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Pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum in wealthy noble families in the first half of the 18th century in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth**

Abstract

The article deals with the experience of pregnancy and early motherhood in relation to the milieu of the magnates and nobility of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the first half of the 18th century. The analysis covers extensive source material which includes the preserved collections of private correspondence of representatives of wealthy nobility and magnates, with particular emphasis on the female half of this population. In turn, this material has been split by selected key issues, such as: trying to have children, pregnancy, birth, postpartum period, and early motherhood. Problems resulting from these stages of motherhood have been analysed in a broad context, considering both mental issues – fulfilling the socially expected role of wife and mother, dealing with new situations and difficulties, building relationships with new-born children – and physical elements, such as health, sickness, dealing with weakness and new responsibilities.

Keywords: motherhood, birth, postpartum period, childhood, 18th century

Słowa kluczowe: macierzyństwo, narodziny, okres poporodowy, dzieciństwo, XVIII w.

The experience of pregnancy and early motherhood in the eighteenth century has so far only been studied to a limited degree¹. Research into this subject is made more difficult by the significant dispersion of source materials and the scarcity of information found therein; for example, on the pages of private correspondence. In the case of research relating to the 18th century

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** This paper has been prepared in the course of a study conducted under the National Science Centre grant 'Dobrodziejki i klienci. Specyfika patronatu kobiecego i relacji klientalnych w czasach saskich' [Favors and clients. The specificity of women's patronage and customer relations in the Saxon era], grant number 2015/19/B/HS3/01797.

¹ Zob. D. Żołądź-Strzelczyk, 2010, p. 98–107.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, attempts to study the subject have so far been made primarily via the analysis of various advice books and herbaria, which constituted compendiums of basic knowledge on dealing with pregnancy and the postpartum period². Interesting findings concerning eighteenth-century attitudes toward these issues are also brought about by studies analysing the subject in the context of faith and religious practices³. It should be noted, however, that this type of research brings valuable, albeit fragmentary results. It reveals a certain postulated pattern of conduct, often only general recommendations, rather than actual practices. Capturing the individual experiences of women from noble families is possible only through the analysis of private correspondence, in which individual reflections, advice, and doubts were shared. It should be noted, however, that even selecting the correspondence of women from noble families from the right period, during which they were expecting a child or immediately after birth, often brings limited results. Relatively little was written about issues related to pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, usually limited to short messages with sparse information. Still more valuable are those examples of correspondence (both from women and men) that went beyond this pattern and expounded on the details of the pregnancy itself, as well as the postpartum period and early motherhood.

The subject should be considered a valuable area of research for several reasons. So far, in Polish academic writing there have been no detailed analyses that would, in relation to the eighteenth century, focus on the issues of family planning, methods of enhancing fertility, the experience of pregnancy and the postpartum period, the health of the mother and the child in the first months after birth, and finally the trauma of the death of a new-born child. In contrast, these issues have already been elaborated on in European historiography⁴. A broad analysis of the indicated issues may allow for a holistic and comparative approach, thus placing the research in a wider European context. The analysis covers extensive source material, which includes the preserved collections of correspondence from the representatives of wealthy Polish nobility and magnates from the first half of the 18th century. Available information about the dates of specific marriages and biographical information about the children born from them guided the search for remarks concerning the experience of pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood. During the research, the materials with the highest cognitive value were selected, which formed the basis of the present analysis.

² B. Zaborowska, 2009, p. 279–312; T. Heimrath, 1988, p. 221–222.

³ M. Delimata-Proch, 2015, p. 433–449; eadem, 2018b, p. 139–152.

⁴ For example, E. Zold, 2015, p. 324–339, T. Bowers, 1996; M. Francus, 2012; J. Buckley, 2017, p. 81–130; P. Hoffer, N.E. Hull, 1981, p. 3–31; L. Massey, 2005, p. 73–91. p. Williams, 2011, p. 67–86.

Trying to conceive

Among the nobility, extending the family line was seen as the natural result of getting married. Having children was considered a security for the future: especially a male heir was seen as hope for securing the inheritance of property. Children also played an increasingly important role in family politics: it was not without reason that parents wanted a good political start for their sons and were actively involved in the matrimony of their sons and daughters⁵. Good family connections made it possible to build a strong political party, the strength of which was to lie in unity of interests. High mortality among children was a problem, however, which people tried to offset by efforts to quickly conceive again⁶.

The inability to have children was an intimate problem – successive unsuccessful attempts raised questions about the potential cause⁷. The preserved correspondence is a perfect testimony to these struggles. Difficulties with becoming pregnant were openly shared with her mother by Katarzyna Barbara Branicka née Radziwiłł (d. 1730), wife of Jan Klemens Branicki (d. 1771), the future Grand Standard Bearer of the Crown (pol. *chorąży wielki koronny*). The spouses hoped to enlarge the family soon after their October 1720 wedding⁸. The lack of immediate results quickly generated uncertainty. Concerned with the situation, Katarzyna Barbara wrote to her mother, wife to the Grand Chancellor of Lithuania, Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł (d. 1746): “I fell ill today when I came to Orla, my Johnny is already telling me that I will never have children”⁹. Anna Daniłowicz, née Denhoff, from 1696 the wife of Aleksander Daniłowicz, starost of Parczew, also had problems with conceiving. Her first pregnancy ended in miscarriage, so waiting for the next child filled her with uncertainty and fear. When she was trying to have a child, Anna was supported by her mother¹⁰ Joanna Teresa née Brzostowska (d. 1738). In her letters, she tried to keep her spirits up, writing “I am hoping for the joy of your child,

⁵ See also valuable research about correlation between religious diversity and reproductive attitudes of the Polish aristocracy in 16th and 17th centuries, M. Liedke, 2017, p. 49–63.

⁶ C. Kuklo, 2009, p. 315–316.

⁷ U. Kicińska, 2014, p. 125–140.

⁸ K. Łopatecki 2016, p. 31–64.

⁹ ‘jam dziś zachorowała przyjechawszy do Orla, już mój Jaś powiada, że nigdy nie będę miała dzieci’ The Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (hereinafter AGAD0), the Radziwiłł Archive (hereinafter AR), section V, manuscript 1335, Katarzyna Barbara Branicka, née Radziwiłł, to Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Orle 18 March 1721, p. 65. In other letters, Katarzyna Barbara mentioned her illnesses: frequent fevers, headaches, permanent weakness and paroxysm: AGAD, ARV, manuscript 1335, Katarzyna Barbara Branicka, née Radziwiłł, to Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Białystok, 22 April 1721, p. 80; *ibidem*, Białystok, 3 XII 1721, p. 149.

¹⁰ Establishing the relationship between Anna and Joanna Teresa is difficult due to limited sources. There is a suspicion that even though she signed the letters as ‘mother’, Joanna Teresa was in fact the girl’s stepmother. See: B. Popiołek, 2019.

but trouble yourself not my child, God will reward you”¹¹. She also advised her daughter to “heed advice and look after her health”¹². One main thought reverberates in Joanna Teresa’s letters: looking after her health was fundamental for a woman trying to conceive and not lose her pregnancy. It was believed that it was the attitude of the woman, as well as the state of her health, that had a fundamental impact on the success of conception and childbirth. If she wanted to expand her family she would need to look after her own health, so that neglecting it would not lead to squandering her chances for motherhood. Joanna Teresa née Brzostowska clearly advised her daughter that she should “spare [herself] and, God forbid, do not give any opportunity for a miscarriage”¹³. The described case is not isolated in this respect. Magdalena Konstancja Czapska, née Gniński (d. 1757), wife of the Pomeranian voivode, gave equally detailed advice to her daughter Magdalena, in connection with her unsuccessful efforts to bear a child. Magdalena (d. 1763) was married from 1745 to Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł (d. 1760), the Grand Standard Bearer of Lithuania (pol. *chorąży wielki litewski*). The couple were trying hard to have a child, but their attempts failed. Magdalena miscarried several times and subsequent unsuccessful efforts to maintain the pregnancy deepened the gulf between the spouses. Konstancja née Gniński gave her daughter much advice in her correspondence, primarily about healthy behaviour, self-care, and sensitivity to the unborn child. Assuming that the girl might already be pregnant, she slept in the same bed with Magdalena, to protect her from taking dangerous positions in her sleep. It was believed that these could be a threat to the unborn child¹⁴. In conversations with her daughter Konstancja also drew attention to various symptoms that could be associated with feminine diseases (such as vaginal discharge containing blood) and instructed Magdalena how to proceed in such cases. However, none of the efforts taken to enlarge the family produced any result. Despite several pregnancies, none of them ended with the timely birth of the desired offspring. The marriage of Magdalena and Hieronim Florian ended in divorce in 1753 and one of the main reasons was the lack of children.

Due to these difficulties, the symptoms of imminent childbirth were carefully looked for. The first symptoms indicating a positive result of the efforts to have a child were received even more enthusiastically among family and friends. When the Grand Hetman of Lithuania, Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł (d. 1762), boasted in a letter that, shortly after his marriage to Anna Luiza née Mycielska (d. 1771), they were expecting a child, the Court Marshal of the Crown (pol. *marszałek nadworny koronny*) Jerzy August Mniszech (d. 1778) immediately wrote to congratulate him profusely. In the letter he emphasized

¹¹ „nadzieję pociechy mojej z waszego wyglądam potomstwa, ale się o to moja dziewczeczko nie turbuj, nagrodzi to Pan Bóg” Library of the Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław (hereinafter BOss), manuscript 5694, Joanna Teresa Denhoff, née Brzostowska to Anna Daniłowiczowa, née Denhoff [no location, no date], p. 17.

¹² ‘rady słuchała, a po tym razie zdrowia bardzo szanowała’. Ibidem.

¹³ ‘[się] szanowała, i nie dawała okazji uchowaj Boże do poronienia’. Ibidem, s.33.

¹⁴ I. Maciejewska, 2020, p. 107.

that knowing about the “happy burden of the Duchess [...] I cannot but only feel inexpressible joy from afar, so I wish with all my heart that this small and happy hope would most favourably satisfy the father’s heart”¹⁵. Considering the child’s date of birth, the information about the expected addition to the family was announced publicly around the fourth month of pregnancy, when it was increasingly obvious even to outsiders. The correspondence of the Court Marshal of the Crown is also a perfect testimony to the expectations that were aroused by the imminent arrival of another descendant in the magnate’s family. In his letter, Mniszech emphasized that the long-awaited child would surely please “the whole splendid house with consolation both effective and desirable for the honour of the homeland”¹⁶. This attitude was symptomatic. Clearly formulated expectations of the mother herself, as well as clear hopes regarding the role of the future descendant in family politics, translated into attitudes towards pregnancy and early motherhood.

Pregnancy

The period of pregnancy was treated as an exceptional time for a woman. The low level of medical knowledge and frequent miscarriages and deaths of infants resulted in the accumulation of numerous superstitions¹⁷. These resulted in recommendations given to pregnant women to protect them from losing a child. They concerned both the woman’s diet and the spaces in which she should stay¹⁸. It was believed that eliminating certain products from the diet, surrounding oneself with beauty, and refraining from quarrels and sudden flares of emotion were supposed to facilitate successful pregnancy and childbirth. The period of pregnancy was also treated as a time of isolation for a woman, of gradually phasing out her previous activities. This tendency was especially visible in the court circles. When rumours spread about another pregnancy of Maria Józefa, née Habsburg (d. 1757), the wife of King Augustus III, it was her prolonged absence that drew the attention. Limiting previous social activities was read unambiguously, with guesses made in private correspondence that “Her Royal Highness, though still keeping it secret, is expecting a child”¹⁹. Especially the lack of official confirmation of pregnancy at its early stage caused many speculations and rumours. The prevailing mood is perfectly reflected in the preserved correspondence. It indicates that the pregnancy of

¹⁵ ‘szczęśliwym brzemieniu JO Księżnej [...] nie mogę tylko cieszyć się stąd niewymownie, tak całym sercem życzę, aby ta ciesząca i mała nadzieja ukontentowała najpomyślniej ojcowskie serce’ AGAD, ARV, manuscript 9855 IV, Jerzy August Mniszech to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Dresden, 15 May 1754, p. 81.

¹⁶ ‘cały prześwieitny dom jego skuteczną i dla zaszczytu ojczyzny pożądaną konsolacją’ Ibidem.

¹⁷ T. Heimrath, 1988, p. 221–224.

¹⁸ D. Żołędź-Strzelczyk, 2010, p. 99.

¹⁹ ‘Najjaśniejsza Królewiczowa lubo dotąd w sekrecie tu zostaje, ma być przy nadziei’ AGAD, ARV, manuscript 9855/III, Jerzy August Mniszech to unknown, [no location, no date], p. 114.

magnates' wives was gossiped about even by their closest family. Konstancja Franciszka Sapieha, née Radziwiłł (d. 1756), informed, in an atmosphere of secrecy, about the probable pregnancies of her close relatives: sister-in-law Anna Luiza née Mycielska (d. 1771) and her grandson's wife, Maria Karolina née Lubomirska (d. 1795). Not sure about the real condition of both ladies, she stated that "I can tell your highness this news that I have found out here, although I do not consider it certain, that the Duchess Miecznikowa²⁰ is with child from the beginnings and the Duchess Hetmanowa²¹ as well"²².

Waiting for childbirth was in many cases associated with sudden malaise, weakness, and other health problems. Katarzyna Barbara née Branicki mentioned in private correspondence that she had to go to Lewartów as soon as possible to visit the wife of the Court Marshal of Lithuania (pol. *marszałkową nadworną litewską*), Marianna Sanguszkowa, née Lubomirska (d. 1729), who, "taken with weakness in Lewartów, is supposedly pregnant"²³. Helping a pregnant woman was treated as an absolute, even natural, duty of her closest relatives. The recurring weakness influenced the hitherto rhythm of life and made fulfilling daily duties more complicated. The loss of strength was a great pain for Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka (d. 1753), wife of the voivode of Vilnius, Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł (d. 1761). The preserved sources indicate that she was pregnant a total of 25 times, of which only 7 ended in live births²⁴. The woman's body felt the health effects of repeated pregnancies, miscarriages, and births. In 1731, during her next pregnancy, she confided in letters that she suffered from significant health problems that threatened her and her unborn child. At her request, the attending doctors undertook the difficult task of "reviving the baby", as Franciszka Urszula herself wrote²⁵. Satisfied with the results of the therapy, the noblewoman wrote "I feel the baby alive in me", adding, however, that "I am so weak myself that I cannot cross the room"²⁶. Luckily, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł was able to deliver the pregnancy, giving birth to a daughter, Anna, at the turn of 1731–1732.

The preserved correspondence proves that women often had problems determining the exact stage of their pregnancy and the moment when the child should be born. Even women with several pregnancies behind them may not have been able to accurately determine their condition. This is perfectly

²⁰ The wife of a Royal Sword Bearer (pol. *miecznik*).

²¹ The wife of a hetman.

²² 'tutejsze nowiny com się dowiedziała, chociaż nie za rzecz pewną uznaję oznajmić WXMc, to jest, że Księżna JejMc Miecznikowa przy nadziei od początków i Księżna JejMc Hetmanowa także' AGAD, AR V, No. 13899/ VIII Konstancja Franciszka Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to unknown, Kodeń 11 February 1754, p. 15.

²³ 'słaba w Lewartowie, jest podobno brzemienna' AGAD, ARV, manuscript 1335, Katarzyna Barbara Branicka, née Radziwiłł to Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszkowa, Lublin, 3 May 1722, p. 219.

²⁴ B. Manyś, 2018, p. 87.

²⁵ 'ożywienia dzieciątka' AGAD, AR IV, manuscript 659, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Nieśwież, 21 November 1731, p. 92–93.

²⁶ 'dzieciątko już żywe czuję w sobie' (...) 'sama jestem tak słaba, że przez pokój przejść nie mogę' Ibidem.

reflected in the accounts of Karolina Teresa née Radziwiłł from the period of her fifth pregnancy, i.e., the turn of 1732 and 1733. In the final phase of 1732, the noblewoman informed her mother, Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, that she was expecting to give birth quickly; in subsequent letters, she predicted that the desired moment would probably come in a few weeks. Already in October she reported: “I don’t know if I will not happily deliver my burden in November”²⁷. The expected delivery, however, did not take place in November or December, although the woman reassured her mother that the child would probably appear any day, until the end of 1732. It was not until the beginning of 1733 that Anna Radziwiłł née Sanguszko received a letter from her daughter, in which she admitted that she had slightly underestimated the expected date of delivery. Although she was still glad that her husband’s absence in January was so short that he had time to return to their estate and thus “so close to the time of the delivery, I will have the consolation of seeing him with me”²⁸, but the possible date of birth was significantly later than her primary calculations suggested. Confused by the earlier signals, she shared her fears with her mother, writing “I am now very afraid, lest I make a mistake in my accounts, as I assume it will last until mid-March”²⁹. In fact, the long-awaited child was born on February 10, which perfectly shows the uncertainty and unreliability of the feelings and assumptions of the mother herself³⁰.

Teresa Karolina née Radziwiłł was not alone in her doubts. Private correspondence among the nobility proves that women often had difficulties precisely assessing their condition. Only careful and continuous observation could help determine the stage of pregnancy as accurately as possible. This is perfectly reflected in the correspondence of Marta Radziwiłł, née Trębicka (d. 1812), wife of the Royal Carver of Lithuania (pol. *krajczy litewski*), Marcin Radziwiłł (d. 1782). Marta Radziwiłł, while exchanging letters with Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł, mentioned that his third, recently married spouse—Antonina née Miączyński—is most likely expecting a child. She based her assumptions on the observed signals indicating the condition of Radziwiłł’s wife. In the letter she wrote that she “had stopped for a few days over a month, after which she had her time, and now she has it every month, sometimes less, sometimes also more, with all that same signs as should be during pregnancy”³¹. Irregular

²⁷ ‘nie wiem jeżeli nie w novembrze przyjdzie mi być szczęśliwie rozwiązana od mego ciężaru’ AGAD, AR V, No. 13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 7 October 1732 p. 94.

²⁸ ‘w tak bliskim terminie zelżenia mego te mieć będę konsolację widzieć go przy sobie’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part IV), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 16 January 1733, p. 3.

²⁹ ‘teraz bardzo się boję, ażebym w rachunkach swoich nie pomyliła się, jak sobie zakładam czas do pół marca’ Ibidem.

³⁰ A letter with information about the birth of her daughter Karolina Teresa Sapieha née Radziwiłł sent to her mother three days after the delivery; AGAD, AR section V, no. 13898 (part IV), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius 13 February 1733, p. 14.

³¹ ‘zatrzymała się była nad dni kilka nad miesiąc, po tym miała swój czas i teraz go miewa co miesiąc, czasem mniej, czasem też więcej, z tym wszystkim znaki niektóre są jak powinna

menstruation was thus seen as a symptom that could indicate a pregnancy. Watching for symptoms that would confirm Marta Radziwiłł's blessed state was not coincidental. Childlessness was one of the reasons why Hieronim Florian's two earlier marriages broke up. In her letter, Marta Radziwiłł, née Trębicka, even pointed out to the magnate that the described symptoms were treated by those close to both ladies as tantamount to pregnancy.

Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka, calculated the planned dates of birth much more precisely. Due to her rich experience, which stemmed from the fact that from the moment of her marriage to Radziwiłł, the woman was almost constantly pregnant, she learned to identify the signs of another conception faster and to calculate the time of the planned birth more precisely. Her calculations were very detailed. In November 1731 she wrote to her husband that she was slowly getting ready for birth, as it "had already been three Sundays in the eighth month", so "we can expect the end soon"³². Waiting for delivery and impatiently counting down the days till birth marked the correspondence between noblewomen in the last weeks of pregnancy.

Birth

Successfully maintaining a pregnancy turned into impatiently waiting for a successful delivery³³. It should be noted that the course of the delivery itself was rarely mentioned in letters. While the preparations for this event were sporadically reported to people from the immediate family, birth itself was treated as an intimate, purely private matter. Most often, the correspondents who were aware of it simply received news about a "happy birth", without details of the act itself. Births took place at home, usually with the assistance of an experienced village woman. Studies into the functioning of the royal court in the 17th century have shown that queens Maria Ludwika Gonzaga and later Maria Kazimiera d'Arquien Sobieska used leather belts before birth, which, according to traditional beliefs, were supposed to facilitate the process of childbirth³⁴. The birth itself was written about very sparsely, even in letters to closest female relatives, mothers or sisters. However, it is a fact that approaching birth caused visible anxiety in women. This is perfectly reflected in the correspondence of Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka, who admitted in a letter to her mother-in-law—the wife of the Grand Chancellor of Lithuanian, Anna

być w ciąży' AGAD, AR IV, manuscript 709, Marta Radziwiłł, née Trębicka to Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł, Niehńewicze, 3 April 1756, p. 141.

³² 'już trzy niedziele na ósmy miesiąc', 'spodziewamy się niedługo zakończenia' AGAD, AR IV, manuscript 659, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Nieśwież, 28 November 1731, p. 96.

³³ Waiting for delivery was mixed with the fear of pain and death, see: M. Delimata-Proch, 2018a, p. 78–80.

³⁴ K. Targosz, 1997, p. 327.

Radziwiłł née Sanguszko—that “happily reaching this date [...] before I enter this dangerous time, I ask your Grace for your gracious blessing”³⁵.

Magnates chose private residences as the place of birth: either their own or those of closest relatives. Both wives of Paweł Karol Sanguszko, Marianna née Lubomirski and Barbara née Duni, gave birth in the Sanguszko residence in Lewartów. Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł (d. 1762), during one of the first pregnancies of his wife Franciszka Urszula, insisted that the birth should not take place at their estate, but in the Radziwiłł residence in Biała, under the watchful eye of his mother Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko. Anna Katarzyna herself believed that this was an excellent idea and profusely expressed her joy at being one of the first to see the long-awaited child. She also promised to properly prepare the manor in Biała for the reception of the pregnant woman. For the time of confinement and delivery, Michał Kazimierz was to choose “the rooms you want to be ready” for his wife, and “whichever apartment” for himself³⁶. At Anna Katarzyna’s instruction, some of her servants were to be directed to help with childbirth and the mother’s confinement.

Appropriate childbirth assistance was requested in advance. The involvement of good, experienced, highly recommended people was seen as crucial for the positive course of labour. Preserved correspondence indicates that efforts were made to have barber surgeons assist women in giving birth. Marianna Sanguszkowa, née Lubomirska, was asked to send one of the experienced barber surgeons for the “Duchess Starost”³⁷, who was expecting imminent delivery. His services were to be indispensable, because—as it was argued—“the duchess needed to have her blood let before the birth”³⁸. Most often, attempts were made to hire experienced women, who were to help with the birth itself. Preparing appropriate conditions for the pregnant woman and ensuring she had proper support was treated as a natural duty of the people around her. Interestingly the efforts to ensure the best care for a woman during childbirth and confinement were often undertaken very early, to avoid relying on random people. Karol Wielopolski (d. 1773), Master of the King’s Kitchens (pol. *kuchmistrz koronny*), accepted, albeit with undisguised surprise, the advice of his mother-in-law, Konstancja Mniszchowa, née Tarło (d. 1739), wife to the Grand Marshal of the Crown. Already in July 1729, Mniszchowa recommended that he start looking for suitable assistance for her daughter, wife to Wie-

³⁵ ‘dochodzę szczęśliwie do tego terminu [...] nim mi jednak tę niebezpieczną przyjdzie odbyć porę suplikuję o łaskawe WXMci błogosławieństwo’ AGAD, AR IV, manuscript 659, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecki to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Nieśwież, 24 December 1731, p. 96.

³⁶ ‘pokoje, które chcesz, żeby były gotowe’; ‘który apartament’ National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk (hereinafter NIAB), f. 694, folio 7, case 8, Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Biała, 15 January 1727.

³⁷ Pol. ‘księżny starościny’, i.e. duchess, wife of a starost

³⁸ ‘samej księżnie przed pologiem krew ma puścić’ The National Archives in Krakow, Section I (hereinafter ANKr I), the Sanguszko Archive (hereinafter ASang), file 260/17, Maria Wiśniowiecka, née Czartoryska to Marianna Sanguszko, née Lubomirski, Wiśniowiec, 16 May, year unknown, p. 13–15.

lopolski, Elżbieta Wielopolska, née Mniszech (d. 1746). He replied in a letter to Mniszchowa: “as for hiring a woman to assist with the birth [...] I see no reason to send for one so quickly, as it should not come to term before the end of December or early January”³⁹. Searching for help six months before the expected birth seemed to him to be going too far. The experienced noblewoman believed, however, that it would be difficult to hire the right people at the last moment.

The successful birth of child was received with undisguised joy. In magnate houses, the birth of children was treated as a holiday. The closest family and in-laws were informed with joy about the newly welcomed offspring. At the birth of her third child and second son, Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł, wrote to her mother: “I would not be remiss in seeking the joy and consolation of falling with my newborn son at the feet of your grace, my mother”⁴⁰. In her private correspondence, however, one sees that with each subsequent pregnancy reports of the birth of the child became more subdued and devoid of such great emotions. When the fourth child, a daughter, appeared in the family, Karolina Teresa sent the relevant information to her mother only after some time. In this case, she did not even try to edit her letters, as she had done before despite her poor health. It was only after regaining her strength that she drafted a few sentences to her mother, in which she first apologized to her, saying: “I did not have the good fortune to write on the occasion of the birth until now that God has brought me to better health”; it was only later that she reported “on the happy delivery of my latest girl”⁴¹.

The ways of celebrating childhood and the willingness to show off the offspring are illustrated by grand ceremonies and family gatherings where the youngest members of the family were proudly presented. The middle nobility used the opportunity of the birth of a child to symbolically strengthen the ties with their patrons. For example, the magnates were asked to hold their clients’ children at baptism. It is demonstrated by private correspondence how

³⁹ ‘co zaś o zamówienie białogłowy do położu [...] nie widzę żadnej potrzeby tak prędko posyłać, gdyż termin nieprzypada chyba aż na końcu decembra albo na początku Januarii’ – AGAD, Aleksander Czołowski collection, manuscript 360, Karol Wielopolski to Konstancja Mniszchowa, née Tarło, Przemysłów, 29 VII 1729, p. 49–50.

⁴⁰ ‘nie omieszkalam najpierwej tego dla siebie szukać szczęścia i konsolacji, z nowo przybyłym na świat synem moim upaść pod stopy W[aszej] Ks[iążęcej] M[o]łści Matki Dobrodziejki’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 1 October 1730 p. 198; the wife of the Crown Chancellor was the first member of the Radziwiłł family whom Karolina informed that her son had been born. She sent a similar letter to her brother, Michał Kazimierz, only after ten more days, nearly a month after the birth of the child. In it, she asked her brother to take the boy under his protection; AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Vilnius, 11 October 1730, p. 204.

⁴¹ ‘nie miałam tego szczęścia odpisać z okazji położu mego, teraz zaś jak mię Bóg do lepszego trochę przyprowadził zdrowia’, ‘o szczęśliwym rozwiązaniu moim z terazniejszą dziewczyną’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 20 January 1732, p. 26; In 1732 Karolina Teresa gave birth to a daughter – Marianna.

widely this was practised. Katarzyna Barbara née Radziwiłł, wife of Jan Klems Branicki, tired of the prolonged celebrations during her stay in Tyczyn (her husband's family estate), wrote to her mother: "I have here, since our arrival, all but every day held children for baptism"⁴². The magnates themselves spared no efforts in celebrating the birth of children. Konstancja Franciszka Sapieha, née Radziwiłł, was overjoyed at the birth of the long-awaited child of the voivode of Vilnius, Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł. She pointed out in a letter that it was a great joy to be able to "congratulate on the guest who came to our house" and added: "when the beginnings are so good, I hope that I will be so lucky to congratulate your honours on the birth of a daughter or son every year"⁴³. The joy at the birth of an offspring quickly became a public affair. In 1712 handwritten newspapers extensively commented on the birth of the firstborn son of Paweł Karol Sanguszko (d. 1750), then the Royal Treasurer of Lithuania. It was mentioned that "Her highness duchess Sanguszkowa [*Marianna née Lubomirski Sanguszkowa*] [...] happily delivered a son in Lewartów", which—it was emphasized—was "a great joy for the great House"⁴⁴.

For Karolina Teresa Sapieżyna, née Radziwiłł, the opportunity to publicly share the joy of having children arrived at the baptism of her first-born daughter, which was celebrated with great vigour. The ceremony was organized only after the girl had turned one. Earlier, a party was held on the child's first birthday, but she mentioned the ceremony to her mother quite laconically, only informing her that she had "happily celebrated the anniversary of June 22" for Anulka⁴⁵. The baptism ceremony, however, was to be much grander. Karolina Teresa involved several people from the Radziwiłł family circles, which were still the closest to her, on this occasion. Much to her great worry, one of the most important people for her, her mother and the girl's grandmother—Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko—could not participate in the celebrations; the young mother therefore had to report the celebrations to her. In one of the letters, she proudly noted that her siblings were charmed by the little girl, who quickly won the love of those around her. As she reported, at the very first contact "my sister, Duchess Field Marshal [*Tekla Róża née Radziwiłł, wife of field marshal Flemming – APJ*], having met my Anulka, fell in love with her so much that

⁴² 'ja tu od przyjazdu naszego ledwie nie co dzień dzieci trzymam do chrztu' AGAD, ARV, manuscript 1335, Katarzyna Barbara Branicka, née Radziwiłł to Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł née Sanguszko, Tyczyn, 19 January 1722.

⁴³ 'powinszować gościa przybyłego w dom nasz'; 'kiedy już są tak dobre początki mam nadzieję, że będę tak szczęśliwa co rok powinszować WXM Dobrodziejowi to córki, to syna' AGAD, AR V, No. 13899/VIII Konstancja Franciszka Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Kodeń, 25 October 1754, p. 46.

⁴⁴ 'Księżna Jmci Sanguszkowa w Lewartowie [...] szczęśliwie synem rozwiązana'; 'wielką radością prześwieanego Domu' The Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences (further BK PAN), manuscript 1026, Gazeta z Lublina, 12 May 1712, p. 24v.

⁴⁵ 'rocznicę 22 juni szczęśliwie odprawiła' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 28 June 1729, p. 73.

she and my brother forced me to let them hold her for baptism⁴⁶. The baptism of the couple's next son, Aleksander Michał, was equally grand. However, it was only celebrated in 1732, almost two years after his birth. As Karolina Teresa herself admitted in a letter, the Sapieha family was in no rush to organise the celebrations. It was most likely due to her next pregnancy, which she seemed not to be taking well. It was only in May 1732 that she could inform her mother "of the completed act of our son's baptism"⁴⁷. The parents were mobilized to speed up the celebrations by their close relatives putting themselves forward the role of godparents. Karolina Teresa explained the situation in detail, admitting to her mother that "we would have probably still been waiting [for the celebrations], if we were not forced to do so by the grace of the Prince Commander⁴⁸, who had declared so long ago that he wanted to be the godfather to our son, which intention had thus now come to conclusion"⁴⁹. In the face of the difficulties resulting from the pregnancy and the delivery itself, the joy of a happy birth and the opportunity to present the long-awaited offspring to relatives and in-laws was natural. Public celebrations and mutual invitations to act as godparents were also an excellent opportunity to strengthen family ties.

Postpartum period

The postpartum period in the conditions of the 18th century was an extremely difficult time for a woman. Having experienced the burden of childbirth, women often struggled with health problems and visible weakness. The deaths of noble women shortly after birth were not infrequently mentioned in private correspondence⁵⁰. This motivated noble families to emphasize the need to take care of a woman right after the birth of a child. Joanna Teresa Denhoff, née Brzostowska, gladly received the news about the successful delivery of a child by her daughter, Anna Daniłowicz, née Denhoff. In her letters, she gave the young mother extensive advice on how to live through the postpartum period in good health. She asked her not to underestimate the dangers that this time

⁴⁶ 'siostra moja Księżna Feldmarszałkowa poznawszy Anulkę moją tak się w niej bardzo rozkochała, że się gwałtem napaarla z bratem moim trzymać ją do chrztu' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 18 October 1729, p. 117.

⁴⁷ 'o zakończonym akcie to jest chrzcinach syna naszego' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 29 May 1732, p. 45.

⁴⁸ This was a reference to the husband of her sister – Tekla Róża née Radziwiłł, primo voto Fleming (d. 1747), who was the then wife of Michał Serwacy Wiśniowiecki (d. 1744).

⁴⁹ 'byśmy pewnie i dotąd oczekiwali, ale że nas do tego przymusiła łaska Księcia Regimentarza już tak dawno dla nas deklarowana, że chciał być chrzestnym ojcem syna naszego i tak te intencje swoją teraz tu zakonkludował' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 29 May 1732, p. 45.

⁵⁰ AGAD, AR V, No. 13899/VIII Konstancja Franciszka Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, from Kodnia, 6 October 1754, p. 43. Sapieha stated in the letter, 'I announce to your highness that the Standard Bearer's wife died in childbirth; she had a daughter.' [pol. 'oznajmuję WXM, że JM Pani Chorążyna Krasicka w położu umarła, córkę miała'].

could pose to her health and her life. She recommended: "I diligently admonish and remind you to respect yourself in everything during the postpartum period, because the postpartum is nothing with young people, but this little sickness needs a lot of time and comfort"⁵¹. To help her convalescence, the mother sent her daughter "porridge, which you eat so gladly [...] to strengthen you in postpartum"⁵². When, despite everything, her daughter's health began to deteriorate, Joanna Teresa urged her not to delay and as soon as possible to seek help from "a doctor who can deal with peculiarly feminine defects"⁵³. Preserved correspondence allows for the conclusion that only a doctor's assistance was treated as valuable in postpartum convalescence disorders. Joanna Teresa explicitly stipulated that during this particular period, "barbers and pharmacists" should be avoided at all costs, because "their advice is of no use"⁵⁴.

Concern for the health of women during the postpartum period was extremely necessary, as the visible loss of strength often made it impossible for women to function properly and fulfil the role of mothers. In the case of Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł, when slightly more than two weeks passed from her son's birth, she was already feeling the hardships of postpartum very clearly. The young mother explained in a letter that she would prefer to report her and her child's well-being in person, but the hardships of birth deprived her of her strength for a long time. She confirmed by letter, however, that she is in better health every day and does not experience any complications after an experience so demanding of the organism. Still, her initial enthusiasm, turned out to be premature, as Teresa Karolina's condition stopped improving over the following days. Therefore, despite earlier assurances, she had to postpone the meeting with her mother, whom she apologized to in a letter that "for my still imperfect health, I cannot rush to her services"⁵⁵. It was only after a few months that Karolina Teresa could realistically admit that she had recovered from childbirth and was getting ready to return to her old obligations⁵⁶. However, the noblewoman's health was still far from perfect. Sapieha made use of the services of doctors relatively often, as she herself was not in the best of health. Every now and then she complained of problems with persistent cough, as well as headaches and toothaches. Very frequent pregnancies also

⁵¹ 'w położu aby się szanować we wszystkim pilnie przestrzegam i upominam, bo to u młodych za nic bywa położ, a wielkiego potrzebuje czasu ta choróbka i wygody' BOss, manuscript 5694, Joanna Teresa Denhoffów, née Brzostowski to Anna Daniłowiczowa, née Denhoff, [no location, no date], p. 35.

⁵² 'kaszki, którą rada jadasz [...] na posilenie w położu' Ibidem, p. 36.

⁵³ 'doktora, który osobiłwie białogłowski defektom umie radzić' Ibidem, p. 47.

⁵⁴ 'cyrulików i aptekarzów, rady nic nie czynią' BOss, manuscript 5694, Joanna Teresa Denhoff, née Brzostowski to Anna Daniłowicz, née Denhoff, [no location, no date], p. 47.

⁵⁵ 'dla niedoskonałego jeszcze zdrowia mego przytomnie do jej usług pospieszyć nie mogę' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 8 October 1730 p. 201.

⁵⁶ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 9 February 1731 p. 12.

negatively affected her health, resulting in a gradual weakening of the body⁵⁷. Reports of great, even overwhelming weakness marked the accounts of young mothers. The postpartum period seemed to be endless, while the need to care for a newborn deepened the feeling of distress in the face of weakness and health problems. Even after a period of nearly two months after the delivery, an exhausted Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka, wrote to her husband that she functions “with no relief from weakness and it is getting worse and worse, God knows that I can hardly write”⁵⁸.

As weakness took its toll, women were recommended to lead a static lifestyle during the postpartum period, avoiding excessive stress and long journeys. In the case of Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł, her earlier tendency to frequently change her place of residence turned out to be troublesome not only because of the need to organize safe transport for babies, but also because such activity was considered too demanding. Her willingness to return to the normal rhythm of her life had to be cooled down by the medics called to the estate. After the birth of her third child, Karolina Teresa even complained to her mother that her activity had been limited for too long and that the inability to leave the Vilnius residence seemed to be an endless ordeal. Justifying such an unequivocal objection by doctors to any idea of travelling any longer distance, Karolina admitted that “the good doctors would not allow me to leave due to the fact that I have already once in two Sundays after the birth fallen over while walking in the cold [...] and I have started to look after myself more now, so that on the 20th of this month I could be strong enough to travel to Warsaw”⁵⁹. With each subsequent pregnancy, however, she was less willing to undertake such strenuous activities. In 1737, getting ready for her seventh childbirth, she admitted to her mother that she would not be going “on these journeys with such bad roads, or at least I would like to sit this day out at home”⁶⁰. She herself admitted that the escapades undertaken during her previous pregnancies had caused her such exhaustion that it could have ended in some misfortune.

⁵⁷ Correspondence from 1732 can serve as an example. In January Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł informed her mother that she had just welcomed her daughter into the world and in mid-October of the same year she informed her that she is slowly getting ready for the next delivery; AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 7 October 1732, p. 93.

⁵⁸ ‘żadnej ulgi w słabości nie mając i owszem chodząc coraz do gorzej, Bóg widzi, że ledwie pisać mogę’ AGAD, AR IV, manuscript 659, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecki to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Nieśwież, 1 March 1732, p. 116.

⁵⁹ ‘[ch]m[os]ć panowie doktorowie nie pozwalali wyjeżdżać z racji tej, żem już raz w niedzielę dwie po połogu po zimnie chodząc upadła była [...] i już się sama najbardziej teraz zaczęłam ochraniać, żebym 20 tego miesiąca mogła być mocniejszą do odprawienia drogi warszawskiej’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 9 February 1731, p. 13–14.

⁶⁰ ‘w te podróże przy tak złej drodze, a przynajmniej chciałabym sobie ten termin spokojnie w domu przesiedzieć’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part V), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Wysokie, 27 January 1737, p. 55–56.

Early motherhood

The appearance of a baby opened a new chapter in family relations; it also changed the evaluation of certain problems and issues. Young mothers used correspondence to share the joys and concerns of having children and did not hesitate to ask more experienced people for advice. The letters were also a perfect occasion to include men at least partially in family life, as they were only marginally involved in the upbringing of children, due to numerous political and proprietary obligations⁶¹.

Adapting to the role of a mother and the desire to fulfil her duties as best as possible led to numerous doubts. The first and fundamental issue was the matter of feeding the children—by the mother herself or by employing a suitable wet-nurse. Preserved correspondence shows that there was no single model of conduct in this respect. Karolina Teresa Sapięha, née Radziwiłł, quickly hired a wet-nurse and used her help with each of her newborn babies⁶². This did not always bring the expected results, as some of the children fed by wet-nurses, instead of growing in strength as expected, gradually deteriorated⁶³. Anna Radziwiłł née Sanguszko recommended looking for a good wet-nurse early. She advised the wife of Mikołaj Kazimierz Radziwiłł that she should investigate the possibility of hiring the best wet-nurse while she was still pregnant. She advised her that in this respect she should rely primarily on the opinion and advice of relatives who had had experience with feeding their babies⁶⁴. Regardless, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka, tried, as much as possible, to feed the babies herself. However, the struggle to maintain lactation and to properly feed babies was associated with numerous complications. In November 1731 the alarmed noblewoman informed her husband that “the milk in the left breast had turned into blood”⁶⁵. She mentioned that to remedy this, medics ordered her to have her blood let regularly. Although the proposed therapy brought temporary improvement and the bleeding, as the noblewoman wrote, “stopped a little”⁶⁶, the implementation of these medical recommendations additionally weakened her already taxed health. Nevertheless, Franciszka Urszula assured her husband that the child was feeling well, which was the most important thing for her.

However, there were many more problematic aspects related to early motherhood. Women regularly shared their doubts in private correspondence, discussing the issue of breastfeeding and hiring and overseeing a wet-nurse, as well the various aspects of child rearing, which confused them. In the case of

⁶¹ B. Manyś, P. Grobelna-Mazurek, 2019, p. 68–69.

⁶² A. Penkała-Jastrzębska, 2019, p. 76.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ NIAB, f. 694, folio 7, case 8, Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Biała, 5 February 1727, p. 46v.

⁶⁵ ‘pokarm w lewej piersi w krew był się obrócił’ AGAD, AR IV, manuscript 659, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł, née Wiśniowiecka to Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł, Nieśwież, 28 November 1731, p. 99.

⁶⁶ ‘trochę ustało’ Ibidem.

one of the daughters of Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł, the burning problem was the fact that the child would not start teething for a long time. The reasons for this situation began to be seen in several places. Initially, the blame was put on malnutrition, caused by the hiring of the wrong wet-nurse: the woman was therefore dismissed in the hope of improving the situation. Karolina Teresa confided in her mother, writing: "I hope to God that now her teeth will show up sooner"⁶⁷. The period of her first child's growing up and the mounting problems associated with it reveal Karolina Teresa's total confusion and fear of taking any steps that could threaten her daughter's wellbeing. She preferred to clarify any doubts by contacting her mother first, to take the right steps only with her acceptance. Anna née Sanguszko's consent became for her daughter a condition of making any changes in the baby's nutrition, arranging the rhythm of the day, as well selecting the people who could be in the girl's immediate surroundings. Afraid to make the slightest mistake in taking care of her daughter, she wrote to her mother: "I beg your highness, princess mother for advice on how I am to feed her, because she has a great appetite to eat and I dare not without your honour's consent, as she has no teeth yet"⁶⁸. Only with the consent of her mother, whom she saw as an unquestionable authority, did she take any steps. Problems with the girl's teething lasted much longer than only the first months of her life. At the end of 1732 Karolina Teresa reported about the health problems of her nearly four-year-old daughter. She complained in a letter to her mother: "Again my Anulka fell ill with the eruption of her side teeth, with pain like she has never had before, not only with constant fever but also with swelling of these places so bad that she can neither eat nor close her mouth"⁶⁹.

An interesting issue, casually reported on the pages of maternal letters, was that of travelling with children. Correspondence reveals mothers' concerns, preparations for travel and the circumstances in which they decided to engage in it. Preparing to travel with a child required a lot of attention, depending on the distance and weather conditions. The fears of taking a child on a long and uncertain journey are demonstrated by the careful behaviour of Karolina Teresa, who, despite a strong need for contact with her eldest daughter, left her under the care of trusted servants, while she travelled on her own. Taking a child

⁶⁷ 'mam w Bogu nadzieję, że jej się teraz prędzej ząbki pokażą' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 30 October 1729, p. 11.

⁶⁸ 'suplikuję W[aszej] Ks[iążęcej] M[ości] Matki Dobrodziejki o informację jeżeli ją mam już karmić, ponieważ wielki ma apetyt do jedzenia, a ja nie śmiem bez woli W[aszej] Ks[iążęcej] M[ości] Dobrodziejki, gdyż jeszcze ząbków niema' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Lipniszki, 17 March 1729, p. 25.

⁶⁹ 'ponownie Anulka moja na wyrznięcie ząbków kątnych tak ciężko zachorowała, jak przy żadnych wyjściu jeszcze takiego bólu nie miała, bo nie tylko w gorączce ustawicznej, ale też i z opuchnięciem tych miejsc tak ciężko, że ani jeść, ani ust zamknąć nie może' AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 2 November 1732, p. 105–106.

of only a few months of age on a journey in the uncertain weather of March seemed too risky. However, she instructed the servants to bring her daughter as soon as the weather cleared. She complained to her mother of her longing for her child, explaining it with overwhelming concern for the little girl, “because now I was afraid to take her with me with these unpleasant colds and it is truly a great mortification that I will not have her with me at this time”⁷⁰. Frequent trips to Vilnius meant that such separations were to become a recurring dilemma for her. Not wanting to put her daughter in danger, she repeatedly decided to leave her at the estate, under the care of trusted people. In letters to her mother, she always emphasized that every separation from the girl was a difficult period for her, although, “By the grace of God my Anulka is healthy [...] I am most troubled by the fact that I cannot bring her here, because of the very bad roads and the severe cold, which still persist in this country”⁷¹. She also decided against taking her daughter on the road, as it was known that the area through which she would travel might be affected by an epidemic. Karolina Teresa was paying attention to avoid such situations, always carefully questioning people about the current situation in nearby settlements. When, in her opinion, the threat was too great, she would leave her daughter in the care of her servants. In September 1729 she even decided to return alone to the estate in Lipniski, which was her permanent place of residence. She reported to her mother: “My Anulka is healthy by the grace of God, but I had to leave her in Vilnius, as I was afraid to transport her in these unhealthy times”⁷². She also tried to use every opportunity to present her children to her closest family when travelling. It was with much regret that she had to deny herself this pleasure, for instance when accompanying her husband in local councils. Each time she regretfully informed her mother that, although she would appear in the area, she would not be able to take the youngest members of the family with her, although “probably both of the older children could bring greater consolation to your gracious heart than before, as they now have more understanding and are genuinely funny”⁷³.

⁷⁰ ‘gdyż teraz tymi tak przykrymi zimnami bałam się jej z sobą brać, i to jest prawdziwie z wielkim moim umartwieniem, że tymi czasami mieć jej przy sobie nie będę’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, [no location] 20 March 1729, p. 33.

⁷¹ ‘Anulka moja z łaski bożej zdrowa [...] mię niezmiernie turbuje to najbardziej, że tu jej sprowadzić nie mogę, dla złych bardzo dróg i ciężkiego zimna, które dotąd w tym trwają kraju’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 17 April 1729, p. 43.

⁷² ‘Anulka moja zdrowa z łaski Boskiej, musiałam [ją – A.P.] zostawić w Wilnie, bojąc się przewozić ją w te czasy niezdrowe’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part II), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Lipniski, 29 March 1729, p. 112.

⁷³ ‘zapewne obie starsze już by większą konsolację mogły przynieść łaskawemu sercu W[aszej] Ks[iążęcej] M[oiści] Matki Dobrodziejki niż przedtem, kiedy już są lepszego rozeznania i srodze zabawne’ AGAD, AR section V, no.13898 (part III), Karolina Teresa Sapieha, née Radziwiłł to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszko, Vilnius, 13 July 1732, p. 64.

Conclusion

The issues related to early motherhood in the circles of wealthy nobility and magnates constitute an extremely complex research topic. Preparations for the appearance of children, the period of pregnancy itself, the effort of bringing a child into the world, and the related health issues in the postpartum period changed the way women functioned, influenced their marital relations and contacts with those closest to them. These problems should be analysed in a broader context, as this phenomenon was one of mentality, the ways of fulfilling the socially accepted role of wife and mother, of dealing with new problems and difficulties, of building relations with newborn children. However, motherhood was also a part of the mental sphere: coping with the pressure of the social environment that expected a quickly growing family and, at the same time, also with the expectations of the husband, who counted on securing the line of succession for his estate. The period of pregnancy–waiting for a child–exacerbated problems of a physical nature. Overwhelming weakness, health problems, and the necessity to give up former activities affected women from wealthy families to a varying degree. There were also different ways of coping with the new situation. The fear of losing a child, along with copious advice and recommendations from friends and family, shaped the mental condition of young mothers. The constant search for the best solution, fear of acting independently, and seeking acceptance for decisions from the medical community or other women, shaped the condition of the mother. These elements were complemented by her coping with the necessity to change current habits when adopting a new role. While this article has outlined a wide array of problems, it has likewise suggested the enormous research potential of the discussed phenomenon.

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