollern-Bayreuth, a pious Lutheran, to such an extent that she stated she would never enter Poland as queen. The Poles, i.e. those of the higher classes, the knights of the Sobieski school, he scandalized by his sybaritic life, his spendthrift ways, and his perfidy. The worst prognostications arose from the glaring contrast existing between his ideals and the ideals of the nation. The nobility, at that time at the height of its "golden freedom", looked down with scorn upon the subjugated

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Germanic race, at times thinking themselves the peers of electors like Augustus, and in the “Pact” stipulated that the King must heed the advice of his national constitutional counsellors and not the advice of foreigners. Augustus, on the other hand, a King “by the grace of God”, was sure that he could easily break down the “senseless liberty” of the Sarmatians. In case of opposition, he would seek aid from his relatives and neighbours, to whom he would offer Polish soil as a recompense. This is the first and perhaps the only example of a King who, at the outset, annually, and later every few years began to bargain with the enemies of the Republic, for her dismemberment. This bargain was never completed, however, for the King’s absolute rule even over a reduced state could never satisfy them.

Augustus entered upon his policy by offering Elbing to the Elector of Brandenburg. By virtue of a formal agreement in Johannisburg, 17 June 1698, he allowed Frederick III to take the city by surprise, which the latter did on 11 November, when the Polish army was on the Ruthenian front. When the Senate later condemned this pact, the Polish commissioners retook the city in 1700. Since the Republic did not pay off its ransom at the proper time, in 1703 with the consent of the King, the Prussian army again occupied Elbingian territory with the exception of the town itself. The King counted on open hostilities between Brandenburg and Poland, in which the former would sap the strength of the latter and teach it submission.

This plan failed completely. The neighbour took advantage of Augustus’ approval and arranged for his coronation at Königsberg (18 January 1701) as King of Prussia, but did not support Saxon plans. In two Diets held in 1701, several deputies protested against the new title as injurious to the rights of Poland. The most influential senators, however, won over to the court of Berlin, were reconciled with the *fait accompli*. Augustus received the pledge of Russian aid from Tsar Peter when the latter was on his “European travels” in April 1697, and later when, on negotiating for concerted action against Turkey and Sweden, he offered the Tsar mutual guarantees against their respective rebellious subjects. Yet all in vain. Harmony with the court of Vienna, which feared his rivalry in Germany, was too much to expect. At one time Augustus was not only willing but actually took steps towards an alliance with France (1700), but he soon realized the dire consequences of such a move and offered a considerable part of his armed forces to the Emperor for the War of the Spanish Succession.

The greater were the difficulties encountered by the King in his secret machinations against his new subjects, the more he trusted his

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“martial star”. He was determined that victories should pave his path to “sovereignty”. The promise of recovering the lost Polish provinces, which was contained in the *Pacta Conventa*, referred chiefly to Kamieniec and Podolia. This however did not satisfy Augustus’ appetite. Hence in 1698, before the maritime Powers were able to mediate a Peace between the Porte and the League, he tried to wrest from the Turk Moldavia and Wallachia, the actual goal of Sobieski’s campaigns. From the side of Poland, hetman Felix Potocki entered upon a successful campaign in the vicinity of Podhajce, routing there a strong force of Tartar cavalry (9–10 September 1698). Unfortunately, a short time later (22 September) at Brzeżany, a conflict between Polish and Saxon troops was avoided by the narrowest of margins. Ambitious designs collapsed. Poland’s ambassador, Stanislas Małachowski, hastened to the Peace Conference at Karlowitz (Karlovice) with one trump card in his hand: “Sobieski’s services to Christianity.” Hence, thanks to the efforts of his predecessor and not to those of Augustus himself, Poland with the aid of Austria not only received Podolia and the Ukraine, by virtue of the treaty signed on 26 January 1699, but gained another victory no less important—Turkey as a friendly neighbour—a fact of paramount value to both in the face of the rising power of Russia which threatened them.

At the very time when Augustus II was ratifying this treaty, he was already bent on taking the field once more—this time to acquire not for the Republic, but for himself, Poland’s former possession—Livonia. In August 1698, he met Tsar Peter in Rawa Ruska, where, draining wineglasses, they plotted an attack on the Swedish possessions lying on this side of the Baltic, whereas Denmark, as the third member of this alliance, was to acquire Holstein and the territory lying beyond the Sound.

Augustus, born in 1670, already of age in knowledge and strength, had an ascendancy over the semi-barbarous Romanov, as far as the political culture of Europe was concerned, and therefore took upon himself the less difficult part of the enterprise, the attack on Livonia. Sweden under the youthful and seemingly fickle Charles XII appeared to be doomed. Did Poland’s interests and hers alone demand the victory of the allies? Such, in truth, was the opinion of Augustus’ German counsellors, e.g. Fleming and the rebellious Livonian leader of the anti-Swedish faction, Patkul. The most loyal among Polish senators, Bishop Załuski and Vice-chancellor Szczuka, called attention to the fact that Kiev was of infinitely greater importance to the Republic than Riga, and that for the future Russia and not Sweden must be weakened.

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The internal situation did not encourage risk, for in the very year 1700, the former Lithuanian feud between the Sapieha family and the other members of the local aristocracy, upon which Augustus looked with favour, in the spirit of his slogan “divide et impera”, broke out once more. On 2 November, the nobility and higher gentry cut to pieces the court troops of the Sapiehas and wreaked vengeance on the possessions of these stiff-necked oligarchs. All this took place six months after Fleming’s unfortunate attack on Riga, shortly after the Peace of Traventhal between Charles XII and Denmark, and immediately before the brilliant victory of the Swedish leader over Peter the Great at Narva (20 November). Charles cut down Augustus’ armies at the Dvina (9–20 July) and thereupon entering Courland threw his protecting arms about the Sapieha brothers, who fled thither from Lithuania. The Swedish King then issued the stern command to the Poles—either dethrone the Saxon or risk a war. Before the Polish Senate could take action in regard to this extraordinary challenge, the Swedes captured Wilno and Warsaw, overcame Augustus at Kliszów (19 July), where the Polish army refused to fight, and took Cracow without a shot, thereby cancelling Poland’s neutrality in respect to the Northern War.

Dethronements were frequent during the Middle Ages, and occasional in England and Sweden during modern times, but were absolutely unheard of in Poland. In fact, free popular elections created there a bond practically indissoluble between the nation and the crown. At this particular time a foreigner tried to sever this bond. Hence the nobles, by no means loyal to their sovereign, were now cut to the quick—in their national pride. Augustus the Strong immediately convoked the Senate and later formed the Confederation of Sandomierz (22 August 1702), and the following year summoned the Diet of Lublin (June–July 1703) at which the Primate and the Poznań malcontents were outraged; a levy of 48,000 troops was voted and the King was empowered to negotiate treaties. The short distance separating them from the well-armed Swedish forces encouraged the enemies of the court to form a Confederation of Great Poland and later to hold a General Assembly at Warsaw, January 1704.

Cardinal Radziejowski initiated an act renouncing obedience to Augustus and proposed a new election. Due to a lack of candidates, since the Saxons at Breslau “kidnapped” Princes James and Constantine Sobieski, the choice fell upon the youthful Stanislas Leszczyński, the Palatine of Poznań, whose father Raphael was a

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bitter enemy of Russia and a lover of liberty (“*malo periculosam libertatem, quam quietum servitium*”). In terror of Swedish muskets, hoping to avoid requisitions and to pacify the country, less than 1000 of the nobility proclaimed Leszczyński King, on 12 July 1704.

Meanwhile the vast majority of the nation rallied to the standard of the German King, for they were driven to it by force and fraud. Tsar Peter took advantage of the Cossack Insurrection under Palej in 1702, and gave the Poles to understand that he would enforce the restoration to Poland of that portion of the Ukraine (Białocerkiew) which the Cossacks had taken, provided the Republic joined him. This same Tsar succeeded in tempting into a separate treaty with Moscow (1703) that part of Lithuania which was opposed to the Sapieha faction, with the result that the Kingdom of Poland would either be compelled to do the same, or renounce its union with the Duchy. Augustus II, through Saxon diplomacy and without consulting Poland, created new *faits accomplis* and whetted Poland's appetite for Livonia. Thus the nation witnessed an extraordinary schism. On 20 May the newly organized General Confederation of Sandomierz Loyalists under Stanislas Denhof raised its standard against Cardinal Radziejowski and the Warsaw malcontents, creating a situation in which the country had two Kings, two Primates, two General Confederations, two hetmans and two political systems.

On 30 August 1704, the Saxon faction drew up, at Narva, the so-called Działyński Pact with the Tsar. At first sight this treaty appeared advantageous to Poland, for it assured her financial and military aid as well as the restoration of Livonia. But under the pretext of offering her aid, Russia would carry on a long campaign in Poland-Lithuania, all this at the expense of the latter's inhabitants, and this (seemingly) “helpful occupation” would be an introduction to the ultimate seizure of this territory by the occupants. The partisans of Sweden assumed the role of dictating in Warsaw (18 November 1705) a treaty, most humiliating to the Polish nation, fatal to Polish trade, and injurious to Catholicism. Not without reason was Leszczyński suspected of bargaining Courland and parts of Livonia for Swedish protection. For two years the rivals Peter and Charles fought for their titles and their prerogatives on Polish soil.

Courland was taken by the Russians. At the Tsar's command, the Cossacks under the leadership of Ivan Mazepa invaded Volhynia. The forces of Augustus and Stanislas were equally matched, hence the devastating war lingered on hopelessly. Not one Polish city, not even Lwów—*virgo intacta* as it was called—was able to withstand

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Charles. The Saxon formed strategic plans for the Republic's reconquest, plans which called for a co-ordinated attack from east and west. With this in mind he met the "Great Russian" in Grodno, in November 1708, only to scamper off at once before the approaching Swede. A Great Elector on the Prussian throne would have rushed into this disturbance for the sake of booty, but the weak Frederick I was content to stretch forth his hand, now and then, for Polish Pomerania and Danzig, only to withdraw it, at the sight of the armed paw of the Swedish Lion.

The year 1706 brought new triumphs to Sweden. First of all, on 3–14 February, Saxon regiments sent to seize Poland were routed by Rehnschöld at Fraustadt. Secondly, in September, the Swedish King himself, by a surprise offensive through Silesia, trampled upon Augustus in Saxony, and imposed an ignominious treaty upon him at Altranstädt (24 September), by which the Elector of Saxony was forced to give up the crown of Poland, to recognize Stanislas, to abandon Peter and to punish Patkul. Subterfuge availed nothing. The Sybarite, crushed under the heavy heel of him who styled himself "Guds fiskal på jorden" (God's attorney on earth), threatened with the destruction of Saxony, was forced to congratulate Leszczyński and wish him success, in person. He then hastened to Flanders, to study strategy under Marlborough at Lille, and to dream of new crowns, wherever they might be gained, in Naples or Jerusalem.

Stanislas, then thirty years old, with all his mental acumen and social ability could not bear the weight of the royal diadem. Of little consequence to him was the fact that Charles in Saxony, poised like an eagle over battle-scarred Europe, was forcing recognition for him from France, England, Holland, the Emperor, Prussia, but not from the Pope; while in his own country no one, not compelled to do so, respected his election. Could he exert influence on any one, after Charles forbade him to convoke Diets and left him but one prerogative, that of removing political enemies from public office? Charles did not even hearken to his plea of mitigating the cruelties of the Swedes, though he had every reason to petition. This "Protector" recognized but one method in his dealings with the Poles, "burn, destroy, rob, arrest". Since the Russians so often responded with terror for terror, the conciliatory policy of Leszczyński was of little consequence.

The leaders of the Sandomierz Confederacy, Constantine Szaniawski, Bishop of Kujawia, hetman Stanislas Denhof, hetman Adam Sieniawski, the Primate Stanislas Szembek and his brother John, the Royal Chancellor, Stanislas Chomentowski, taken by surprise



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at the news of Augustus' resignation, claimed that they alone were the true representatives of the Polish nation, restored their assemblies at Lwów, and negotiated an agreement with their "protector" Peter the Great, in the matter of a new election. On 8 July, they in turn, at Lublin, proclaimed an interregnum, all this, of course, the result of the Tsar's terror, and looked about for suitable candidates for the crown. The venerable Szczuka earnestly tried to bridge this chasm of discord which threatened to swallow up Poland. Yet the fratricidal war continued with little hope of success for Stanislas.

Charles XII attempted to cut this gordian knot by attacking Moscow. In the autumn of 1707, he led an offensive against Minsk, in which aid was expected from Livonia and Finland, while Mazeppa, for some time plotting with Leszczyński, might put the whole Ukraine on horseback. The offensive met with a determined resistance of the well-disciplined Russians and was compelled to deviate from its intended course toward the Ukraine. Reinforcements from Livonia were cut down at Lesna (9 October 1708), while the Ukrainian insurrection brought forth a few thousand swords instead of the promised thirty thousand.

After the severe winter of 1708–9, the decimated Swedish force besieged Poltawa and under its walls gave battle to an overwhelmingly superior army of Peter's (27 June—8 July). Neither the Tartar Khan, who received the appeal for help too late, nor Leszczyński, for he had not been allowed to reunite the Poles, could take the field at the decisive moment and this spelled doom for their cause. One day sufficed for the burial of Sweden's imperial sway, of the Ukraine's freedom, and of Leszczyński's regime in Poland.

Augustus anticipated this very situation and in good time sought Prussian and Danish aid in recovering the throne. He had scarcely entered Poland when Stanislas and his Swedish allies escaped to Pomerania. In Thorn, the King and the Tsar, who had not seen each other for four years, renewed their former League (20 October 1709). Their respective roles, however, had since been changed. Now the Wettin received the kingdom from the hands of the Romanov, who, as the "Redeemer of Polish liberty", had his eye fixed on his absolutist designs, considered Poland his dependency and for this reason rejected every thought of her dismemberment, ideas conceived in Berlin and approved in Dresden.

With the exception of a small group of Polish "Swedomaniacs" who accompanied Charles XII and Mazeppa to Turkey, all Poland rallied round the Saxon King. He conceived the thought, therefore,

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that he might perhaps attempt to rule Poland without a Diet, but when the General Federal Assembly met in Warsaw (February—April) his loyal senators and the representatives of the gentry gave him to understand that Liberty, the Diet, and the “*Pacta Conventa*” must remain in force. On such foundations did the Assembly reconstruct Augustus’ regime in Poland.

Dangers continued to threaten Augustus, not so much from the side of Sweden, but from Turkey. The Lion of the North and Mazepa found a den in Bender. Charles’ agents and especially Stanislas Poniatowski, who was now beginning his brilliant career, aided by the French and Cossacks, called the Porte’s attention to the dire consequence of events in the north. Russia crushed the Ukraine’s freedom, made the Poles her dependents and began to raise the hopes of the Christians in the Balkans. After Mazepa’s death, hetman Philip Orlik, who succeeded him, made a treaty with the Tartars, with this in mind, that with the Swedes as protectors, and with the actual aid of the Turks, he would recover a free state on either side of the Dnieper for the Cossacks.

The Polish Emigrants relied upon this same help, but their calculation proved false, for the vizier Mehmed Baltadzi declared war on Augustus and Peter, to compel Leszczyński, when restored to the throne, to return to the boundaries extant before 1699. The Tsar, left in the lurch by his Balkan allies just as Charles had been by the Cossacks, was forced to make a memorable treaty at his camp on the Prut, a treaty in which he promised not to interfere in the affairs of Poland and the Ukraine (12–23 July 1711). Whereupon the Porte attempted to seize the Ukraine but not the portion to the east, beyond the Dnieper, which she did not acquire from Peter, but the Western Ukraine, which according to the Treaty of Karlowitz belonged to Poland. The latter she intended to give to the Cossacks. Sweden and Poland were, of course, opposed to this seizure. Orlik also readily realized that he would not be able to maintain a free Ukraine against Poland’s will, though he might do so under Poland’s supremacy. This danger, however, menaced the southern boundary of the Republic as long as Charles and the Emigrants incited the Turks to a new campaign.

In the north, the Prussian King, ever coveting Danzig and Pomerania, was enticing the Swedes, by holding out the prospect of a treaty. During the years 1711–13, Swedish partisans had already tried to stir up an insurrection against Augustus, little realizing what a price Poland would be forced to pay for such an “emancipation”. The bulk