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## Sources for studying the position of widows in noble families and society in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. An outline of the problem and research questions\*\*

### Abstract

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, women played a significant role in both family and social life. An important position was occupied by widows, who – protected by privileges and adequate financial security – had a great impact on the creation of contemporary reality. According to law, in their childhood and early youth, young women were dependent on their fathers or guardians. Once wives, they had to consider opinions of their husbands, who could constrain them in making independent decisions. Only widowhood gave women the opportunity to change their legal and financial status and allowed them to decide about their own fate, manage their family's policy, undertake economic initiatives, as well as to participate in public, cultural and social life, also by fulfilling the role of a patroness. The position of widows in the family and noble society in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth can be studied based on a variety of sources. Ego-documents should be considered an exceptionally valuable kind of material where the authors could express their thoughts freely, write frankly about their problems, feelings, troubles and joys of everyday life, and present to the world their experiences and perceptions of reality.

**Keywords:** widow, ego-document, prenuptial agreement, life agreement, will, correspondence

**Słowa kluczowe:** wdowa, ego-dokument, interczyza przedślubna, umowa na dożywocie, testament, korespondencja

A woman in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had two life paths to choose from: secular or monastic. When she decided to choose the former, the

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contemporary ideal obliged her to find fulfillment as either a chaste maiden, a devoted and faithful wife, a loving mother, or a thrifty and humble widow<sup>1</sup>. Widowhood allowed women to regain almost full financial and legal capacity and meant a change of their social status, allowing them to decide about their own fate, manage the politics of their families, undertake economic initiatives, and participate in public, cultural and social life, also in the role of a patronesses.

The position of a widow in family and society can be analysed based on various sources, but ego-documents deserve particular attention. They are private handwritten texts such as letters, wills, memoirs, prayer books, supplications, *silvae rerum*, and life stories<sup>2</sup>. Their authors express their thoughts straightforwardly and wrote about their problems, feelings, worries, and joys of everyday life. Ego-documents can therefore be used as a source of information to study mentality but can also be considered “a tool tailored for the needs of anthropologised history”<sup>3</sup>. A researcher analysing a text in terms of ego-documentation should seek to pay attention to the circumstances of its creation and consider whether it is not limited by a particular convention, for instance special terminology, form, or structure. Thus, the history of Polish-Lithuanian widows can be recounted not only by means of the abovementioned archival materials, but also based on other documents such as prenuptial agreements, life agreements, manifestations related to particular properties, and financial registers. However, it should be clearly emphasized that such documents, which are primarily legal and official in nature, differ from one another, as they stem from different legal systems of the Commonwealth: the law of the Crown, Lithuania, Volhynia; the law applicable to the area of the Royal Prussia, as well as canon law.

## Prenuptial agreements and life agreements

Noble widows took high positions in both their families and the society of the Commonwealth, which was largely determined by their legal and financial freedom. For this reason—as mentioned before—prenuptial agreements, life agreements, complaints, and protestations allow one to learn about these women's lives. These sources provide answers to many important questions: What property rights were women entitled to based on prenuptial agreements? What rules dictated the process of taking over a husband's property by a wife and paying off his debts? Which part of the inheritance went to a widow, to her

<sup>1</sup> U. Kicińska, 2013/4, p. 135; I. Pugacewicz, 2008, p. 247–260.

<sup>2</sup> See S. Roszak, 2013, p. 27–42. The author suggests that in different European countries different terms referring to private manuscripts were used: private space writings, self-description, or first person writings. With time, the term „ego-documents” became more and more common. It was coined by a Dutch historian, Jacob (Jacques) Presser. Recently, many source editions of egodocuments have been published. See: J. Rafałowiczówna, 2000; P. Klint, 2008; P. Klint, 2011; J. Dygdała, 2013; U. Augustyniak, 2014; P. Klint, K. Rzemieniecki, J. Węglorz, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, 2015, p. 14. See also S. Roszak, 2012, p. 15–29.

children, and to her stepchildren? Did a widow have to dispute with her late husband's family and relatives to keep the property?

These questions arise given that the material status of Polish-Lithuanian noblewomen changed depending on their age and social position. First, as maidens, they were cared for by their fathers or legal guardians. Later, as wives, they were dependent on their husbands, who could constrain their decisions. Only during widowhood were they able to act with legal and financial freedom, which was largely influenced by decisions taken on their betrothal day<sup>4</sup>. For a widow, her husband's death was a moment of a symbolic assumption of his place in the family, which, in principle, was associated with crossing the barrier and breaking the limitations resulting from her gender.

The widow's freedom was determined by the amount of dowry (*dos*), which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries included money (sometimes also jewellery) constituting an inherited part of her mother's and father's properties. Generally, a dowry was settled on a daughter's wedding day but was also sometimes included in her father's will. The amount of dowry was not determined by law but depended on the wealth and position of a girl's family<sup>5</sup>. In the period under study, middle class nobility (*szlachta*) settled dowries of a dozen or tens of thousands Polish zlotys, whereas amongst magnates the amount was much higher, ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of Polish zlotys. Customarily, magnatesses were provided with dowries of about 200,000 or 300,000 Polish zlotys including cash, but usually not more than 100,000 Polish zlotys. A dowry of 500,000 was considered exceptionally large. While there were larger dowries, however, they were extremely rare<sup>6</sup>. In 1674, Anna Franciszka née Gnińska (d. 1704) received a dowry of 200,000 Polish zlotys from her parents, Jan Gniński (d. 1685) and Dorota Jaskólska (d. 1682). In such circumstances, her husband-to-be, Marcin Zdzisław Zamoyski (d. 1689), the deputy pantler of the Płoskirów powiat, in their prenuptial agreement agreed to ensure for his future wife an *oprawa* (insurance) of 100,000 Polish zlotys and another 100,000 Polish zlotys of *przywianek* (dower)<sup>7</sup>.

The financial status of a widow was also determined by a *wyprawa* (*expeditio*), which included items and other movable properties for her private use. This specific kind of dowry, which usually incorporated clothes, jewellery, dinnerware or other objects of everyday use, was listed in separate registers accompanied by information about their value. The *wyprawa* was usually given on the second day after the wedding<sup>8</sup>. A woman's property brought into the marriage was protected by a *wiano*, the amount of money usually equal

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Pielas, 2011, p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Kuchta, 2008, p. 261–267; K. Sulej, 2011, p. 78; J. Pielas, 2011, p. 173–174; I. Kulesza-Woroniecka, 2002, p. 23; W. Zielecka, 2010, p. 133–142; A. Penkała, 2016, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. T. Zielińska, 1989, p. 97–98; B. Popiołek, 2009, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Prenuptial agreement of Anna née Gnińska and Marcin Zamoyski, signed in Warsaw on 5 March 1674, the Central Archives of Historical Records (hereinafter: AGAD), the Zamoyski Archives, call no. 455, p. 17–19.

<sup>8</sup> J. Kuchta, 2008, p. 261–267; K. Sulej, 2011, pp. 81–82; M. Lubczyński, 2001, p. 149. See also T. Nowak, 2002, p. 149–157.

to the amount of her dowry. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the so-called *oprawa* was another common practice. It functioned as a security of both *wiano* and dowry and was executed in two ways: a husband pawned his real estate (*modo reformatio*) and assigned a *przywianek* (*dotalitium*) of the same amount. The *oprawa* was a specified sum of money pawned on all movable and immovable assets or their part or without specifying any amount, with its terms and conditions included in a prenuptial agreement<sup>9</sup>. For instance, Jan Romer from Chyszów decided on this kind of contract, and in this way secured his future wife for her potential widowhood. Upon signing the prenuptial agreement with Anna, the daughter of Stanisław Samuel (d. 1679), the master of the hunt of the Podlaski powiat, and Apolnara née Kalinowska from Zakliczyn, Romer secured his future wife's dowry worth of 30,000 Polish zlotys with 60,000 Polish zlotys, which he pawned on his "inherited lands"<sup>10</sup>. Also, the future of Anna née Tarło (d. 1733), the daughter of Stanisław Tarło (d. 1705), the voivode of Lublin, and Teresa née Dunin-Borkowska (d. 1723), was secured in the same way. On 15 December 1703, "an irrevocable wedding contract" was signed on her behalf with a widower, Franciszek Cetner (d. 1732), the starosta of Kamionka. According to the agreement, the wedding was planned for "the last days of the Shrovetide" of 1704, and the bride was assigned a dowry of 100,000 Polish zlotys, which her parents obliged to pay back within a year. The agreement said that the starosta of Kamionka was obliged to the following: "whatever [...] God gives, whether cash, jewellery or silverware of his wife," and he was to pawn that "in recompensam" on his lands and real estates<sup>11</sup>. Another couple, Petronela née Dederkał and Antoni Wyszpolski, the cup bearer of Mozyrz, is worth mentioning here. They signed their prenuptial agreement in August 1722, according to which the lady's dowry was 2,000 Polish zlotys (1,500 zlotys in cash and 500 zlotys in jewellery), which was subsequently pawned by the groom on his lands and real estates, assigning his future wife 4,000 Polish zlotys<sup>12</sup>.

A life agreement (*advitalitium*) was a special security for the time of widowhood, both for the woman and the man. It included all movable and immovable properties and money in the possession of the young couple on their wedding day, as well as everything they would gain in the future. It was possible to annul a life agreement in case of its abuse or if the heirs were able to prove malpractice. Moreover, *advitalitium* was revoked upon the next marriage of a widow or a widower. This was particularly beneficial for a wife as it meant that in case of her husband's death, she was granted lifetime management of all his properties, including real estate, which oftentimes was the

<sup>9</sup> J. Kuchta, 2008, p. 82; S. Płaza, 1997, p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> Prenuptial agreement between Jan Romer and Anna Kalinowska, signed on 25 April 1697, the Stefanyk National Science Library in Lviv (hereinafter: LNNBU). Manuscript Department, collection (fond) 91, the Radziwińscy Archives (hereinafter: ARadzim) ms. 274. *Inter-cyzy, dożywocia i zapisy między małżonkami. 1701–1771*, p. 10–10v.

<sup>11</sup> The Central State Archives of Ukraine in Lviv, fond 181, op. 2 spr. 2797, p. 3–3v.

<sup>12</sup> Prenuptial agreement of Petronela née Dederkał and Antoni Wyszpolski, signed on 16 August 1722, LNNBU, fond 91, ARadzim ms. 274, p. 164–164v.

reason for many disputes within families, especially those with sons. A Crown land (*królewszczyzna*) was additional security for a widow<sup>13</sup>. It is worthy to note that from the latter half of the seventeenth century, *advitalitium* was drawn up before the second Sunday after the wedding day. Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century, life agreements were signed two to six weeks after the wedding, and at times the signing was prolonged to as late as 12 weeks afterward<sup>14</sup>. For example, in 1704 Jerzy Kazimierz Czerwiński and Teresa née Chołhańska signed their life agreement in Łuck. The document secured the future of both in case of widowhood; the groom stated that should he die first, his wife will take over all his things, both movable and immovable, receive them for “free use” and will be allowed to “use them at her best profit.” Similarly, the bride stated that “if God were to call [her–U. K.] into the other world”, her widowed husband would have the right to use all movable properties owned by her<sup>15</sup>. Antoni Dembiński (d. 1730), the master of the hunt of Kraków, and Teresa née Lipska, the daughter of the starosta of Sandomierz, decided on a quick signing of their life agreement. They obliged to draw up the document “one week after the wedding at the latest”<sup>16</sup>.

## Wills

The financial position of a widow and the family relationships of testators are described in another kind of archival material, namely wills or testaments. In almost each will, a dying husband assigned a certain part of his property, mostly movable, for his wife and indicated a guardian, or guardians, for her and their offspring. As far as wills are concerned, it is worth noting that, at least under the Chełmno law, it was not possible to dispose of real estate with them. Hence, alongside wills, acts called ordination of goods were created. Sometimes they were drawn up together with wills. It was in ordinances that the dying person divided the property, while in wills only sums and movables were divided. In both, it was possible to arrange for childcare. Therefore, the ordination was aimed at preventing the division of family goods, ensuring their inalienability and securing the family's fortune against fragmentation, which could occur if the woman took it over and then entered into another marriage. In addition, movable property (jewels, household utensils, capitals, shares and library collections) as well as immovable property (palaces, manors, arable lands and urban areas with buildings) were understood as the exclusive property of the

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. Koczarska, 1975, p. 55–63, 157–183; S. Płaza, 1997, p. 245–246; J. Kuchta, 2008, p. 8, p. 261–267; K. Sulej, 2011, p. 83–85; J. Pielas, 2011, p. 174; idem, 2001, p. 127–136; J. Długosz, K. Stasiewicz, 1988, p. 159–163. See also E. Kulik, 2007, p. 47–114; U. Kicińska, 2013, p. 182–200; eadem, 2013(2014), p. 266–283.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. Penkała, 2016, p. 118; T. Zielińska, 1989, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup> Life agreement between Jerzy Kazimierz Czerwiński and Teresa Czerwińska, signed in Łuck on 1 July 1704, LNNBU, fond 91, ARadzim ms. 274, p. 24-k. 24v.

<sup>16</sup> The Ossoliński National Institute Library (hereinafter: BZNiO), the Wodziccy of Kościelniki Archives (hereinafter: AWzK), ms. 11612/III, p. 7–8. See: S. Cynarski and A. Falniowska-Gradowska, 1990, p. 220.

ordinate, and not as a substitution of the family<sup>17</sup>. These documents allow one to find answers to the following key questions: What exactly was left for a widow, other members of the family, and serving staff? Was any offspring disinherited and if yes, why? What was the financial status of a woman reaching the last stage of her life?

Property inheritance by children as well as family relationships are particularly interesting aspects of the topic that can be discovered by reading wills, which gave the dying person the last possibility to speak publicly about their family. Especially noteworthy are the situations where sons or daughters committed shameful behaviour towards their parents, which resulted in their disinheritance and deprivation of a possibility to take care of their widowed mother and fatherless siblings. This happened in Andrzej Skarszewski's (d. 1687/94) family. In 1678, while writing his last will, he mentioned all the misbehaviours of his son Krzysztof (d. 1717/19). In this way, he wanted to protect his wife and his other children in the future. The testator pointed out that his son, born of his marriage to Zofia née Szczodrowska, not only abused his parents but also squandered about 9,000 Polish zlotys, which he had received from them, burdening "the unfortunate parents" with continuous "crimes and insufferable grudges". Hence, the dying father clearly indicated that after his death, Krzysztof was to take care neither of his mother nor his younger siblings. It appears that the father's opinion of his firstborn was very low, given his own words that the boy was "a bad and malevolent man with this cunning and treacherous head of his"<sup>18</sup>.

One of the purposes of a will was to settle debts between spouses. To that end, the document included information on securing a widow with a life agreement. This was the idea of Piotr Wodzicki from Granów (d. 1770), the deputy cupbearer of Kraków, who indicated in his will that his wife, Konstancja from Dębno (d. 1784), "should use the lands and estates of Złota and Poręбка [settled-U. K.] according to the life agreement"<sup>19</sup>. Sometimes, a widow could not take anything allowed to her in the life agreement since everything had been squandered by her irresponsible husband. Such tragic fate fell upon Marianna from Rozwadów (d. 1708), the wife of Mikołaj Siciński from Sitno (d. 1700), the standard bearer of Parnawa. In her testament, the widow complained that her husband had left her 40,000 Polish zlotys of *advitalitium* in his will, but she had no proof that he had squandered it all since "all munimenta and documents were burned during the Swedish incursion"<sup>20</sup>.

Wills are an excellent source that allows one to track the fate and responsibilities of wives after their husbands' death. These documents include

<sup>17</sup> T. Zielińska, 1977, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> The last will of Andrzej Skarszewski written on 26 June 1678, [in:] P. Klint, 2015, p. 50–51.

<sup>19</sup> The last will of Piotr Wodzicki of Granów, the deputy cupbearer of Kraków, written in 1770, BZNiO, AWzK, call no. 11612/III, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> The last will of Marianna Sicińska of Rozwadów, the wife of the standard bearer of Parnawa, the Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine in Kyiv, fond 747, op. 1, no. 4a, p. 2.

information not only about the locations and ways of organising burials but also about the care to be provided for the orphaned children, their upbringing, education and financial future through a good and efficient property management. In 1765, the aforementioned Konstancja Wodzicka from Dębno was given orders for childcare. Her husband Piotr indicated in his will that his wife had to “give the children the best education, which they will need for the greater glory of God and their proper full consolation.” Moreover, the dying husband pointed out that one of his sons, Jan Kanty, should be “individually” taken care of as he had joined the clergy and, as his father thought, “with the grace of God, he can be an ornament and help” to their family. In addition, Konstancja Wodzicka was, according to her husband’s will, to take care of the education of their sons and pay 100 red zlotys to their daughter, who was a nun of the Order of the Holy Sacrament and, as the dying father mentioned, “never has she created any opportunity for aversion towards her.” Additionally, the widow was to take care of the husband’s clothes and “jewellery and silverware, both table credenza and cast, which [...] she should include in a personal register and keep for the children or divide amongst them so that nobody shall suffer any harm in this respect”<sup>21</sup>.

In the case of especially Catholic women, wills also allow one to take a closer look at the piety and spiritual culture of noble widows due to their private nature and elements that allow one to understand the authors’ beliefs and participation in the church community, including membership in religious sisterhoods, supporting church institutions or practicing compassion. There are other documents supplementary to these sources, especially with regards to religious and charity initiatives undertaken by women. They include preserved foundation records, sales registers, disclaimers of certain properties, inventories of private and monastic movable properties, powers of attorney, contracts, and settlement agreements. Noteworthy is the fact that these archival materials describe most extensively the direct support provided by widows to selected congregations, which was usually reflected in the foundation acts of chosen monasteries or church institutions. Hence, the analysis of these archival materials allows one to find answers to the following other important questions: Did religion, faith and teachings of the Catholic Church stemming from the Council of Trent exert any substantial influence on the mentality and religious attitudes of widows? Did the group of women under study, given their position, approach the issue of religious values individuals? Can the increased number of religious practices and pious foundations be a real indicator of actual religiosity of women, or rather a manifestation of a desired role model created by the Church and society? Obviously, these elements cannot be considered in the same way in the context of every religion. One should remember the differences in piety between Catholics, Protestants and the Orthodox.

The analysis of wills, which apart from their legal nature are also parenetic sources, demonstrates that widows were persistent in their faith, worshipped

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<sup>21</sup> The last will of Piotr Wodzicki of Granów ..., p. 29–30.

God, Mary, Jesus and patron saints, participated in religious services and pilgrimages, belonged to religious sisterhoods, followed the ten commandments, and introduced different ascetic practices (mortification, fasting, self-discipline) into their lives. This religious fervour of widows can be explained by the fact that “the suffering after losing a loved one [...] required a spiritual foundation, [and] religion and [...] [pious activities–U. K.] allowed them to fill their world again and find the motivation [and–U. K.] the basis for further action”<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, by following such actions, widows prepared themselves for a good death and oftentimes asked to be buried next to their husbands. Such was the wish of Katarzyna née Bojanowska, the wife of the late Wojciech Radowicki. In 1685, she requested “to have her body buried, awaiting the Last Judgement Day [...], in the grave next to [her–U. K.] husband [...] at the Bernardines in Kościan”<sup>23</sup>. Anna née Kunińska (d. 1689/90), the wife of Jan Łącki and later of Krzysztof Marszewski, had a similar wish. In 1689, she implored to have her “sinful body” buried next to that of her second husband at a Jesuit church in Poznań, where “[her–U. K.] late husband [...], God rest his soul, lies.” The funeral, in accordance with the last wish of the *moribundus*, was to be prepared “with no secular splendour”<sup>24</sup>. Also, she requested to have “estimated” and sell “the bowl and the silver and gold-plated ewer”, and spend half of the money on masses for her soul and the other half on masses for her husband’s soul. At times, it happened that pious widows, who were members of religious confraternities, declared their wish to be buried in a mass grave of the sisterhood they belonged to. Such was the dying wish of Anna Eufemia Denhoff (d. 1663), the wife of the starosta of Wieluń. She asked to be buried in “a gray woolen” tunic “of saint Francis [...] and his belt” for, as she pointed out, she belonged to his sisterhood. Additionally, the dying woman requested to be accompanied with a scapular of the Blessed Virgin Mary and a rosary<sup>25</sup>.

## Correspondence

As mentioned above, already on their wedding day the law gave security to women in case of potential widowhood. Thus, they were properly financially prepared for this occasion well in advance. However, psychologically, mentally and emotionally, this looked far worse, as we can learn from letters sent by women after their husbands’ death. In their epistles, the mourning ladies expressed their regrets, worries and fears of living alone, as well as their looming helplessness and loneliness. Correspondence is an excellent source portraying relationships within families, with the assumption, however, that love, respect

<sup>22</sup> A. Jakuboszczak, 2010, p. 266.

<sup>23</sup> See the last will of the widow Katarzyna née Bojanowska, the wife of the late Wojciech Radowicki, 3 December 1685, [in:] P. Klint, 2015, p. 168.

<sup>24</sup> See the last will of the widow Anna née Kunińska, *primo voto* Łącka, *secundo voto* Marszewska, 5 March 1689, [in:] P. Klint, 2015, p. 234.

<sup>25</sup> The last will of Anna Eufemia Denhoff, signed in Kruszyna on 18 October 1654, AGAD, the Radziwiłł Archives (hereinafter: AR) XI, call no. 104, p. 27.



and other feelings (sometimes a tad colder) which the spouses had for each other translated to commemoration after one of them died. For the most part, letters present the way the spouses addressed each other, expressed their love and intimacy, behaved towards their offspring and stepchildren—they also reveal the children's attitude towards their parents and stepparents—and fought for or negotiated the management of their households and all family lands, real estate and other properties. In addition, letters give answers to some more complex questions, which can be considered crucial in the context of a widowed woman: How did a widow behave after her husband's death? How did she express her grief after his passing away? Did she share her grief with other people? How did she cope with preparations of the funeral? How was she consoled by received letters of condolences? How did she deal with the trauma suffered after her husband's demise? How did she (if ever) cope with her mourning?

For a woman, the reality that followed losing her husband often became extremely harsh, especially when the death happened unexpectedly. Traumatic feelings after her husband's demise ripped apart Teofila Ludwika née Zasławska-Ostrogaska *secundo voto* Lubomirska (d. 1709), the wife of the grand marshal of the Crown. Her first husband was Dymitr Jerzy Wiśniowiecki, the castellan of Kraków, who died on 28 July 1682 in Lublin. After his death, Teofila Ludwika wrote to Waclaw Leszczyński, the Podlaski voivode, words full of grief, "heavy hand of God touched me, when it took away the only consolation of my heart and my life, and left sorrow, worries and troubles in its stead"<sup>26</sup>. Another lady, Anna Dolska née Chodorowska *primo voto* Wiśniowiecka (d. 1711), complained about an extremely grim fate as "God brought [...] deep grief and loneliness due to my husband's leaving this world." She wrote about this one day after the death of her second husband, Jan Karol, the grand marshal of Lithuania, to her protector, Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł (d. 1719)<sup>27</sup>.

Moreover, letters served as a specific kind of supplication, where—as indicated by Bożena Popiołek—"heaps of elaborate ceremonial and empty words hid real goals and hopes of both interconnected sides"<sup>28</sup>. In such epistles, the supplicating side—a client (secular or clerical)—took on a servile position towards the addressee characterised by exaggerated kindness and sublime titles. This type of behaviour was applied mainly towards those women (wives and widows) whose husbands occupied high offices in the country. The pleading counted on favour and care provided by magnatesses, who were supposed to influence their husbands in dealing with certain matters or nudge the cogs of their contacts-and-ties machine by themselves. For this reason, this kind of material is extremely helpful mainly in tracing patronage relationships and analysing the importance of widows acting as entertainers and caretakers of

<sup>26</sup> Teofila Ludwika Lubomirska née Zasławska-Ostrogaska *primo voto* Wiśniowiecka to Waclaw Leszczyński, the Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Science, call no. 1944/c, Jaworowo, 22 August 1682, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Dolska née Chodorowska *primo voto* Wiśniowiecka to Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł, AGAD, AR V, call no. 3129, Karolin 30 April 1695, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> B. Popiołek, 2011, p. 155; eadem, 2018, p. 207.

the social life in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In this type of correspondence, one can find answers to some more interesting questions: What did cliential ties between people from the same and different social circles look like? What were the usual supplications? What was the way of expressing respect towards a benefactor or benefactress? How long did the care take—did it finish with the death of a patron or patroness, or was it perhaps continued by a widow or widower? Did widowed wealthy noblewomen and magnatesses also have patrons whose favours they sought to gain? The analysis of the epistolographic material indicates that, although a woman—whether a magnatess or a poorer noblewoman—entered widowhood, each of them tried to maintain a good relationship with their patrons, established when their husbands were still alive. One letter, written by Anna Katarzyna née Sanguszko (d. 1747), the wife of the grand chancellor of Lithuania, is a good example of such behaviour. Only two days after the death of her husband, Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł (d. 2 August 1719), she wrote to Józef Wandalin Mniszech (d. 1747), the grand marshal of the Crown, asking him for further care, complaining at the same time that “grand sorrow, caused by the fatal end of my Husband’s life [...], has happened not only to me but also immersed my whole orphaned Home in the currents of abundant tears”<sup>29</sup>.

The position of widows in families and the society of the Commonwealth can also be studied based on economic letters, which constitute excellent material for the analysis of their public and economic activities, especially the way of managing their family property. Some of these document the cooperation between a landlady and her staff—folwark officials, leaseholders, tenants and merchants—which demonstrates all sorts of economic endeavours undertaken by widows. Moreover, such letters allow one to pose the following additional questions: What did the entrepreneurship and thriftiness of Polish-Lithuanian noble widows look like? Did any branch of the economy (agriculture, industry, trade) generate greater interest among women? What attitude did landladies have towards their administrators, counterparties and subordinates? What kind of goods were sold and bought by landladies?

There are many widows who were excellent managers of their lands and real estate and were considered entertainers of contemporary cultural and social life. Powerful magnatesses included Anna Franciszka Zamoyska née Gnińska (d. 1704), the wife of the Grand treasurer of the Crown; Elżbieta Sieniawska née Lubomirska (d. 1729), the wife of the castellan of Kraków; Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł née Sanguszko (d. 1746), the wife of the Grand chancellor of Lithuania; Barbara Urszula Sanguszko née Dunin (d. 1791), the wife of the marshal of Lithuania; Anna Paulina Jabłonowska née Sapieha (d. 1800), the wife of the voivode of Braclaw (she was also the manager of Kock and Siemiatycze and the author of *General Laws for Lands of My Administrators*, written in 1785<sup>30</sup>);

<sup>29</sup> Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł née Sanguszko to Józef Wandalin Mniszech, BZNIo, call no. 2663/II, Biała, 4 August 1719, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> See Anna Paulina Jabłonowska née Sapieha, *Ustawy powszechne dla dóbr moich rządzców. W drukarni pokojowej siemiatyckiej roku 1784*, AGAD S.D. II 1496. See also G. Perczyńska,

and originating from poorer nobility, Katarzyna Polanowska, the wife of the hunter of Bełżec; to only name a few. In 1744-1785, Katarzyna Polanowska ran an economic journal that included a detailed and very interesting register of livestock and objects of everyday use, necessary for proper and everyday functioning of her farm<sup>31</sup>. Konstancja Denhoff née Słuszko (d. 1723) is another example of a prominent patroness and excellent manager. Her first husband Władysław died in 1683, and her second husband, Władysław's cousin and the voivode of Malbork, passed away in 1693. Konstancja received letters of economic nature from Antoni Bieniakowski, one of the administrators of her estates, who was also responsible for purchasing all kinds of goods for her. Oftentimes, however, he had problems with delivering them due to difficult weather conditions. Such situation occurred in February 1713, when "great ice" and "shameful blockages," which "appeared thickly," resulted in his "great misfortune [...] [and he could not-U. K.] cross the land" and worried that he would not deliver the goods on time<sup>32</sup>. Konstancja Denhoff née Słuszko also received many letters of supplications. In one of such epistles, her subordinates, devastated and ruined by a flood, pleaded the patroness to "look at them with her merciful eyes and [...] embrace [them-U. K.], the poor and miserable, with her wings of grace." Due to bad weather conditions, they could not gather enough crops and had problems with paying 3,000 Polish zlotys of rent. They pleaded for Konstancja's understanding and mercy, since due to the flood and losing the crops (mainly winter grain) and vegetables, they suffered great poverty and famine: "every other man has no bread at his home"<sup>33</sup>.

## Conclusion

In summary, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth widowed noblewomen with adequate legal and financial security and specific character traits consciously abandoned the idea of remarrying and focused on taking care of their own business by raising and educating their children, expanding their family property, and patronizing charity ventures. For this reason alone, the topic of widows and widowhood is an important and interesting one for research. Nevertheless, to understand it properly—mainly in legal, financial and mentality terms—it is necessary to select an appropriate category of sources. This article, however, covers only a tiny fraction of the subject. We can certainly categorise the archival materials used here as personal sources of an ego-documentary

2009, p. 43–44; Ł. Charewiczowa, 2002, p. 30. See also W. Karkucińska, 2000; U. Kicińska, 2015, p. 293–305; eadem, 2016, p. 44–56; eadem, 2016, p. 61–74; eadem, 2018, p. 253–267; eadem, 2015, p. 279–290.

<sup>31</sup> *Książka, czyli konnotata różnych domowych interesów jako to zapłaty i odzienia czeladzi dworskiej i inne rzeczy gospodarskie dla pamięci dnia 23 Aprilis 1744 do zażywania W. J. M. Pani Katarzyny Polanowskiej, łowczyni bełskiej sprawiona*, BZNiO call no. 7928/1.

<sup>32</sup> Antoni Bieniakowski to Konstancja Denhoff née Słuszko, the Princes Czartoryski Library (hereinafter: BCz) call no. 5763, p. l. 27 February 1713, p. 235–236; idem to eadem, BCz, call no. 5763, p. l. 25 July 1714, p. 247.

<sup>33</sup> BCz ms. 11519, n. pag.

nature, as they not only reflect the personal interests and emotions of their authors but also show their experiences as well as preceptions and creations of reality.

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