The children of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka buried in the crypt of the Holy Virgin Mary's Church in Szczuczyn

Tomasz Dudzińskia

The article concerns the burials of the children of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka, a Crown Referendary and Lithuanian Chancellor, connected with kings John III Sobieski and Augustus II. The burials were identified during the archaeological explorations carried out between 2012 and 2014 in the crypts of the Holy Virgin Mary's Church in Szczuczyn and belong to the adolescents: August Michał (1697–1702) and Maria Anna (1703–1705), as well as Marcin Leopold, who died at the age of 30 (1698–1728). The author confronts the preserved written sources with the material obtained through the archaeological investigation. Thanks to the source material, besides making the descriptions of the preserved coffins and remains of grave attire, it was also possible to reconstruct partially the burial ceremonies accompanying the funerals of Szczuka's juvenile children.

KEY-WORDS: Stanisław Antoni Szczuka, Konstancja Potocka, Szczuczyn, crypts, children, 18th century

Death and human attitude towards it throughout the centuries has been within the scope of interest of the researchers for several decades. These problems are taken up by the theologians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists of culture, but also, as far as the burial rites are concerned, by the historians and archaeologists. Unfortunately, only in rare cases it is possible to compare the materials obtained during archaeological excavations with the historical sources. Their mutual relationship enables to make, apart from a physical description of the preserved coffins and burial attire, a partial reconstruction of the burial ceremonies and identify those 'anonymous' burials. The deaths and burials of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka's children are such examples. On the one hand, there are the results of the archaeological excavations in the crypts of the Holy Virgin Mary's Church in Szczuczyn, from 2012–2014, on the other one, the written records preserved in the Central Record Office of Historical Documents.

Stanisław Antoni Szczuka (coat of arms 'Grabie') was born in Radzyń in about 1654, in a noble family as a son of Stanisław Szczuka and Zofia Szpilewska from the

Grajewska Izba Historyczna (Grajewo Historic Chamber), 30 Ełcka St., 19-200 Grajewo, Poland; tomaszdudzinski@interia.pl

Neronowicze. In 1675, at the age of only 23, thanks to his education and mighty patronage, he became the secretary of King John III Sobieski. In 1683, as a hussar captain, he took part in the Battle of Vienna. From 1684 he was the regent of the crown office and from 1688, the Crown Referendary. From November, 1688, till April, 1689, he was the Wiska Land deputy and Seym Marshal. In 1690 he became a representative of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in Kingsberg where the Elector of Brandenburg paid homage to the Polish king. After King John III Sobieski's death, he became an advisor of Augustus II, and in 1699 he received the office of the Lithuanian Chancellor. He died unexpectedly on 19th May, 1710, in Warsaw. In accordance to his last will, he was buried in the crypt of the church in Szczuczyn in Wiska Land, which he had founded himself (Grochowska 1989: 28–29, 33–34, 357).

He started buying up grounds for his private town located close to the Prussian border in 1683 and the plans were ready in 1690. Józef Piola and Józef Fontana II were among the architects working on respective town structures. The town created by Szczuka received its Magdeburg town law with the privilege granted in Żółkiew by King John III Sobieski on 9th November, 1692. The church of the Holy Virgin Mary, situated on a hill together with the Piarist Order monastery, were the predominant architectonic elements of the newly born town (Czapska 1975: 357).

Stanisław Antoni Szczuka got married relatively late, in 1695, with one of Queen Marie Casimire's ladies-in-waiting, Konstancja Maria Anna Potocka (coat-of-arms 'Srebrna Pilawa'), a daughter of Bogusław Potocki, the *starosta* of Jabłonowo. Among the five known children of these parents, two died in a very young age when their father was still alive, the other three, although mature, died also young according to the present standards. The first who died were: August Michał (1697–1702) and Maria Anna (1703–1705), the next ones: Jan Kanty Antoni (1706–1726), Marcin Leopold Stefan (1698–1728) and Wiktoria (1701–1735).

In the course of the archaeological explorations performed in the crypts of the presbytery of the Szczuczyn church between 2012 and 2013, apart from a number of other burials, the coffin of the Szczuczyn founder – St.A. Szczuka (who died in 1710) was identified, but also, thanks to comparing the archaeological material with the written sources, the coffins containing the mortal remains of at least three of his children. These are: August Michał, Maria Anna and Marcin Leopold (Dudziński *et al.* 2013: 15). Jan Kanty may have been buried in the Szczuczyn church crypt, but unfortunately his burial has not been identified so far.

August Michał was the first child of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka. His birth was welcomed with particular joy, because a male descendant gave a chance for the family continuation. After his birth Szczuka wrote to his wife as follows: (...) *I will love him, even if there were nothing more in him apart from the fact that he is of my flesh and blood* (Szczuka 1697a). He wrote in a similar manner one year later, when his next son, Marcin Leopold, whose formal godparents were Holy Roman Emperor Leopold and

Jadwiga Elżbieta Sobieska, a daughter-in-law of John III Sobieski, was born (Szczuka 1698; APR 443: k. 191). Unquestionable joy, but also relief accompanied the birth of Maria Anna, being the fourth child of Stanisław Antoni and Konstancja (Szczuka 1697b). Their happiness was much greater because of the fact that they had already experienced the death of their eldest son in 1702. The relief was caused by the fact that in the discussed time the delivery itself as well as the postnatal period brought much danger and frequently had a tragic end (Bogucka 1994: 43-44; Żoładź-Strzelczyk and Kabacińska-Łuczak 2012: 148–149).

Death accompanied every life from the very beginning. The Baroque period reported a significant rate of mortality, much higher than today, and death was inevitably inscribed into the social life. People died because of childhood diseases, wars, pests, food poisoning, natural disasters and, probably the most rarely, due to their old age. Death was not a taboo subject and followed people from their childhood. A common opinion, deeply rooted in the mentality of those societies, was that that death was a necessity resulting from God's will and it was perceived as irreversible end, which is confirmed by the common sayings such as: 'there is no cure for death' or 'there is nothing more certain than death' (Kuchowicz 1992: 333, 336; Nowicka--Jeżowa 1992: 78).

Death of immature children affected, more or less severely, every family of those times. Before the partition period in Poland, 35% of newborns died, over 55% of children did not reach the age of 5, and barely 35% reached the reproductive age (Gieysztorowa 1979: 169). This was also the case of Stanisław Szczuka and Konstancja neé Potocki, who experienced the fact twice. First, their eldest son, August Michał, died of measles at the age of 5 in Radzyń in April 1702 and next the youngest Szczuka's child, Maria Anna, aged 2, died in June 1705 (Szczuka 1702a; 1705a). Marcin Leopold Szczuka who died in January 1728 as the last of male offspring of St. A. Szczuka is also buried in Szczuczyn (Echo 1728).

Equality in the face of death did not mean, however, equality as regards splendour and luxury of the burial ceremonies, the place of the eternal rest and the repercussions of a person's death. In the case of the eminent high rank members of society, who undoubtedly included Stanisław Antoni Szczuka and Konstancja neé Potocki, the death of their children became a public matter and functioned in information circulation of the elites and persons connected with them, which was expressed by numerous condolences and expressions of grief in the letters addressed to the parents (Szczuka 1702b; 1702c). In one of the letters we read: (...) it does not give so much pain, but I do lament indeed the death of your elder Son of great promise, who was loved not only by the world, but by God Himself (Szczuka 1702d). The death of the 30-year-old Marcin Leopold echoed much more seriously in public. He had already kept the office of a starosta of Wawolnica and was a Seym deputy and was connected with a magnate family by his marriage with Elżbieta Potocka. The funeral speeches from 1728, preserved until

today, are the proofs of that fact. They also contain references to the death of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka himself in 1710, but also Jan Kanty in 1726 (*Echo* 1728).

On the grounds of the preserved source material, we were able partially to reconstruct the burial ceremonies accompanying the funerals of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka's underage children. They involved common and specific theatrical forms, characteristic of the Polish Baroque. The 17th and 18th century sources define them as *pompa funebris*. Crowded, splendid, accompanied by light of hundreds of candles and torches ceremonies veiled and diminished the awareness of the definite end. The satisfaction with these arrangements enabled the living to accept the fact of the departure of the nearest and dearest or generally tamed the thought of death (Chrościcki 1974: 8, 55–57; Kuchowicz 1992: 349).

During the funeral of August Michał in Radzyń, over 60 candles and several torches were used. Expense registers of St.A. Szczuka list, e.g., the cost of the funeral, which was estimated at over 400 zlotys in general, not mentioning the probably smaller sums spent additionally, which for those times was a great sum (APR 440: k. 169). When the ceremony was over, the coffin with the dead body was taken to Szczuczyn, which in the founder's concept was designed *pro gloria Dei, pro decora familiae*, to be the main family seat and then the place of eternal rest for the whole family. As the Szczuczyn church was still under construction, the coffin was deposited in a specially prepared chamber in the wooden church standing nearby.

We have much more information concerning the details of the funeral ceremony of Anna Maria thanks to a letter of J. Nietyszek to St.A. Szczuka from 24th June, 1705, describing the event. It started in a church in Wasosz, located about 4 km away from Szczuczyn. The coffin with the body was transported by priests in a procession to the outskirts of the town where it was put on specially prepared bier and carried to Szczuczyn. Near the town, the procession was awaited by the Piarists and disciples of the local college, standing along the road to Szczuczyn. The coffin with Anna Maria's body was placed on a decorated hearse covered with a coral cloth shroud with white Chinese cotton lining. Having reached the church, the coffin was again placed on a decorated bier. The proper atmosphere was created by at least 70 candles lit around the coffin and along the church walls. The further ceremony took place in this arrangement. The church was rather small, therefore the majority of over 1500 people gathered there had to stand outside. When all prayers were completed, the coffin was placed in the 'grave' where another coffin of August Michał Szczuka, who had died in 1702, had already been standing. That was probably a small niche or temporary crypt, because the coffin was put (...) on the top of the other, because there was not enough room to put it side by side (Szczuka 1705b).

St.A. Szczuka must have planned to move later on the coffins with his children's relics to the crypts in the newly built church. It may have happened, but not earlier than in 1711, when the building was completed and beside the children's bodies, the

coffin with Stanisław Antoni Szczuka, deceased in May 1710, was also placed there (Szczuka 1711a; 1711b; Wąsowicz 1711).

During the archaeological excavations in the crypt, the coffins which may have belonged to St.A. Szczuka's children were selected. The assumption was made basing on the fact that they were the only children coffins upholstered with textiles and decorated with rivets. Moreover, one of the coffins had an inscription with the year '1705', being a significant date. The coffins contents supported that identification.

The coffin attributed to August Michał was situated in the central part of the western crypt, stuck between the external crypt wall and the steps of the centrally placed catafalque /western crypt A, burial 7/ (Dudziński et al. 2013: 15). Only the coffin lid was intact, whereas only a side wall and the planks from the bottom of the main chest remained (Fig. 1). The 127 cm long lid was made of three long planks and two adjusted corner constructions, sized: $10 \times 27 \times 18$ cm (at the feet); a side: $14.5 \times 35.5 \times 10$ (at the head). It was fixed to the chest with round pegs. Both the lid and the preserved side wall were upholstered on the outside with white silk of satin weave. All the lid edges were decorated with 1.8 cm wide bands with a metal wrap and loops along the rims. A similar band, a little narrower and without loops, was recorded along the preserved chest planks. These bands were fixed with round brass hobs with a diameter



Fig. 1. The burial of August Michał. Photo by M. Majorek

of 0.7 cm, placed at every 4.8–6 cm. The coffin interior had originally been upholstered with white silk and also had a silk mattress and a pillow (Grupa and Majorek 2012; Majorek and Grupa 2013: 77; Dudziński *et al.* 2015: 48–59).

The facts established during the archaeological excavations have been confirmed by the written sources. The expense registers of St.A. Szczuka's court include, among the costs connected with August Michal's funeral, e.g., 890 brass hobs for the coffin, 46 ells of golden lace, four – five ells of satin for the coffin and three ells of white Chinese cotton (APR 440: k. 169).

The boy buried in the coffin was dressed in a żupan and it is the only example reported among the children's burials from the Szczuczyn crypts (Grupa *et al.* 2013: 105). The *żupan* was made of silk, today yellow-green in colour, decorated with an ornament of vertical pink stripes. The quality of its manufacturing as well as lack of information in the funeral costs register indicate that it was a garment used by the deceased during his life.

Moreover, August Michał was holding a cross in his hands during the funeral, which information is obtained from the description of the funeral of his sister Maria Anna, died three years later. During that later ceremony, his coffin was also opened and it was stated (...) and the cross alias crucifix is held by his hand tight, as they opened the coffin (Szczuka 1705c). Unfortunately, the cross was not found in August Michał's coffin during the archaeological excavations.

When the research started the coffin of Maria Anna was found in the antechamber of the western crypt /western crypt B, burial 8/ (Dudziński *et al.* 2013: 15) and it was completely preserved (Fig. 2). Both the lid and the chest were made of three plain planks finished with trapezoid tops. The coffin length was 104.5 cm, its maximum width was between 27 and 36.5 cm whereas the total height of the chest and lid was 32 cm at the head and 24 cm at the feet. The lid was fixed to the chest with two round pegs on each side. The whole artefact was upholstered on the outside with bright cream (originally probably white) silk textile with a geometrical (chequered) pattern. Like the coffin described above, the lid was lined along all the edges with a 1.8 cm wide band with a metal wrap and loops along the rims. The chest's edges were decorated with a narrow plain tape with a metal wrap. Originally, that golden tape had been fixed by means of round brass hobs with a diameter of 1 cm, placed at every 4.7 cm. The same type of nails was used for writing the Marian sign on the 'bigger' coffin top and the date '1705' on its 'smaller' one (Grupa and Majorek 2012; Grupa *et al.* 2014: 62–63).

We have obtained a great deal of information confirming that the coffin belonged to Maria Anna, namely: the date written on it and the type of textile used for the upholstery. The funeral description also contains information that the coffin was upholstered with raw white silk, the textile weaved in small squares, which is confirmed in the archaeological material (Szczuka 1705d; Michałowska 2006: 107).



Fig. 2. The coffin of Maria Anna. Photo by M. Majorek

The coffin contained the body of a child dressed in the clothes resembling a zupan, but with a very simplified form and without any attributes which could help to identify the child's sex. It was made of the same fabric as the external coffin upholstery, therefore it can be assumed that it was a plain garment made specially for the burial. The child wore underwear in the form of a linen shirt and knitted stockings (Grupa et al. 2013: 105).

Due to the fact that Maria Anna's coffin was completely preserved, it was possible to establish all the materials used for its decoration. The results are as follows: 532 rivets (including 179 ones for the Marian symbol and the date '1705'), galloons: 13.12 m, textile for the external coffin upholstery: 0.94 m², textile for the internal upholstery: 0.53 m². Both coffins were made using similar techniques, style of decorations, and had similar shapes. August Michał Szczuka's coffin was partially damaged, we can only assume that the quantities of materials used for its decoration were similar to the ones listed above, concerning his younger sister. We can compare these values with the records describing the preparations for Michal's funeral. The parents bought, among other things, 890 brass rivets, 550-600 of which might have been used for the coffin

ornaments, 46 ells of galloon, which at present would give 27.42 m of band¹. In this case, it is also a much bigger amount than it was necessary to decorate a coffin (about 15 m). A similar situation is reported for the purchased and used textile. The list included 4.5 ells of satin (about 1.6 m²)² and 3 ells of Chinese silk (about 1.1 m²), which is again too much to make the external (about 1 m²) and internal (about 0.5 m²) coffin upholstery (APR 440: k. 169).

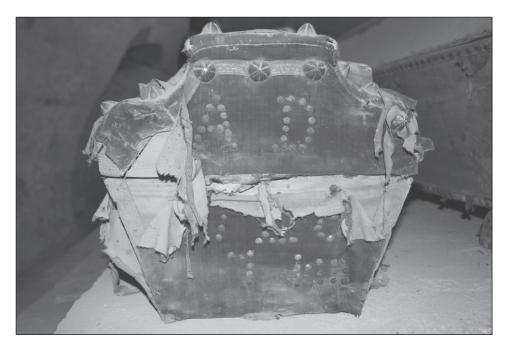
Basing on the above analysis, although simplified, we can conclude that at least in the case of St. A. Szczuka's court, the purchases for the funerals were made without taking the expense into account. The way of sewing and upholstering the coffins may have been important and the textile waste could have been used for decorating the other elements of the *castrum doloris*, such as, e.g., the catafalque.

The last, identified with great probability, grave of one St. A. Szczuka's children deposited in the Szczuczyn crypts, belongs to Marcin Leopold, deceased in 1728. His coffin was located in the central part of the western crypt, at the back steps of the catafalque/western crypt A, burial 4/ (Fig. 3) (Dudziński et al. 2013: 15). The buried man was an adult, therefore the coffin dimensions were definitely much bigger than the ones described earlier: its length was 187.5 cm, the maximum width in the place where the lid was connected to the chest was from 35 cm at feet to 54.5 cm at the head, while the coffin height varied from 33 to 48.5 cm. The lid was profiled, had short potshaped sides and was fixed to the chest with wooden pegs. Both the cover and the chest were upholstered on the outside with sheared burgundy velvet and along all the edges there was a silk band with a 1.8 cm wide metal wrap. It was fastened with big (2.3 cm in diameter), conical brass hobs, with 6 vertical grooves at every 8 cm. At the chest top from the feet side, plain hobs with a diameter of 0.7 cm formed the inscription 'AD' /Anno Domini/, at the chest top, '1728', at the bottom, probably '7 Ian' /7 January/, but because some of the hobs are missing, the inscription is difficult to decipher. The date is identical with the date of Marcin's death known from the written sources. The coffin interior was upholstered with plain pink-red silk (Grupa and Majorek 2012; Majorek and Grupa 2013: 77)

There is a coffin portrait kept in the Szczuczyn church vestry, the shape and size of which indicate that it must have been originally fastened to this coffin top (Fig. 4). The oval portrait is placed in a chased metal sheet frame with a pearl motif and a chased cartouche in the shape of Marcin Szczuka's coffin front. The cartouche frame is plain, while its central field is filled with a chased ribbon ornament of the acanthus leaves, branches, and campanulas. In the middle, at the plain green background, there is a bust of a young man wearing a silver-white wig, dressed in dark armour, with a cinnabar coat on his shoulder (Dziubkowa 1996: 160; Kałamajska-Saeed 1988: 48).

¹ Assuming that historical ell was 59.6 cm.

² Assuming that historical ell was 59.6 cm and a textile width – 60 cm.



The front part of Marcin Leopold's coffin. Photo by M. Przymorska-Sztuczka



Fig. 4. The coffin portrait of Marcin Leopold. From the collection of The Holy Virgin Mary parish church in Szczuczyn

The young man's body rested in the coffin on a green textile pillow filled with herbs. He was dressed in a loose silk robe (green taffeta, like the pillow), cut at the front to his waist and tied at the neck with a pink bowknot, with very wide sleeves, finished with cuffs and four folds. Under it, there was a wide linen shirt reaching his feet, with a semi-circular neck opening. The feet were covered with knitted stockings. The clothes resembled the western fashion in their style, and the knitted stockings reaching his knees are an additional confirmation (Grupa and Majorek 2012).

In this burial the dead body was also equipped for the last journey with devotional objects, which consisted of a silk scapular with Marian symbols, a holy medal with St. Benedict, and a rosary made of wood and fruit stones on a silk string, wound around the hands (Nowak and Przymorska-Sztuczka 2013: 58-64).

Also in this instance, we were able to recreate Marcin Szczuka's burial ceremony thanks to written sources. He died in Sidra, Grodno commune, on 7th January, 1728 in one of his palaces, being the family seats. The later translocation of his mortal remains to the family crypt in Szczuczyn seems to have been planned from the very beginning. After a modest burial ceremony the coffin with his body might have been temporarily placed in one of the palace rooms. The winter in progress was a favourable factor this time, allowing to postpone the proper burial ceremony and Marcin's body transportation to Szczuczyn by a nearly one month. The event took place in the first days of February. The poor local subjects (...) constantly accompanied the body day and night singing and praying for the soul of their Master. The main ceremonies started on the 3rd of February with building a special altar at the coffin where numerous invited clergy members celebrated six masses. In the afternoon, in presence of the noble visitors, the body, accompanied by a procession with torches, was taken to the dining-room where the vice-rector of Szczuczyn had a sermon, praising the Szczuka's family and Marcin's relatives. Forming a procession, they set off towards Szczuczyn, accompanied by local inhabitants; the bells in hamlets on the way were ringing and fires were burning. When they approached Szczuczyn, another procession of the Piarists and town people welcomed the cortege (...) in the light of twenty four wax torches, not to count our huge candles. Next the monks took the coffin into the brightly lit church, with singing and numerous instruments playing, and placed it onto a brier, which (...) although prepared in a great haste, was finely made and decorated. On the next day three masses were celebrated and next the monks took the coffin into the crypt and placed it (...) on the right hand side of his father, on the second step. The ceremonies were finished on the next day, i.e., on Saturday, February 6th, by celebrating again two Requiem masses (Szczuka 1728).

The facts above confirm indirectly the observations made in the course of the archaeological excavations. The coffin contained, e.g., a pillow filled with dry herbs, the aroma of which was to keep a 'natural' pleasant scent around the dead body and this should not be surprising in the light of the long period between the day of the death and the deposition of the deceased in the crypt, as well as the long journey from the place where young Szczuka died and the site of his burial in the Szczuczyn church. All the elements of his clothes were sewn with a very loose seam, therefore it can be supposed that his grave garment was prepared in a hurry. The aim of the described actions was to create an image of a very rich burial, yet they discreetly economised on every detail. The Szczuka family experienced financial difficulties at that time which can be confirmed by the fact that after his death Marcin's servants (...) rebelled and invaded the palace taking all the silver, distributing the items among themselves (Szczuka 347: k. 22; Dudziński et al. 2015: 50).

Despite the fact that the expense records of Marcin's funeral have not been preserved till our times, there is no doubt that the expense might have been significant. The body translocation from Sidra to Szczuczyn and all the ceremonies must have cost at least one thousand Polish zlotys, which were sent by Konstancja Potocka Szczuczyna (Szczuka 1728: k. 818, 837). The sum of about 300 Polish zlotys was borrowed by the widow, Elżbieta neé Potocki Szczuczyna, from the Sidra parish priest (...) to bury the late Marcin Szczuka (Szczuka 347: k. 24).

In most cases, the microclimatic conditions in the crypt under the church presbytery caused complete or partial mummification of the buried bodies (Kozłowski and Krajewska 2013: 83-98). That was also the case of Marcin Leopold's burial. On the contrary, the mortal remains of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka's juvenile children's mortal remains underwent the skeletonisation process. It may have been the result of the fact that their coffins were transported to the crypt a few years after their death. The conditions in the 'temporary' grave must have been much worse. Only three years after Michał August's death, an eye witnesses stated that: the (...) face is already unreadable, gowns have decayed, shoes blackened (Szczuka 1705d; Grupa et al. 2014: 49).

The same microclimate caused a substantial rate of organic material preservation (mainly various textiles, including, e.g., the linen fabric, not preserved in other cases), which makes the Szczuczyn crypts exceptionally important research sites as regards the 18th century clothing fashion and burial culture. The detailed analyses of the obtained samples, which are still in progress, will undoubtedly deliver more information on the kinds of textiles and other materials used in these burials. We also hope that genetic research will confirm with certainty the identifications of the burials made on the grounds of the archaeological exploration as the burials of St. A. Szczuka's children. However, these burials themselves deliver an interesting spectrum of various elements of the Baroque funeral traditions adopted by the Polish nobility. Moreover, thanks to the possibility of comparing the facts established in the course of the archaeological excavations with the results of interdisciplinary studies, including the preserved written sources, there is a chance to describe and place them more exactly in the historical reality, as well as to confirm some of the assumptions and theories. The data obtained that way are no longer a collection of bare scientific facts but allow to analyse the selected burials and their elements in greater detail. They have also made the Szczuczyn founder's children's relics resting in the crypt less impersonal.

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Acronyms:

AGAD - Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych

APP - Archiwum Publiczne Potockich

APR – Archiwum Potockich z Radzynia

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APR 440: k. 169. Expense Register from April 1702, sign. 440, k. 169.

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Szczuka, A.S. 1697a. AGAD, APP, a letter from 18th October 1697, sign. 163a, v. 42, k. 860.

Szczuka, A.S. 1697b. AGAD, APP, a letter from 18th October 1697, sign. 163a, v. 42, k. 21–22.

Szczuka, A.S. 1698. AGAD, APP, a letter from 23rd October 1698, sign. 163a, v. 42, k. 1435.

Szczuka, A.S. 1702a. AGAD, APP, a letter from 14th May 1702, sign. 163a, v. 39, k. 203.

Szczuka, A.S. 1702b. AGAD, APP, a letter from 4th April 1702, sign. 163a, v. 31, k. 266–267.

Szczuka, A.S. 1702c. AGAD, APP, a letter from 2nd May 1702, sign. 163a, v. 31, k. 327.

Szczuka, A.S. 1702d. AGAD, APP, a letter from 6th April 1702, sign. 163a, v. 31, k. 32.

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Szczuka, A.S. 1711b. AGAD, APP, a letter from 23rd April 1711, sign. 163a, v. 45, k. 604.

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