

Flags of the Saxon Era in the Collection of the Polish Army Museum

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The partially reconstructed flag of the first guard of the Crown and several fragments of other colors of the first guard of the Polish Army are preserved in the collection of the Polish Army Museum. The flag of the first guard is of white silk, measuring 100 x 140 cm. (No. 2.1) in the center, beneath a white eagle, four shields have been placed in a row: the White Eagle and the Lithuanian Cross (a shield with a red field, between them, below the crest of arms of the House of Wettin, and above, the coat of arms of the House of Habsburg) in a blue field. The drap above is of white silk, lined with blue fabric. On top of it all, the royal crown. The ermine are appliquéd, embroidered with gold, silver and coloured silk, lacinated with gold. Border design in the Louis XIV style, appliquéd ermine silk with yellow edges lacinated with crimson, and yellow gold. A burning grenade, appliquéd and embroidered, lacinated with gold, is on the top corner of the flag. The border is of white silk which was originally gold.

In the Museum collection there are several other flags of the first guard, such as the flag of the first guard of the Polish Army, made of silk, measuring 100 x 140 cm, with a white field, a Lithuanian Cross in the center and a white eagle in the center. The dimensions of the golden ermine are the Lithuanian Cross, the ermine - a golden ermine on a red cap (No. 2.2) and several

The Saxon era in Poland spanned the period between late 17th and early 18th century. During this time, the Polish throne was occupied by kings of the Saxon House of Wettin, Augustus II the Strong (1697–1706, 1709–1733) and Augustus III the Saxon (1733–1763), but also their rival, Stanisław Leszczyński (1705–1709, 1733–1736). It was an exceptionally tumultuous period in Polish history – from Northern War campaigns waged on the Commonwealth territory in 1702–1706, a contest for the Polish crown between supporters of the Saxons and those of Stanisław Leszczyński, culminating in a war for succession in the years 1734–1736, to the struggle of the Dzików confederation formed in 1734 by Stanisław Leszczyński’s supporters against Augustus III. In Polish military history, this era was the twilight of the old Polish military philosophy, when the role of Polish formations was marginalized, while the foreign contingent rose in significance, the manpower of the army being gradually reduced at the same time. With the restructuring of the army and the introduction of the Saxon model, traditional military symbols, reinforced in the preceding period, began blending with new imagery. This unique combination of old and new is



8.1 Colour of the Foot Guard of the Crown, early 18th century, MWP 24588*. Photo: Polish Army Museum

particularly noticeable in military dress and colours – flags and standards.

The Polish Army Museum’s small collection of standards and colours from this era can be broken down into several categories. There are regulation flags worn by regular units in the service of the Saxon dynasty, so called royal flags connected to Augustus II, flags flown by the supporters of Stanisław Leszczyński, hetman flags, and flags of private (court) armies represented by single examples.

The first category consists of colours attributed to the foot guard of the Crown, artillery guidons of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and one dragoon guidon.

One partially reconstructed colour of the foot guard of the Crown and several fragments of other colours of this formation remain in the Museum’s possession. The colour of the foot guard is of white silk, measuring 178 x 227 cm. (See ill. 8.1) In the centre, beneath a drape, four emblems have been placed framed in early rococo cartouches: the White Eagle and the Lithuanian Chaser side by side, each in a red field. Between them, below the coat of arms of the House of Wettin, and above, the initials AR (Augustus Rex) in a blue field. The drape above is of ermine, lined with blue fabric. On top of it all, the royal crown. The emblems are appliquéd, embroidered with gold, silver and coloured silks, hemmed with gimp. Border design in late Louis XIV style, appliquéd crimson silk with yellow edge, hemmed with crimson and yellow gimp. A burning grenade, appliquéd and embroidered, decorates each of the four corners of the flag. The broken shaft is tipped with a finial of iron which was originally gilded.

In the Museum collection there are two identical artillery guidons, each measuring 73x70 cm. (See ill. 8.2) Both are made of silk, crimson faded to russet, with swallowtail incisions. A circular charge of silk, about 32 cm in diameter, is inserted at the centre and enclosed in a laurel wreath. The obverse of the guidon features the Lithuanian Chaser, the reverse – a golden cannon on a red carriage; two barrels



8.2 Artillery guidon of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, MWP 897*. Photo: Polish Army Museum

and cannonballs next to the cannon. Wreaths and images are oil painted. One of the guidons has its original stave with a leaf-shaped finial (length of stave – 191cm + finial 27.5cm). Spiral blue, red, and white stripes painted on the length of the stave.

The dragoon guidon is made of azure damask 90x93cm with a swallowtail indent. The monogram "AR" (Augustus Rex) is in the centre beneath a crown, appliquéd, hemmed with silk chenille, embroidered with silver, girdled in two palm branches, appliquéd. Edges hemmed with crimson fabric. Stave with an iron finial. The guidons are secured with tulle mesh.

Royal standards, traditionally attributed to Augustus the II are only partially preserved. (See Ill 8.3) Made of silk, probably originally crimson, they measure 200x200 cm. The charge features a pelican of silver fabric, appliquéd and hemmed in chain stitch, enclosed in a laurel wreath of green fabric weaved with silver, appliquéd. Inscribed on a 5-cm ribbon of appliquéd golden fabric are the words "PRO LEGE ET GREGE". A great flame decorates each of the four corners. The entire field decorated with appliquéd silver five-pointed stars and motifs of reversed letter S. The pelican is a symbol of the Catholic Church, and in this context refers to the king's care of the nation. The use of a popular religious symbol in reference to secular power is not incidental. The king, like Christ, nurtures his faithful subjects and is their source of law, justice, and grace. The

imagery of the standard's charge complements the motto. The entire design was very likely imposed by the necessity to legitimize Augustus II's rule before oppositional gentry. Two such standards of different levels of preservation are in the Museum's possession.

The second category of flags is represented by Stanisław Leszczyński's dragoon guidon, the standard of Antoni Pocij, Lithuanian head regiment commander, an artillery standard of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, commanded by the same, and the standard of Adam Tarło's Hussar or heavy cavalry regiment. Adam Tarło was the starost (administrator) of Goszczyn, general commander of the Dzików confederation.

The dragoon guidon is made of yellow fabric 56x51cm, with rich floral ornamentation embroidered with silver thread. (See Ill 8.4) The charge of the flag is an eagle soaring toward the sun. Above the charge, a silver-embroidered ribbon with the words "TURBINE DISCUSO PAR SUMMIS FERRERE SERENUM" (Having silenced the storm/thou art worthy/to usher in peace) in black. Each corner of the guidon is decorated with the monogram "SR" under a crown and elements of armour. The guidon is bordered with 3cm-wide silver fringe. The 355cm-long stave is tipped with a 24.5cm-long leaf-shaped finial. A black, yellow and silver cord hangs from the finial. The symbols used in the making of the flag referred to king Stanisław Leszczyński's political agenda focusing on stabilizing the complicated domestic situation and detaching Poland from foreign powers.

The standard of Antoni Pocij, in the year 1734 head commander of the Lithuanian regiment, a supporter of Stanisław Leszczyński, is 142 x 208cm, made of crimson



8.3 Royal standard of Augustus II the Strong, the king of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, elector of Saxony, MWP 2060*. Photo: Polish Army Museum



8.4 Dragoon guidon of Stanisław Leszczyński's army, early 18th century, MWP 891*. Photo: Polish Army Museum

silk, faded, oil-painted. Both the obverse and reverse feature a rococo escutcheon crested with a nine-tip crown, girdled from beneath with two laurel branches coming out of a vase. The escutcheon on the obverse features the Lithuanian Chaser with the Leszczyński coat of arms, Wieniawa, and the Pocij crest, the Scale, among battle equipment, in each corner; on the reverse – an angel holding a shield beneath a crown and the initials "A.P.R.G." (Antoni Pocij Regimentarz Generalny - Antoni Pocij, Head Commander) in each corner. The 252-cm staff, painted with red and black spiral stripes, was lost during World War II.

The artillery standard of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was sewn from two vertical bands of crimson material, now completely faded, and measured 142x215cm. In the centre of the obverse, an uneven circular charge is appliquéd (ca. 42x45cm) with the Lithuanian Chaser painted on it, now in residuary condition. Remains of ornamentation surround the charge. At the top, the initials "A.P.R.G." (Antoni Pocij Regimentarz Generalny - Antoni Pocij, Head Commander). The reverse features the same design, but with a golden cannon on a red carriage, two barrels and a pile of cannon balls.

The standard of Adam Tarło, head commander of the Dzików confederation regiment was sewn of three

horizontal bands of crimson silk and measured 215x260cm. (See Ill 8.5) The charge features a Polish Maltese cross (145x145cm) of raw white silk, bordered with yellow silk thread. Seen in the centre of the cross are the letters "PG" (Powiat Goszczyński - Goszczyń District) cut out of crimson silk and framed with black and white thread. Above the cross are the words "PRO:FIDE:PATRIA:LEGE:et REGE" (the motto of the Order of the White Eagle with the added word "PATRIA", as if in contrast to the Saxon motto of the Order). At the bottom of the hoist, the Axe crest in an oval escutcheon, topped with a crown and girdled with acanthus branches, all framed with initials "ATSGRGP" (most likely the initials of Adam tarło Starosta Gostyński Regimentarz Generalny Powiatu - Adam Tarło Administrator of Gostyń District Regiment). Both crest and initials appliquéd in the same manner as all other components of the flag.

A noteworthy example of the last category is the 1718 infantry banner of Grand Duchy of Lithuania Field Hetman Stanisław Denhof's Regiment. The standard was made of patterned dark-green damask (99x104cm). The charge on the obverse features the Saxon crest and the Lithuanian Chaser, oil-painted in separate escutcheons framed in a rich golden rococo border, topped with a golden crown. Beneath, the date: "1718". The coat of arms of the House of Denhoff (a boar head) in golden rococo frame crested with a golden crown and two crossed hetman sceptres decorates each corner of the standard. The image of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception is painted on the reverse. Above, the words „SUB TUUM PRAESIDIUM CONFUGIMUS" (We fly to Thine patronage) are painted in gold. In each corner, the golden initials "SDVDG" (Stanisław Denhoff Vice Dux Generalia – Stanisław Denhoff field hetman) are written beneath a five-tip crown. The symbolic meaning of this imagery calls for a few words of explanation. The two-field crest is typical of regulation flags of Polish and Lithuanian units of the Saxon era. Here, it is also a declaration of loyalty to Augustus II, who bestowed the hetman sceptre on Denhoff. Two crossed sceptres – the symbol of hetman's authority, often used in seals, evolved into a complex personal crest of the hetman. The image of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception is very typical of the Polish military imagery of the Sarmatian era and appeared often on both military standards and Hussar breastplates as a substitute of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, which had been designed during the rule of Władysław IV, but never introduced. The whole of the imagery therefore almost perfectly combines traditional elements with the necessity to adjust to new circumstances.

The last presented flag is the court colour of August Czartoryski, Voivod of Ruthenia, commander of the foot guard of the Crown, and uncle of the last king of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski. The colour, most likely made in 1742, is of white silk (163x216cm). The charge features an appliquéd crest cartouche with rich ornamentation resembling acanthus leaves on the sides and palmette designs at the bottom, topped with ducal mitre, surrounded with battle equipment. The Chaser is seen in the red field of the cartouche. At the top, the date “1742”. In each corner, the initials “AC” (August Czartoryski) beneath a ducal mitre.

In closing, a few facts relating to the origins of the presented flags. The colour of the foot guard of the Crown, the dragoon guidon, and the Tarło standard all come from General Wincenty Krasiński’s collection of military souvenirs and national memorabilia. Gen. Krasiński was the commander of 1st Light Cavalry Regiment of Napoleon I’s Imperial Guard, an expert collector, founder of an entail which, in late 19th and 20th century, had charge of the library and museum collections. After the outbreak of World War II, the collection was transported to the National Museum and Polish Army Museum in Warsaw. Carried away by Germans and revindicated after the War, they returned to the Army Museum. August Czartoryski’s court colour comes from the collection of another House of Polish aristocracy – that of Count Tyszkiewicz of Łohojsk. It was donated to the Army Museum in 1919. The remaining flags most likely came from the Warsaw arsenal, where they were kept until 1831. After the defeat of the Polish-Russian war of 1831, the flags were moved to the Artillery Museum in St. Petersburg as war trophies. It wasn’t until the end of the 1920s that the flags, along with other trophies, were returned to Poland by virtue of the Ryga treaty which ended the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920. The turbulent history of the flags has made its mark on their condition and strained their delicate texture; hence their continued preservation requires constant conservation efforts and continuous renovation.



8.5 Standard of Adam Tarło head commander of the Dzików confederation regiment, MWP24587*. Photo: Polish Army Museum