

Enlightened Absolutism, Imperial Bureaucracy and Provincial Society: Austrian Project to Transform Galicia, 1772-1815

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the bureaucratic modernization of Galicia, the formerly Polish territory annexed to the Habsburg empire in 1772. The attempted transformation of Galicia was part of a larger reform project of the second half of the eighteenth century, uniting an Enlightened spirit of centralization with the reality of Austria's territorial enlargement. The Austrian bureaucrats were responsible for the integration of a new province into imperial structures. By focusing on the Austrian state bureaucracy and its interaction with local population – Poles, Jews, and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) - I intend to analyze the general transformation of Galician political culture through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

“My family is truly Austrian, in a sense that ... it does not belong to any nationality, but...like other families of imperial bureaucrats and military personnel is a mix of different Austrian nationalities... My father, Johann Nepomuk von Sacher, born in Bohemia, early became a state bureaucrat, knew Czech as well as German; he, like many other imperial bureaucrats of his time, after the first partition of Poland, when Austria acquired Galicia, came to the province to work on the organization of the new regime here.” (Hofrath von Sacher-Masoch 1882: 104)

Introduction

The piece cited above was published in 1882 in Leipzig in the collection/periodical, edited by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Signed by *Hofrath* (the easiest translation is just “counselor”) von Sacher-Masoch and published by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, it seems to be written by Leopold's father, who himself occupied an important post in Galician administration and together with his family resided in Lemberg, the capital of Galicia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet the memoirs are composed in a very special way. Instead of sharing his own experience, *Hofrath* von Sacher Masoch recounted the experience of his father, Johan Nepomuk von Sacher.

Johan Nepomuk von Sacher, a grandfather of the famous (or notorious) Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, came to Galicia in 1772, right after the annexation of the province by the Austrian empire, and served as a *Hofrath* in the city of Lemberg.

Johan Nepomuk and his descendants traced the origin of their family to Don Mathias Sacher, a member of the Spanish lower nobility (*Ritter*) during the time of Kaiser Karl V in the early sixteenth century (Hofrath von Sacher –Masoch 1882: 104). Don Mathias married a Bohemian woman and the family resided in Bohemia. Johan Nepomuk von Sacher, almost two centuries later, retained his Spanish family name but also had a specifically Bohemian first name – Johann Nepomuk. More important, by the eighteenth century the Sachers had“...German, Italian, Czech, and Hungarian blood in their family”, and thus, formed, in Sacher-Masoch’s words, a typical example of the family of a supra-national Austrian bureaucrat (Hofrath von Sacher – Masoch 1882: 104).

Johan Nepomuk, along with others, was chosen for service in Galicia because of his knowledge of the Czech language. Like many others, he considered the appointment a rather unlucky development in his career. Galicia and its capital, Lemberg, did not enjoy great reputation among Austrian officials. The saying that “In Pohlen ist nichts zu holen” [there is nothing to get out of Poland] reflected common attitudes to the new Austrian province (Hofrath Sacher –Masoch 1882: 104). Unquestionably loyal to the Habsburg dynasty, Johan Nepomuk was unhappy with Polish nobles in Galicia in particular. Uneducated and rude in their behavior, Polish nobles, in his view, were primarily responsible for the decline and disintegration of the old Polish Republic (Hofrath von Sacher –Masoch 1882: 115). Happy or unhappy with his new appointment, the older Sacher was to reside in Galicia for the rest of his life.

Johan Nepomuk’s son, Leopold’s father, followed the family tradition and held an important administrative position as a city counselor in Lemberg. He also served as a head of the city’s police (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch 1985: 18). Born in Galicia, the second Sacher married to Lotte von Masoch. The origin of her family is unclear. Leopold, who does not say much about his mother comments more on his aunt, the mother’s sister. Aunt Zenobia, in Leopold’s words, “die femme terrible of the family”, was “the prettiest girl in Galicia”, and a true Pole, “.. with all the charms and flaws of her race, full of spirit and temperament” (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch 1985: 23). While fighting with Polish conspiracies, Leopold’s father, however, already seemed to integrate into high Polish noble society much in contrast to Johan Nepomuk von Sacher, Leopold’s grandfather, who two or three decades earlier ridiculed local Poles and kept the distance from them, to say the least.

Leopold himself, born in Lemberg in 1836 and a third generation member of a family of Austrian bureaucrats in Galicia, exemplified even stronger family and societal transformations. German, French, and Polish were equally spoken at home. Yet it was Ruthenian (contemporary Ukrainian), which Leopold identified as his first language (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch 1985: 23).

In 1846, *Hofrath* von Sacher-Masoch got a promotion to Bohemia, where he was to occupy a position of the city counselor in Prague. The family moved to Prague, and 1846 marked the end of the 70 year Galician story of the Sachers, becoming the Sacher-Masoch family. Leopold von Sacher Masoch is perhaps the representative of the most famous and also a quite typical family of Austrian bureaucrats in Galicia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The records we have – the memoirs of Leopold’s father, and Leopold’s own autobiography – are very valuable historical sources, which allow us to trace societal transformations in the region based on the example of three generations of the family of Austrian bureaucrats. The Galicia of Jan Nepomuk von Sacher in 1772 and the Galicia of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch in 1846 were two different regions.

This paper traces the transformation of Galicia through the early period of Austrian rule, 1772-1815. The region which in the eighteenth century underwent Austrian centralization and Germanization reforms and Metternich’s reactionary policies in the early nineteenth century expressed strong national affiliations, which became especially obvious in the 1830s, and in 1848 and its aftermath. My paper analyzes these transformations using the example of Austrian bureaucrats, who were most responsible for the implementation of Austrian reforms, and, in my view, best exemplify societal transformations in Galicia--both successes and failures of Austrian policies, as well as the reaction of local society, Galician Poles, Jews, and Ruthenians.

The Annexation of Galicia

Galicia was annexed to the Habsburg monarchy in 1772, after the first partition of Poland. With its boundaries, Galicia was about to become the largest province of the empire. The region was unofficially divided into Western and Eastern Galicia. Poles predominated in the Western part. Ruthenians formed a large part in Eastern Galicia, with its center in Lemberg (Lwów). Galicia had a large Jewish minority; the region, in some calculations, had the densest Jewish population of the entire empire (Andlauer

2001: 35). Galicia was also famous for its numerous and strong Polish nobility. Both in the east and in the west, Poles and Jews formed the majority of the city's residents; Ruthenians were predominantly peasants, and resided mainly in the east.

After the annexation, the Austrians were looking for an example of a successful administrative apparatus, which could serve as a model for the organization of Galicia. After some deliberation, it was decided that Galicia should not be modeled after any old province, but should receive a new, and thus, better state and administrative apparatus than any of those currently under reform in the empire. Austrian centralization reforms in Hungary and Bohemia encountered strong opposition from local societies. Galicia was a new province and the reform strategy was to be totally different here. The goal was to dismantle everything left over from the Polish republic, and in its place create a new, and supposedly, perfect, administrative state apparatus.

The idea of establishing a new and unprecedented administrative apparatus in the province was voiced for the first time by Johan Pergen, a few months before the first governor dispatched for Galicia. In his memorandum to the empress, Pergen emphasized his intentions to create a new rather than reform the old government and administration in the region. (Pergen's Pro Nota, 30 August 1772. VA. Hofkanzlei, II A 6: 229). The plan was approved by the empress, and Maria Theresa was very explicit about her intentions. The flaws of old constructions should not impact the building of a new one (Maria Theresa to Kaunitz, 2 September 1773. HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Vorträge: 113). Moreover, the intention was to turn Galicia into a model-province (*Musterprovinz*) for other Habsburg territories. This rhetoric reflected the spirit of the age: the Enlightenment, the power of reason, and the vitality of reforms. It was the Austrian state bureaucracy-- supra-national, rational, loyal to the monarchy, educated, and endowed with the Habsburg reformist spirit-- which had to carry out the changes.

How these rather optimistic and positive attitudes of the Habsburg reformers turned out in practice is a subject of my further discussion. Only one reminder here: in the first half of the nineteenth century, Galicia indeed transformed in a significant way, and the Sacher-Masoch family is one illustration of this. Yet this transformation was not the one which the Austrians eighteenth century reformers envisioned.

Austrian Bureaucracy at Work in Galicia

The annexation of Galicia coincided in time with the emergence and development of the Austrian state bureaucracy. Bureaucracy was to serve the needs of a centralized state. In the late eighteenth century, Macartney argues, the bureaucracy emerged as a distinct class. Before, most work was done by local nobles, who often advocated their estate rights or local interests. Joseph's bureaucracy was "... a centralized civil service", promoting the interests of the state (Macartney 1969: 124).

Top administrative positions in Galicia, the governors especially, were selected from experienced Austrian personnel, who occupied important positions in Austrian administration before coming to Galicia. Count Anton Pergen, the first governor during 1772-1774, count Auesperg, and count Brigido, who governed the province during 1774-1790s, all exemplify this trend. Waclaw Tokarz, a Polish historian of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is obviously biased to Austrian reformers in Galicia. Yet he does acknowledge Austrian efforts in organizing the top bureaucracy in Galicia, and admits that this part of administration was indeed not as bad as it could be, and that many top Austrian officials in Galicia were reasonable and intelligent people (Tokarz 1909: 62). It was the lower bureaucracy, both in the *Gubernium* and in Galician districts, which caused the main concern for the Viennese Court, and the major dissatisfaction of local Galicians.

Who these bureaucrats had to be, how to select them, and what to do with the mainly Polish officials occupying the posts in old administration proved to be another difficult dilemma, which had to be resolved by the Habsburg right after the annexation. Austrian state chancellor Kaunitz was directly responsible for new appointments and the organization of the bureaucratic apparatus in Galicia.

Kaunitz and Maria Theresa agreed that the key administrative posts should be filled with new-coming Austrian officials, foreigners to the region. The Poles could be employed only at minor posts and occupy subaltern levels of Galician administration (Vortrag des fürsten Kaunitz, 2 Septmeber 1772. HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Vorträge: 113). The first governor, Pergen, in contrast to Kaunitz, favored a milder position on Galicia. Without the authorization of the Court, he appointed quite a large number of Poles. Maria Theresa agreed that some Poles could hold minor positions, yet they should be given smaller salaries than the officials from the Habsbsurg hereditary lands (Kaunitz on Maria Theresa, 11 November 1772. HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Vorträge: 110).

In September 1773, Kaunitz finally provided Pergen with a list of preferable personnel, altogether about 50 persons. Kaunitz, in his report from September 2, 1773, explained, first, his intentions as to the organization of the bureaucratic corpus in Galicia, and also complications with the selection of candidates. The largest province of the empire required a great number of bureaucrats, and, as Kaunitz emphasized, this was not an easy task to achieve. Determined not to hire Poles, Kaunitz and other top Austrian officials were still looking for people who either knew the region or had potential to get to know the province within a relatively short time. Language, thus, came to play a key role. Kaunitz was very explicit about his intentions, stating that he preferred the candidates who knew Polish; the knowledge of at least one related language – in most of the case this was Czech – was absolutely mandatory (Kaunitz to Joseph II, 2 September 1773. HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Vorträge: 113). Yet these people were difficult to find and, when available, sometimes did not have other qualifications necessary for officials occupying relatively high positions (only top posts were administrated by Kaunitz). Kaunitz himself admitted that he was not able to achieve a perfect selection, yet strove to pick the most suitable out of the candidates (Kaunitz to Maria Theresa, 2 December 1772. HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Vorträge: 110).

Such a strict Austrian position on non-employment of Poles for key administrative posts, however, started to change as early as 1772. Galician looming financial collapse was the main problem. Even simple transportation of the masses of people from the Austrian hereditary territories required large financial investments, not to mention that the province's reconstruction was already proving to be more financially burdensome than originally envisioned. The combination of Austrian central investments and local contributions did not suffice to cover even preliminary reconstruction. The employment of German-speaking Austrian personnel in Galicia was financially burdensome and not always beneficial for either the province itself or for the central Austrian government.

In November 1772, in his report to Maria Theresa, Kaunitz insisted on retaining, at least temporarily, the old Polish judicial system in Galicia. Moreover, Kaunitz advised that the members of top Polish noble families – Zamoyski or Jablonowski -- be appointed to the key positions in the judicial system. (Kaunitz to Maria Theresa, 18 November 1772. HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Vorträge: 110). The never-ending row of these exceptions eventually turned into the reversal of the Austrian policies in Galicia in the late 18th century.

The language, after the judicial system, was another important Austrian concession to the Poles, already in an early stage. The decree of the Galician *Gubernium* from 1783 allowed the use of Latin simultaneously with German in administration (VA. Hofkanzlei III A 4: 322). Latin was proposed as an intermediate language, a compromise between German and Polish. All official decrees had to be translated either into Polish or Latin. This, however, did not solve the problem. Latin was more familiar to Poles than German, yet very few of them knew the language well enough to efficiently use it for practical administrative purposes. Many German-speakers were also not sufficiently proficient. Some administrative branches had a position of a translator in their staff. Nevertheless, it appeared that Galician administration remained handicapped through the late eighteenth century at least. Language was one but not the only problem

Lower Bureaucracy

Already in the early 1780s some Austrian inspectors were dispatched to Galicia to check on the functioning of its administration and filed the reports on why the situation there had not improved since the annexation (*Systematische Verbesserung der Galizischen Landsregierung*: HHStA. Staatskanzlei, Pohlen III: 13). The Austrian administration, both in Vienna and Lemberg, were also overloaded with Polish complains. The picture, as presented by many dissatisfied Poles and Austrians inspectors, is one of the multiple failures of the Austrian administration and bureaucracy starting from the lowest level up to the very top of the Galician *Gubernium*. Many Austrian officials employed in local administration in Galicia, due to their educational level and previous employments, were not capable of fulfilling their basic functions, not to mention the maintenance of order, proper processing of acts, and sustained communication with other branches of Galician administration.

Waclaw Tokarz analyzes Margelik's inspection mission in Galicia, 1783 to 1784. Tokarz identifies several groups of Austrian officials. The first was formed by ardent Germanizers who strictly followed Austrian orders and disregarded local circumstances. Another group was formed mainly by young people for whom Galicia was a kind of internship, necessary for their further promotion (Tokarz 1909: 68). Most of them only pursued their own interests and, considering their Galician job as a temporary, however necessary, step in their own careers, did not care about the development of the region and Austrian interests there.

Tokarz describes some provincial governments in Galicia as disastrous in terms of personnel. Tokarz's implications that Galician districts administrated by Poles fared much better than those administrated by Austrian German-speakers is biased, yet perhaps contains a grain a truth. While Austrian bureaucrats were underpaid throughout the empire, the situation was especially severe in Galicia (Tokarz 1909: 56). The assumption in Vienna was that the costs and standards of living in a new and a relatively backward province were lower than in the empire in general. This assumption was false; it took a while, however, until the Austrians adjusted the salaries to the average imperial standards. In 1787, the governor count Brigido finally admitted that low salaries were one of the causes of the poor quality of Galician administrative personal (Brigido, Die Mangel und die dagegen einzuleitende Abhilfe. VA. Hofkanzlei, III A 5: 402 A). People were not willing to take up strongly underpaid administrative positions.

Corruption, along with administrative malfunctioning, also resulted from the poor quality of the personnel and underpayment. The problem was acknowledged by Austrians from the very beginning of their work in Galicia. Tokarz indicates that in 1790 the *Gubernium* considered 44 complaints of Polish nobles on the malfunctioning of Austrian officials in the region (Tokarz 1985: 44). Anonymous denunciations became very common.

Austrian officials, not very trustful of Polish nobles, who in most of the cases filed the complaints and denunciations, at some point started to pay closer attention to what once was considered ungrounded and biased complains of local population on the misgivings of the foreign administration. Some slow changes in the organization of Austrian administration began already in the 1770s. In 1783, the commission investigating the complains and denunciations in Galicia proposed to replace German-speaking foreign officials in Galicia with local Polish nobles. The most radical proposition was to dismiss all currently employed foreigners and in their place hire relatively rich Polish nobles who would not depend on Austrian salaries and, thus, would not resort to bribes or support corruption (Extractus Protocoli Der Kaiser. Koenigl. Oberste Justiz Stelle von 24 December 782. VA. Hofkanzlei III A 4: 321).

A special commission on Galician matters was established in Vienna in the early 1790s. The aim of the commission was to check on the functioning of Galician administration. Investigation of complaints and denunciations was part of the commission's work (VA. Hofkanzlei III A 3: 309a). The very foundation of the

commission seemed to be the result of this never-ending flow of complains, in a situation when the Viennese government already did not fully trust the *Gubernium* administration in Lemberg, and was looking into what indeed was happening in Galicia.

The mid 1780s witnessed several very important changes in Austrian policies. The governor Brigido more and more favored the Poles, “the nationalists”, as they were termed in contemporary documents, over the foreigners. In 1785, again on the insistence of Brigido, Galician *Gubernium* recommended to the Viennese court to equalize the salaries of the Austrian bureaucrats in Galicia with those in Bohemia (24 april 1785, VA. Hofkanzlei III A 4: 322).

In 1787, the united Austrian and Bohemian *Hofkanzlei* issued one of the most important decrees concerning Galicia of the last decade. It was decided not to hire foreigners into any important administrative posts in Galicia unless these foreigners were especially experienced and reliable people (VA. Hofkanzlei, III B 1: 423). This was 180 degree turn from the 1770s and Kaunitz’s policies of not admitting any Poles into important administrative posts.

Afterwards: Polish Nobles and Austrian Bureaucrats

To hire Poles, “the nationalists” as they were termed in Austrian acts, meant to hire the Polish nobles, who were the only social group suitable to do administrative work. From the very beginning, the Austrians were eager to attract some major Polish families. The Poles occupied the key positions in the judicial system, and were not only allowed, but also encouraged to do so. The Poles retained many administrative posts, which they occupied before the partitions. Already in the 1780s, the Austrians abandoned their initial determination of not hiring Poles and reversed it. They needed the Polish nobles to fill up the positions previously occupied by unsuitable foreigners.

The Austrians, however, did not always receive a welcome response from the Poles. While not openly opposing the Austrian government, many of them retreated into some kind of inner-circle life. Living in the country-side, many of them could compete with the Polish king in wealth and prosperity. Social and financial resources allowed many to lead a quite independent and prosperous life, interacting with the Austrian administration as little as possible.

Some used French as a way to distance themselves from German bureaucrats, who used German and did not understand Polish. Many families also favored home

education for their children, where they typically used French or Italian teachers and did not have to attend German-language schools (Grodziski 1982: 153). Most of them were more than unhappy about the partitions, cherished hopes for the restoration of the Polish state, wrote multiple letters to the court, explaining the situation in the province, complained about forceful Germanization, and almost always listed recommendations on how to improve the situation in the region. Yet it also seems that many Polish magnates lived as if very little, if anything, changed after the partitions.

The still existing Polish republic outside the border, with its capital in Warsaw, was the main focus of attention, hopes and aspirations. Warsaw was a usual place of visit, and until 1795 only relatively few Polish magnates directed their attention to Vienna. Few, if any, Poles made careers during this earlier period of Austrian rule (Grodziski 1982: 153).

The situation changed dramatically after the disintegration of Poland in 1795. The Austrians became stricter on the mixed subjects, who had properties in different parts of partitioned Poland, pressing them to choose their permanent residence. The main concern was that the Poles, moving between different parts of divided Poland, caused money to flow out of the province.

With the final disintegration of the Polish republic in 1795, Warsaw, now part of the Prussian empire, was becoming less and less attractive. The Polish Republic was naturally preferred over the Austrian empire. With the Russian empire across the border, the situation became more complicated. Some Poles preferred Austria over Russia or Prussia as less oppressive.

In the mid and late 1790s, the Austrians made strong efforts, eventually successful, to engage Polish nobles in the Viennese government (Mencel 1985: 51). Vienna was becoming a more typical place of visit and a commonplace residence for Polish nobles. A number of grand Polish nobles received direct access to the Viennese court, not only promoting Polish interests there, but also to a great degree shaping Austrian policy on the Polish question (Mencel 1985: 51-52).

While the Austrians made additional efforts to attract the Poles, the Polish attitudes also warmed significantly, not so much because they developed specific affections for the Austrians, but rather because the international and domestic conjuncture left them little choice. Stanislaw Grodziski identifies these more cooperative Poles as the

second generation of the Polish intelligentsia under Austrian rule. In the years between 1791 and 1810, more and more Polish nobles became involved in Austrian public services. More and more attended the universities in Lemberg/Lwow, Krakow and Vienna. Many permanently resided in Vienna (Grodziski 1982: 158).

The third generation of Polish intelligentsia already formed an important and dominant group of “Austrian” officials in the region. Yet while the Poles were becoming the Austrian bureaucrats, the Austrian bureaucrats also integrated into Polish noble society. The descendants of the Austrian bureaucrats from the late eighteenth century in the early nineteenth century spoke predominantly Polish. Once German-speaking supra-national Austrians, in the second and third generation some of them turned into Polish speaking Galician patriots.

Negative attitudes of Polish nobles to the new-coming German officials, some contemporaries claimed, determined to a great degree the outcomes of Germanization policy and eventual results of the Austrian reforms in Galicia. *Hofrath* von Sacher and *Hofrath* von Sacher Masoch were nobles in many generations and occupied important positions in Galician administration. This, however, was not the case with many other lower officials. The social and economic status of many Polish nobles in Galicia was much higher than that of some Austrian officials, even provided that many of them were nobles and many had a law degree from one of the Austrian universities (Heindle 1990: 96-102). Austrian bureaucrats were eager to integrate into the higher noble society, notwithstanding that this society was predominantly Polish and sometimes French-speaking. In the second generation, many of them already identified themselves as Poles, and in third some already did not speak German.

The 1830s witnessed even more dramatic transformations. The 1831 uprising and its suppression in Russian Poland shaped new developments in Galicia. Many Polish nobles emigrated from Russia to Austria. The Austrian government took a rather strict position of not letting Polish migrants settle in Galicia. As so often before, this position was not strict enough; besides, the Austrians realized the potential threat of this mass influx of Polish nobles relatively late, after many of them already settled in Galicia.

Some of the richest Polish families emigrated to Galicia, and the 1830s also witnessed the influx of financial resources and the revival of Polish life in the province. Count Leon Sapieha, one of the most prominent Polish Russian émigrés, played an especially important role in the Polish revival in Galicia. The first Polish

bank in the province was founded in the region on his money in the 1830s (Sapieha 1863). Several Polish associations and a credit association followed suit.

In the 1830s, and more so in 1848, Galicia was already Polish - yet in a different sense than before the partitions. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as one memoirist indicated, the Poles were Poles, because they could not be anything else. Local patriotism was not complemented with any kind of national feelings (Kaczkowski 1899: 25). French, and not Polish, was the main language of communication among the Polish nobles. The Austrian period marked the transition from “traditional” to “modern” Polishness. A combination of different factors shaped these developments. The enlightened reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, I would argue, formed the basis for these transformations, even though the results were the opposite of what was anticipated. In the mid nineteenth century, Galicia, like many other Habsburg provinces, was more “national” than before the launch of the Austrian centralization reforms.

Abbreviations:

VA – Verwaltungsarchiv, Vienna (Administrative Archive)

HHStA – Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna (Family-, Court and State Archive)

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