PART THREE

NOTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP:
THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION
CHAPTER EIGHT

‘COUNTY REPUBLICANS’ AND THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY POLAND AND FRANCE

James B. Collins

You will think to yourself what is it to be King, to be the one who rules, to be who I am, what must I do. You will judge that Ruling (Regere) is acting rightly (recte agere) that is that this word rule, command, govern, contains in itself a necessity to do good (bien faire) and rightly to render justice to each and every one without doing damage or incommodity to you or to the other You will remember that kings are created by God to judge the people of God. (First President Harlay, at a lit de justice in 1583, Parlement of Paris)¹

No man is king or prince by institution of nature, …but every king and kings sonne, hath his dignity and preheminence above other men, by authority only of the common wealth. (Robert Doleman, A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crown, 1594)²

In his famous, or perhaps one should say notorious article on the szlachta of the Commonwealth, Andrzej Sulima Kamiński defined three political camps, which he wrote might be distinguished in practice and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in theory: direct republicanism, which

¹ Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Mss Fr 16517, fol 207–207v., f. 258 and f. 261. “Vous penserez en vous mesme qu’est-ce qu’estre Roy, qu’estre qui regner, qu’estre que je suis, qu’est-ce que je dois faire. Vous jugerez que Regere est recte agere c’est a dire que ce mot de regir, commander, gouverner, contient en soy une necessite de bien faire et droituerement rendre la justice egalement a ung chacun sans faire dommage ny incommode a l’un (207v) qu’a l’autre. Vous souviendrez que les Rois ont este creer de Dieu pour juger le peuple de Dieu.” The speech is one among a collection of outstanding speeches made during the 16th and 17th centuries, collected by the Harlay family, prominent at the Parlement of Paris during that period. A lit de justice took place in the king’s presence: initially used to ratify important acts, in the late sixteenth century it became a method for registering edicts without dissent by the Parlement. In the king’s presence, no remonstrances were allowed. See below.