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## Political activity of widows as an example of shaping cliental dependencies in the second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Women played a significant role in the social life of old Poland. Widows, protected by privileges and secured with property ownership, had a solid influence on the formation of cliental ties. Their role took on a dual character in this process, since they acted as both guardians of their clients and supplicants appealing to their own patrons for protection in pursuing or settling important matters for themselves, their relatives or family. The second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the ascent of a group of influential widows, who were eager to engage in state affairs, wanting to gain power and prestige for members of their family.*

**Key words:** *patronage – clientelism – women’s patronage – customer relations – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – 17<sup>th</sup> century – 18<sup>th</sup> century*

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In recent years, research on old Poland has been expanding and gaining in popularity. It has shown that women of that time played a significant role in social life, influencing the economy, culture, education, ecclesiastical matters and politics.<sup>2</sup> Widows, who were protected by privileges and secured with property ownership, had a real influence

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2 See Wanda KARKUCIŃSKA, *Anna z Sanguszków Radziwiłłowa (1676–1746). Działalność gospodarcza i mecenat*, Warszawa 2000; Agnieszka JAKUBOSZCZAK, *Sarmacka dama. Barbara Sanguszkowa (1718–1791) i jej salon towarzyski*, Poznań 2008; Urszula AUGUSTYNIAK (ed.), *Administracja i życie codzienne w dobrach Radziwiłłów XVI–XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 2009; Agnieszka SŁABY, *Rządzicha oleszycka. Dwór Elżbiety z Lubomirskich Sieniawskiej jako przykład patronatu kobiecego w czasach saskich*, Kraków 2014; Urszula KICIŃSKA, *Korespondencja jako źródło do badań aktywności gospodarczej kobiet w epoce saskiej*, in: Bożena Popiołek – Urszula Kicińska – Agnieszka Słaby (eds.), *Kobiece kręgi korespondencyjne w XVII–XIX wieku*, Warszawa – Bellerive-sur-Allier 2016, pp. 44–56; Jarosław PIETRZAK, *Księżna Dobrodziejka. Katarzyna z Sobieskich Radziwiłłowa (1634–1694)*, Warszawa 2016; Agata ROČKO – Magdalena GÓRSKA (eds.), *Słynne kobiety w Rzeczypospolitej XVIII wieku*, Warszawa, 2017.

on the formation of cliental ties. In this very process they adopted a dual standpoint:<sup>3</sup> on the one hand, they served as benefactors and guardians of their clients, and on the other, they supplicated to their own patrons, counting on protection and support in obtaining or arranging important matters for themselves, their relatives or families. Politics was another area where cliental relations were formed. This resulted from changes in standards of public life which took place during the reign of Augustus II, and had their roots in the increased political struggle of various magnate camps, unstable royal power and the presence of foreign troops in the Commonwealth due to the Northern War fought in the background.<sup>4</sup> This situation “contributed to a rapid flourishing of informal sociopolitical ties, which were to ensure not only material prosperity and participation in power, but also fundamental security criteria.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, in the Saxon Era, the process of shaping female patronage took on an extremely extensive character and was associated with the advancing position of women and their strong impact on the economic and political affairs of the country. The behind-the-scenes activity of old Polish ladies, in this case widows, provided them with many clients and friends who, in return for protection, declared their service and loyalty.<sup>6</sup>

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- 3 See Jacek PIELAS, *Wdowa-matka a kwestie majątkowe w rodzinach szlachty koronnej w XVII wieku*, in: *Spółeczeństwo staropolskie. Seria nowa. Tom III. Spółeczeństwo a rodzina*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 171–193; Joanna KUCHTA, *Pozycja majątkowa wdów z rodów szlacheckich w XVII–XVIII w.*, in: Cezary Kuklo (ed.), *Rodzina i gospodarstwo domowe na ziemiach polskich w XV–XX wieku. Struktury demograficzne, społeczne i gospodarcze*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 261–269; Agnieszka JAKUBOSZCZAK, *Wdowa i wdowieństwo w świetle XVIII-wiecznych tekstów religijnych*, *Nasza Przyszłość* 113, 2010, pp. 247–267; Alyson D. ALVAREZ, *A Widow's Will: Examining the Challenges of Widowhood in Early Modern England and America*, Dissertations, Theses, & Student Research, Department of History. Paper 57, 2013:5, URL: <[https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historydiss/57/?utm\\_source=digitalcommons.unl.edu%2Fhistorydiss%2F57&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historydiss/57/?utm_source=digitalcommons.unl.edu%2Fhistorydiss%2F57&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)> [accessed 10. 02. 2019].
- 4 W. Konopczyński is a pioneer among historians researching political activity of women in history, see Władysław KONOPCZYŃSKI, *Kiedy nami rządziły kobiety*, London 1960; Maria BOGUĆKA, *Gorsza płeć. Kobieta w dziejach Europy od antyku po wiek XX*, Warszawa 2005, p. 195; EADEM, *Białogłowa w dawnej Polsce. Kobieta w społeczeństwie polskim XVI–XVIII wieku na tle porównawczym*, Warszawa 1998, p. 2010. The author claims that from the middle of the seventeenth century women, mainly from the noble class, wished to have a greater influence on the public life of the country.
- 5 Bożena POPIOŁEK, *Najniższy podnózek, służa i więzień pański – klientalne listy proslawne czasów saskich*, *Krakowskie Studia Małopolskie* 16, 2011, p. 151; EADEM, *Między przestrzenią domową a wielką polityką. Aktywność publiczna kobiet w czasach saskich*, in: Teresa Kulak – Małgorzata Dajnowicz (eds.), *Drogi kobiet do polityki (na przestrzeni XVIII–XXI wieku)*, Wrocław 2016, p. 30; Jarosław PORAZIŃSKI, *Epiphania Poloniae. Orientacje i postawy polityczne szlachty polskiej w dobie wielkiej wojny północnej (1702–1710)*, Toruń 1999.
- 6 Cf. Bożena POPIOŁEK, *Dobrodziejki i klienci. Z dziejów patronatu kobiecego w czasach saskich*, in: Ewa Dubas-Urwanowicz – Jerzy Urwanowicz (eds.), *Patron i dwór. Magnateria Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 2006, p. 385. See also Agnieszka SŁABY, *Szlachcianki na politycznej scenie czasów saskich – polityka czy obrona interesów domowych?*, in: Anetta Głowacka-Penczyńska – Katarzyna Grysińska-Jarmuła – Monika Opiola-Cegiełka (eds.), *Wnuczki Pandory. Kobieta w społeczeństwie od starożytności do współczesności*, vol. 1, Bydgoszcz 2016, pp. 71–83. The author observes that women,

Political issues can be traced by means of various sources, which include numerous documents of an unequivocally official nature, for instance, diaries from the *Sejm*, constitutions, records and files from dietines (*sejmiki*), royal legacies, resolutions (*lauda*), or instructions of the members of the Diet (envoys). Letters belong to a special category of sources which have both an official and private form. They are full of important information which can help in an investigation of the political structures of that time. Correspondence, as a basic communication tool, played an extremely important role. In all organizational actions it served not only as a means of expressing opinions but also it was used to conduct consultations, give instructions and present adequate reports. Correspondence is thus a 'direct illustration' of the principles of power and its functioning within the extensive borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where the average bureaucratic-administrative structure and weakened central power were compensated for by the cliental systems of the senatorial elite.<sup>7</sup> Hence, a thorough analysis of correspondence material allows us to conclude that letters depict connections not only related to business, family, society, trade, and – within the context of the following discourse – politics, but they also provide an excellent, though seemingly exaggerated insight into the mentality of people living at the time, especially the representatives of the authorities and members of individual noble and magnate families cooperating with those who wielded power.<sup>8</sup>

Female patronage, as already noted, developed within state affairs. The phenomenon of the significant political revival of women that took place in the Saxon Era had first emerged one century before, during the activity of Queen Ludwika Maria (died 1667) and her court, and was continued by her successor Maria Kazimiera Sobieska (died 1716).<sup>9</sup> At

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despite their lack of official public function, frequently engaged in politics and were often as efficient as men. The attributes of power were out of their reach, but this nevertheless did not mean that they had fewer opportunities to appear in public life.

7 Cf. Wojciech TYGIELSKI, *Epistolografia staropolska jako źródło do badania mechanizmów politycznych*, *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 33, 1988, pp. 63–65, pp. 78–79. See also Anna CZARNIECKA, *Listy królowej Marii Kazimiery jako element kampanii politycznej w okresie bezkrólewia (1696–1697)*, *Studia Wilanowskie* 23, 2016, pp. 29–44; Antoni MAŁCZAK, *Rządzący i rządzeni. Władza i społeczeństwo w Europie wczesnonowożytnej*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 140–150; Sharon KETTERING, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France*, Oxford 1986, pp. 18–22.

8 Cf. J. PORAZINSKI, *Epiphania Poloniae*, pp. 9–10; B. POPIOŁEK, *Najniższy podnózek*, p. 155.

9 Cf. Urszula AUGUSTYNIAK, *Wazowie i „królowie rodacy”. Studium władzy królewskiej w Rzeczypospolitej XVII wieku*, Warszawa 1999; M. BOGUĆKA, *Gorsza pleć*, pp. 181–206; Maria BOGUĆKA, *Bona a rola dworu monarszego jako centrum kulturalno-obyczajowego (1518–1548)*, in: EADEM, *Człowiek i świat. Studia z dziejów kultury i mentalności XV–XVIII w.*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 50–62; Bożena POPIOŁEK, *Na dworze Marii Kazimiery*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, Historia CII*, 1992, pp. 82–88; Witold FILIPCZAK, *Elżbieta Sapieżyna na tle politycznej roli kobiet w czasie kampanii sejmowej z 1778*, in: Mariusz Malinowski (ed.), *Niebem i sercem okryta. Studia historyczne dedykowane dr Jolancie Malinowskiej*, Toruń 2003, p. 303; Tomasz GRALA, *O pozycji kobiet w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVII wieku ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ugody kiejdańskiej*, in: Agnieszka Jakuboszczak

the time, as Bożena Popiołek remarks, “*ladies quickly understood that political intrigues and court games were as dangerous as an intriguing activity, all the more so, for they could provide them with considerable importance and assets.*”<sup>10</sup> The political background was constructed mainly on the basis of mutual social and family ties, accompanied by cliental relations. Moreover, the acquisition of new, valuable supporters meant expanding the circles of allies.

Thus, the cultivation of cliental relations resulted in opportunities to gain political significance within a particular territory, in a province, or even throughout the entire country. For this reason, systems of mutual dependence became one of the goals in social relations, in which old Polish widows found themselves eagerly involved.<sup>11</sup> In the second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there appeared a certain group of influential widowed women. They were willing to engage in state affairs and prioritized two goals, namely obtaining certain ranks, promotions and offices for their relatives, and protecting their properties which were threatened with destruction and collapse brought on by soldiers plundering individual areas in connection with the Northern War fought in the background. These women became deeply involved in their husbands’ affairs. Frequently, they took over matters related to the economic activities of their family and quickly came to be the main managers. The experience accumulated throughout their marriage, numerous acquaintances and respect gained within society circles benefited them especially during their widowhood, when they became the main orchestrators of the family policy.

Women from elite circles acted mainly as “*initiators, participants and propagators of numerous political ventures*”, aiming at the promotion of their family members and their various interests. Thus, the scope of female concern with public affairs encompassed primarily safeguarding family interests and establishing proper relations with influential

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– Przemysław Matusiak (eds.), *Kulturowe wzorce a społeczna praktyka. Studia z dziejów kobiet*, Poznań 2012, pp. 88–89; Edward OPALIŃSKI, *Aktywność kobiet w życiu publicznym w czasach pierwszych Wazów*, in: Katarzyna Justyniarska-Chojak – Sylwia Konarska-Zimnicka (eds.), *Per mulierem... Kobieta w dawnej Polsce – w średniowieczu i w dobie staropolskiej*, Warszawa 2012, p. 241; Anna CZARNIECKA, *Królowa wdowa w polityce. Pozycja Marii Kazimiery po śmierci Jana III (1696–1697)*, in: Anna Kalinowska – Paweł Tyszka (eds.), *Maria Kazimiera Sobieska (1641–1716). W kręgu rodziny, polityki i kultury*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 149–165.

10 Bożena POPIOŁEK, *Kobiety świat w czasach Augusta II. Studia nad mentalnością kobiet z kręgów szlacheckich*, Kraków 2018<sup>2</sup>, pp. 331–332; EADEM, *Między przestrzenią domową*, p. 31; M. BOGUĆKA, *Białogłowa w dawnej Polsce*, pp. 208–212; Katarzyna KURAS, *Rola wybitnych kobiet w polityce w czasach panowania Augusta III Sasa*, in: K. Justyniarska-Chojak – S. Konarska-Zimnicka (eds.), *Per mulierem...*, p. 262.

11 Cf. Dorota WIŚNIEWSKA, *Dlaczego służby Augusta III interesowały się prywatną korespondencją Polek? Przyczynek do badań nad aktywnością polityczną kobiet w XVIII wieku*, in: Anna Obara-Pawłowska – Anna Miączewska – Dariusz Wróbel (eds.), *Kobieta niepoznana na przestrzeni dziejów*, Lublin 2017, p. 183; B. POPIOŁEK, *Najniższy podnózek*, p. 151.

friends.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, it was often wives and widows who participated in competition for vacancies, showing their ingenuity and ruthlessness,<sup>13</sup> and in consequence acquiring desired posts for their sons, stepsons or close relatives. One can agree with the opinion presented by Agnieszka Jakuboszczak that “*this nomination carousel accompanied women throughout their whole lives in a community so strongly attached to the hierarchy of dignity and grandeur.*”<sup>14</sup> The higher the position of the husband, the greater the declarations of absolute fidelity and loyalty, and the more urgent requests for protection were directed to their wives or widows. It was easier to reach the patroness herself than her husband, as he was usually absent and busy with public affairs.<sup>15</sup>

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Józef Wandalin Mniszech (died 1747)<sup>16</sup> and his second wife, Konstancja née Tarło (died 1746), enjoyed great respect and appreciation amongst the nobility. Although Mniszech, as Grand Crown Marshal, exerted influence over most political affairs of that time, it was his wife who accepted requests for dealing with various issues, acquiring offices, and obtaining care and protection. This is what Franciszek Cetner (died 1732)<sup>17</sup> did when he wanted to take over the *starostwo* of Bełz, and lacking the courage to ask Mniszech directly on so many occasions, used Konstancja to settle his case, counting on the fact that her “*grace*” would “*make things easier.*”<sup>18</sup> Antoni

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- 12 Cf. M. BOGUĆKA, *Białogłowa w dawnej Polsce*, p. 220; A. SŁABY, *Szlachcianki na politycznej scenie*, p. 78.
- 13 Cf. K. KURAS, *Rola wybitnych kobiet w polityce*, p. 266; Danuta GARBUSIŃSKA, „*Niewieście rządy*” w *świecie satyry i pism politycznych z czasów Jana III*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, Historia* 102, 1992, pp. 75–81.
- 14 Agnieszka JAKUBOSZCZAK, *Rodzina i rodzinność szlachcianek wielkopolskich w XVIII wieku. Perspektywa kobieca*, Poznań 2016, p. 86.
- 15 Agnieszka JAKUBOSZCZAK, *Aktywność polityczna wielkopolskich szlachcianek w XVIII wieku*, in: T. Kulak – M. Dajnowicz (eds.), *Drogi kobiet do polityki*, p. 46; B. POPIOŁEK, *Między przestrzenią domową*, p. 40; Anna PENKAŁA, *Szlacheckie aspiracje. Opieka finansowa nad obiektami sakralnymi w świetle wybranych przykładów testamentów kobiecych oblatowanych w krakowskich księgach grodzkich z XVIII wieku*, *Klio. Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym* 44, 2018, no. 1, pp. 85–86.
- 16 Józef Wandalin Mniszech (d. 1747), Grand Marshal of the Crown from 1713, son of Jerzy Jan and Anna née Chodkiewicz. Married twice, first to Eleonora Ogińska and later to Konstancja Tarłówna. Teresa was his daughter from his first marriage, and Konstancja gave him four children. See Huguette PERZANOWSKA, *Mniszech Józef Wandalin*, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (hereafter PSB), vol. 21, Wrocław 1976, pp. 474–478.
- 17 Franciszek Cetner of the Przerowa clan (d. 1732), Palatine of Smoleńsk from 1714, starosta of werbelski from 1727, and Kamionka from 1702. His father, Jan, was the starosta of Lviv. Cetner was married to Anna Chodorowska, daughter of the Chamberlain of Lviv, who gave him a daughter, Aniela (religious name Zofia), Mother Superior of Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Lviv. His second wife was Anna née Tarło, daughter of the Palatine of Lublin. From his second marriage he had a son, Jan, and a daughter, Franciszka, who married the Palatine of Podole, Michał Rzewuski. Cf. Wojciech HEJNOSZ, *Franciszek Cetner*, PSB, vol. 3, Kraków 1937, p. 238.
- 18 F. Cetner to K. Mniszchowa, s. l., 25. 10. 17[? s.d.], *Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich w Wrocławiu [the Ossoliński Library – Ossolineum – in Wrocław]* (hereafter BOss), sygn. 2639, f. 33–34.

Michał Potocki (died 1766)<sup>19</sup>, Palatine (*wojewoda*) of Belz, also turned to Konstancja for assistance. In 1736, he asked her to help him take over the Palatinate of Kyiv and “*exchange with the starosta of Belz, [...] so that he could take the Palatinate of Belz,*” because, as he emphasized, it would be a “*fair profit.*”<sup>20</sup>

It is worth noting that entry into the client circle of the patroness was a success in itself, especially for such young and poor noblemen. It was often the first level of their official career, which prepared young lads for further promotion, allowing them to establish appropriate relationships and giving them the opportunity to create convenient arrangements that could bring profitable benefits in the future.<sup>21</sup> Cetner, the abovementioned gentleman, using his ties with Konstancja Mniszchowa, tried to obtain an office for his nephew, Antoni Cetner (d. 1731), son of the Castellan of Volhynia. He supplicated with the following words: “*my nephew [...] knowing your protection [...] in receiving this so much needed Crown land, puts forward his appeal, and so repeated by me, so that he could receive a standard after his uncle, the starosta of Tymbark [Jan Cetner?], almost hereditary, for it has been successively passed on by the great-grandfathers.*”<sup>22</sup> It appears that Cetner’s request was not immediately accepted by Konstancja, as in a subsequent letter he renewed his supplication referring to her grace and “*licence*”.<sup>23</sup>

It also happened that women mediated in obtaining military ranks. Anna Franciszka Zamoyska née Gnińska (died 1704) played a vital role in this area. Despite the fact that after her husband’s demise she had kept the title of the wife of the Grand Crown Treasurer, it was not dignity, but shrewdness and innate intelligence that gave her the ability to acquire influential friends and loyal clients, and manage the Zamość Ordinance for almost fifteen years. Anna Zamoyska was asked for protection in obtaining the hussar standard. Stanisław Jan Jabłonowski (died 1702), Grand Hetman of the Crown,<sup>24</sup> wrote to her in this matter, explaining that upon receiving the message “*about the demise of the memorable [...] Mr. Uliński, my nephew, hussar standard-bearer, God rest his soul, the Palatine of Belz,*

19 Antoni Michał Potocki of the Pilawa clan (1702–1766), Palatine of Belz, son of Aleksander Jan, Palatine of Smoleńsk (died 1714), and his second wife Teresa, daughter of Aleksander Tarło, Castellan of Zawichost, nephew of Primate Teodor, brother of Józef, Castellan of Lviv. In 1727, he married Maria Ludwika née Sapieha, Aleksander Dominik Wielopolski’s widow. He had a son, Jan Prosper (born 22 Jul. 1728, died 1763), a commander of border fortresses, general-lieutenant of the Crown army. See Barbara GROSFELD, *Potocki Antoni Michał*, PSB, vol. 27, Wrocław 1983, pp. 782–790.

20 A. M. Potocki to K. Mniszchowa, s. l., 27. 5. 1736, Boss, sygn. 2660/I, f. 13.

21 Cf. B. POPIOŁEK, *Dobrodziejki i klienci*, p. 395.

22 F. Cetner to Konstancja Mniszchowa, Lviv, 10. 11. 1723, Boss, sygn. 2639, f. 35–36v.

23 F. Cetner to Konstancja Mniszchowa, Lublin, 21. 11. 1723, Boss, sygn. 2639, f. 38–38v.

24 Stanisław Jan Jabłonowski (1634–1702), Grand Crown Hetman, Castellan of Cracow, son of Jan Stanisław, Sword-bearer of the Crown (died 1647), and Anna née Ostroróg. Married to Anna Maria née Kazanowska and had six children. See Tadeusz NOWAK, *Jabłonowski Stanisław Jan*, PSB, vol. 10, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1962–1964, pp. 232–239.

not letting go of regret that the sign of the standard-bearer cannot last long, I am putting forward a sensitive instance on behalf of [...] your friend, a good man and good soldier, Mr. Stamirowski, a companion of my armoured standard, so that you would confer on him the aforementioned position, as a result of my present intercession.”<sup>25</sup> It should be added that Jabłonowski wrote to Anna Franciszka to ask for her support for Mikołaj Stefan Radecki, standard-bearer of Horodło,<sup>26</sup> who, as noted in the letter, asked him “in this matter for my good Lady’s instance.”<sup>27</sup>

Obtaining offices for children, grandchildren, stepchildren and other protégés should be considered the most important task undertaken by women. Mothers-widows<sup>28</sup> had a special role in these activities. For this purpose, they took part in meetings of a social nature, although their actual purpose was to establish convenient contacts, ensuring their protégés appropriate career development.<sup>29</sup> We can talk about such an event in the case of Joanna Maria de Béthune (died 1744), widow of the Russian Palatine, Jan Stanisław Jabłonowski (died 1731).<sup>30</sup> She wrote to Józef Wandalin Mniszech, so that he, “with all his seriousness and credit, for which he is respected by the whole Poland, would use his friendship and intercession for this House, which has always respected him and his dignity.” Hence, on receiving the message that “General Gietko is dangerously ill”, she asked him to help her son, Jan Kajetan Jabłonowski (died 1764), starosta of Czehryń, in obtaining the baton

25 S. J. Jabłonowski to A. F. Zamoyska, Jazłowiec camp, 6. 9. 1692, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie [Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw] (hereafter AGAD), Archiwum Zamoyskich [the Zamoyskis Archives] (hereafter AZ), sygn. 515, f. 8.

26 Mikołaj Stefan Radecki (died in the second half of the seventeenth century), steward of Żydaczów, standard-bearer of Horodło, cavalry master of a hussar standard. Married twice: first to a Miss Piotrkowska of unknown first name, and later to Teresa née Lipska, who gave him three daughters and five sons. See Mirosław NAGIELSKI, *Radecki Mikołaj Stefan of the Godziemba clan*, PSB, vol. 29, Wrocław – Warsaw – Cracow – Gdańsk – Łódź 1986, pp. 676–678.

27 S. J. Jabłonowski to A. F. Zamoyska, s. l., s. d., AGAD, AZ, sygn. 515, f. 23.

28 Cf. K. KURAS, *Rola wybitnych kobiet*, p. 265; Szymon Piotr DĄBROWSKI, *Między królem a hetmanem. Działalność Elżbiety Sapieżyny w świetle jej korespondencji ze Stanisławem Augustem i Franciszkiem Ksawerym Branickim*, in: A. Roćko – M. Górka (eds.), *Słynne kobiety w Rzeczypospolitej*, pp. 243–258. See also W. FILIPCZAK, *Elżbieta Sapieżyna na tle politycznej roli*, pp. 303–326; IDEM, *Stanisław August i Elżbieta Sapieżyna. Spór wokół losów sejmu z 1782 r.*, in: Zbigniew Anusik (ed.), *Władza i polityka w czasach nowożytnych*, Łódź 2011, pp. 53–75.

29 Cf. A. JAKUBOSZCZAK, *Aktywność polityczna wielkopolskich szlachcianek*, p. 52.

30 Jan Stanisław Jabłonowski (died 1731), Russian Palatine, son of Stanisław, Grand Crown Hetman, and Maria Anna née Kazanowska. As a young adult he gained a good education. During the battle for the throne between Augustus II and Stanisław Leszczyński, he initially favoured the first candidate, but later, after his dethronement, he switched his support to Leszczyński and as a consequence he was appointed Grand Chancellor of the Crown. He was involved in many funding activities and married Joanna Maria de Béthune, who gave him three sons and three daughters. See Józef GIEROWSKI, *Jabłonowski Jan Stanisław of the Prus clan*, PSB, vol. 10, Wrocław – Warsaw – Cracow 1962–1964, pp. 221–223.

for which she supplicated with “*humbleness at protection*” of Mniszech. Joanna Maria Jabłonowska argued that her son “*should deserve it, as he is sa naissance of a predecessor so great in Poland.*”<sup>31</sup> The dignity and political position of Stanisław Ernest Denhoff (died 1728),<sup>32</sup> the Lithuanian Field Hetman, was also extremely important for his widowed mother, Konstancja Denhoff née Słuszeko (died 1723), wife of the Palatine of Malbork. In one of her letters to her son, sent probably in October 1707, she complained that she had no contact with him, and that the Palatine of Połock, Dominik Michał Słuszeko (died 1713), had been elected marshal of the confederation. The worried mother continued: “*for God’s sake, one’s reasoning ceases, thinking what is happening, that as you left Warsaw somehow, I have nothing about you, even in the newspapers from Lublin nothing was mentioned about you, I am just writing that the Palatine of Połock has been chosen marshal of the confederation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, I do not know how it can be, for you are the general marshal.*”<sup>33</sup> On numerous occasions, widows-mothers, willing to further their sons’ careers, decided to remarry. For instance, Anna 1v Działyńska, 2v Gurowska née Radomicka (died 1812) followed this course. She wanted to provide suitable offices for her sons from her first marriage – Ignacy and Ksawery – and in 1767 she decided to marry Władysław Roch Gurowski (died 1790), Grand Secretary of the Crown. Thanks to her efforts, her sons managed to achieve numerous successes in the military field.<sup>34</sup>

Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł née Sanguszeko (died 1746)<sup>35</sup> is another example of an extremely influential woman. She was involved in several areas – social, economic, cultural and political. The wife of the Grand Lithuanian Chancellor engaged in public life long before her husband Stanisław Karol’s demise in 1719. Nevertheless, it was only during her widowhood that her social activity reached its peak. Throughout this period, she focused on directing the careers of her sons – Michał Kazimierz (died 1762)<sup>36</sup> and Hieronim

31 J. M. Béthune Jabłonowska to J. W. Mniszech, Lviv, 19. 2. 1743, BOss, sygn. 2643/I, 2, f. 7–7v.

32 Stanisław Ernest Denhoff (d. 1728), Lithuanian Field Hetman in 1709–1728, son of Władysław, Palatine of Pomerania, and Konstancja Słuszczanka. He was married to Joanna Denhoff, daughter of Ernest. His second wife was Zofia Maria née Sieniawska. He had no offspring. See Orest Marian KAŁUŻNIACKI, *Denhoff Stanisław Ernest*, PSB, vol. 5, 1939–1946), pp. 115–117.

33 K. Denhoffowa née Słuszeko to [S. E. Denhoff], s. l., 12. 10. 1707 [?], Biblioteka Czartoryskich w Krakowie [the Princes Czartoryski Library in Cracow] (hereafter BCz), sygn. 5792, f. 203.

34 Cf. A. JAKUBOSZCZAK, *Rodzina i rodzinność szlachcianek*, p. 87.

35 See W. KARKUCIŃSKA, *Anna z Sanguszków Radziwiłłowa (1676–1746)*; Jerzy DYGDAŁA, *Codzienne kłopoty, wielkie interesy i podwójna elekcja. Korespondencja radziwiłłowskich urzędników z księżną Anną z Sanguszków Radziwiłłową i jej synem Michałem Kazimierzem z 1733/1734 roku*, Warszawa 2013.

36 Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł “Rybenko” (died 1762), Palatine of Vilnius and Grand Lithuanian Hetman from 1744, son of Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł and Anna Katarzyna née Sanguszeko. He was married to Urszula née Wiśniowiecka, who gave him seven children. His second wife was Anna née Mycielska, who gave birth to five offspring. See Hanna DYMNIĆKA-WOŁOSZYŃSKA, *Radziwiłł Michał Kazimierz*, PSB, vol. 30, Wrocław – Warsaw – Cracow – Gdańsk – Łódź, 1987, pp. 299–306.



Florian (died 1760).<sup>37</sup> At the end of the 1730s, the widow-mother attempted to help her older son obtain the starostwo of Przemyśl. It appears that her help was supported by the aforementioned Mniszech, who became her formal guardian after her husband's death. In 1738, it was Mniszech whom Anna contacted and thanked, stating that there were no "words to express [her – U. K.] gratitude [...] and obligation, which [...] [she owes – U. K.] [...] to my good Sir for gracious protection [...] of [her – U. K.] son [...] in guiding him to attain the starostwo of Przemyśl." Further in the letter, the grateful widow-mother emphasizes that she "prepared him as for a private journey, however, the grace [...] and presence of my good Sir made it very public." She goes on to add that "for such beginnings, gained thanks to the grace of [...] my good Sir" – "His Mother, being an orphan herself, [will – U. K.] always [...] be an indebted servant until her last days."<sup>38</sup>

In addition to maintaining proper contacts with their patrons, building political careers for their children and protégés, the role of wives and widows included taking care of family interests by acquiring influential allies and keeping the estates in a decent condition. This task was often based on well-suited ties and connections, and in many cases it forced women to adopt a servile stance, which can be observed in correspondence.<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that due to legal privileges and inheritance, widows often became owners of extensive lands and estates. As they were located within the Commonwealth territory, they were secured by the king and various state institutions, and their defence lay in the hands of the army and hetmans.<sup>40</sup> The turn of the eighteenth century abounded with armed conflicts, the most important of which was the Northern War. This event contributed to the devastation and impoverishment of particular territories.<sup>41</sup> Women, despite the fact that they did not take a direct part in military operations, were highly interested in reports from the front. Moreover, they eagerly followed all political news and at times experienced the repercussions of such events. Many Polish estates were plundered by marching troops.

37 Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł (d. 1760), Grand Lithuanian Cup-bearer from 1739, Grand Standard-bearer of Lithuania since 1750, starosta of Przemyśl and Krzyczew, son of Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł and Anna Katarzyna née Sanguszko. He had three wives: Teresa Sapieżanka, Magdalena Czapska and Aniela Miączyńska. He had no offspring. See Hanna DYMNICKA-WOŁOSZYŃSKA, *Radziwiłł Hieronim Florian*, PSB, vol. 30, Wrocław – Warsaw – Cracow – Gdańsk – Łódź, 1987, pp. 185–188.

38 A. K. Radziwiłł née Sanguszko to J. W. Mniszech, Biała, 21. 3. 1738, BOss, sygn. 2663/II, f. 25.

39 Cf. B. POPIOŁEK, *Najniższy podnózek*, p. 155; Małgorzata ALEKSANDROWICZ-SZMULIKOWSKA, *Radziwiłłówny w świetle swoich testamentów. Przyczynek do badań mentalności magnackiej XVI–XVII wieku*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 58–59.

40 Cf. T. GRALA, *O pozycji kobiet*, p. 90. The author reports that according to the 3rd Lithuanian Statute, the obligation of the defence of the country pertained to all landowners irrespective of their gender, including widows.

41 Cf. Andrzej K. LINK-LENCZOWSKI, *Doświadczenia wojny północnej a percepcja otaczającej rzeczywistości*, in: Bogdan Rok – Filip Wolański (eds.), *Staropolski ogląd świata. Materiały z konferencji*, Wrocław 23–24 października 2004, Wrocław 2004, p. 221.

This sowed fear and terror amongst the folk living on their lady protector's territory. Hence, "one cannot ignore the fact that whilst both women and men were victims of the war or natural disasters, these events had a much more devastating effect on women's psyche, since men were well seasoned in battle."<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that pleading with patrons to grant personal protection to the property owner and the estate equalled the commitment to protect the Commonwealth itself, as the mentality of the people of the late Baroque period impaired their understanding of the fatherland (country). This, of course, did not diminish its importance, since it was limited to the cultivation of the so-called 'small fatherland', embraced by the boundaries of own goods, lands or palatinates.<sup>43</sup> In 1708, Zagórski, an economist from Lesser Poland, informed his protector, Teofila Ludwika 1v. Wisniewska 2v. Lubomirska née Zasławska-Ostrogaska (died 1709), that "the Baranów area is once again facing oppression, the bridge from Sandomierz has been moved there, that is why poor people are continually suffering hardship from the constantly wandering troops. Therefore, there are no words, spoken or written, which could describe our misery."<sup>44</sup> Most likely, the situation had not calmed even a year later, because Zagórski reported to Lubomirska from Wiśnicz, that he was expecting "guests [...] Crown Hetmans, whose cannon appeared at Christmas in Tarnów, and apparently the army are going to accompany them [...], and some of them being there, others here, they all will move the poor to the last. As in Niepołomice, you do not have a day off."<sup>45</sup>

The opportunity to acquire powerful patrons and use their authority 'as a shield' to protect property against the manoeuvres of troops and aggressive neighbours played an important role in the fight against the looting enemy. The respect that some people from the ruling circles or the local elites enjoyed, as well as the fear of their revenge, formed a bulwark strong enough to protect the clients from undesired actions of the destroyer.<sup>46</sup> Hence, widows-managers often turned to their guardians in the hope that they would protect their property from the invasion of foreign troops. This is exactly what Lukrecja Katarzyna Grudzińska née Radziwiłł (died 1716), wife of the starosta of Golub, did. Fearing Muscovite troops and their assault on her properties, she wrote to her protector, Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł (died 1719), asking "with contentment [...] of my good Sir, so as not to forget [...] [her – U. K.] in his former and also current grace and protection declared

42 B. POPIOŁEK, *Między przestrzenią domową*, p. 38.

43 Cf. B. POPIOŁEK, *Kobiety świat w czasach Augusta II*, p. 301.

44 Zagórski, an economist from Lesser Poland, to T. L. Lubomirska, 1v. Wisniewska née Zasławska-Ostrogaska, Jarosław, 4. 10. 1708, Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie [The National Archives in Cracow], Archiwum Sanguszków [the Sanguszkos Archive] (hereafter ANKr ASang), fol. 291, file 10, f. 90.

45 Zagórski, an economist of Lesser Poland estates to T. L. Lubomirska, 1v. Wisniewska née Zasławska-Ostrogaska, Wiśnicz, 2. 1. 1709, ANKr ASang, fol. 291, file 10, f. 177.

46 Cf. B. POPIOŁEK, *Najniższy podnózek*, p. 158.

[...] [to her – U. K.]” She was striving to “*obtain exemption*” in the case of her goods in the Palatinates of Rawa, Chełmno and Kalisz, because, as she emphasized, “*approaching Muscovite troops are right behind the Vistula border*”.<sup>47</sup> It should not be forgotten that Grudzińska had another extremely influential protector – Adam Mikołaj Sieniawski (died 1726), Castellan of Kraków. She addressed him with “*the humblest request*” and a supplication that the Palatinate of Golub, “*being left on the troops’ marching trail, much ruined, could receive some relief*”.<sup>48</sup> The problem of destroying and plundering of lands and estates is one of the main themes in Grudzińska’s correspondence, hence one can conclude that Sieniawski’s care was focused mainly on the protection of her properties. In April 1708, the wife of the starosta of Golub once again complained to her protector that she was “*the most miserable [...] under the sun*”, because in her estates in Sochaczew, “*the Muscovite troops had been stationing for so long, [...] [before – U. K.] they destroyed everyone, and there is nobody left who could have a mere piece of bread*”. When the army crossed the Vistula river, these properties “*were destroyed by the Kalmykian Cossacks*”, who “*having swum across the river*” robbed and left in their wake “*great poverty and ruins*” among her people. Therefore, the despairing widow asked Sieniawski to issue an official proclamation (*uniwersał*) “*liberating [them – U. K.] from troops’ bases and provisions*” because, as she emphasized, “*after Moscow – the Swedes helped [...] to the last ruin*”.<sup>49</sup>

In times of danger, widows-managers sought help not only from their powerful guardians. Every now and then, it happened that their clients declared willingness to defend the property. For example, in 1698, Maciej Bar, in his correspondence to Anna Franciszka Zamoyska née Gnińska, assured her of his readiness to defend her people against the German army. He referred to the order which he received from his lady protector, and declared that he would try to defend her subordinates so that “*they shall face no aggravation from the passing royal army*”. Also, he heartened her that if she were to receive any message about the Germans “*attacking the people [...] of my good Lady [...], then, even at midnight, I [would – U. K.] not [...] regret my bother and charge at them with people to mitigate them*”.<sup>50</sup>

Occasionally, female guardians, thanks to their influence and extensive connections, contributed to the protection of fixed or movable assets of their subordinates. In 1703, this was the course of action of the aforementioned Zamoyska. Marianna 1v. Gnińska 2v. Bystramowa née Szydłowska, wife of the Chamberlain of Pomerania, thanked her for protecting her valuables against the approaching Swedish army. Full of gratitude, she

47 L. K. Grudzińska née Radziwiłł to K. S. Radziwiłł, s. l. s. d., AGAD, Archiwum Radziwiłłów [the Radziwiłłs Archive], section V, call no. 4803, f. 95–96.

48 K. L. Grudzińska née Radziwiłł to A. M. Sieniawski, Szymanów, 10. 5. 1706, BCz, sygn. 5827, f. 127–128.

49 K. L. Grudzińska née Radziwiłł to A. M. Sieniawski, Szymanów, 12. 4. 1708, BCz, sygn. 5827, f. 163–165.

50 M. Bar to A. F. Zamoyska née Gnińska, Tarnogród, 21. 10. 1698, AGAD, AZ, sygn. 358, call no. 504, f. 23.

wrote: “*Thank God you took them away, my Lady, for the Swedes seized everything in Toruń – deposits of the nobility, bells, cannons.*”<sup>51</sup>

The obligation, which was imposed on the Crown land, was entitled *hiberna*. It was a mandatory tax on winter maintenance of troops, and from 1667 it was paid in cash only.<sup>52</sup> The costs related to the settlement of *hiberna* were often too high and exceeded the financial possibilities of the estates’ owners. Therefore, such situations called for protectors’ assistance. The wife of the starosta of Golub found herself in this very position. She wrote to her guardian, Sieniawski, and asked, “*facing the approaching due date of military dispositions, when it comes to business*”, whether she could “*pride [herself – U. K.] on the promised grace*”, which would relieve her of paying *hiberna* on the Golub territories, because, as she pointed out, “*there is no way you can pay out when [they are – U. K.] brought to ruin*”. The desperate matron agreed to pay for “*the winter stationing*”, only from the starostwo of Grybów and Guzów.<sup>53</sup>

As already mentioned, officially, women did not engage in ‘high politics’, and the events they were actually involved in often boiled down to their “*behind-the-scenes activity*”<sup>54</sup> or commentaries on political affairs. However, their desired social activity continually forced them to take an interest in political events and follow the latest news and current relations at the court. Such activities manifested themselves in the increased reading of books or handwritten newspapers (*awizy*), as well as subscriptions to calendars and forecasters, which not only reported on the most important domestic and foreign events, but were also a source of practical knowledge about the world and everyday life, enabling noblewomen to form their own opinions and views about the world.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, women wished to receive all political reports on a regular basis. The news from the front about the Treaty of Karłowice was provided to Anna Franciszka Zamoyska née Gnińska by the priest Canon Jan Dłużewski (died 1720). In July 1699, he wrote that he was sending some camp newspapers informing about “*the increasing congestion of diseases, specifically dysentery, from unhealthy waters*”.<sup>56</sup> Konstancja Denhoff née Słuszko in one of her letters expressed her outrage that her son Stanisław Ernest was delaying correspondence. She insisted that he update her on the *levee-en-masse*: “*and the world has not heard of such laziness that lies in you [...] you neither speak, nor think about it, it is just like talking to the wall*”.<sup>57</sup> In another

51 M. Bystramowa to A. F. Zamoyska, Gołubiewo, 13. 11. 1703, AGAD, AZ, sygn. 358, call no. 505, f. 187–188.

52 Cf. Antoni MAĆZAK, *Encyklopedia historii gospodarczej Polski do 1945 roku*, Warszawa 1981, vol. 2, p. 347.

53 K. L. Grudzińska née Radziwiłł to A. M. Sieniawski, Grybów, 10. 9. 1706, BCz, sygn. 5827, f. 131–134.

54 B. POPIOŁEK, *Między przestrzenią domową*, p. 30.

55 B. POPIOŁEK, *Kobiety świat w czasach Augusta II*, p. 332.

56 Priest J. Dłużewski to A. F. Zamoyska née Gnińska, from a camp, 4. 7. 1699, AGAD, AZ, sygn. 507, f. 64.

57 K. Denhoffowa née Słuszko to S. E. Denhoff, s. l., s. d., BCz, sygn. 5792, f. 63–64.

letter, Denhoffowa worried about a Turkish resolution, which “immensely beat [her – U. K.] up”, complaining that she was “frantic with worry”, fearing for Stanisław’s health and life.<sup>58</sup> The political curiosity of the wife of the Palatine of Malbork was noticed even by the king himself, as her son reported in one of his letters: “in the whole world, my king has no truer or dearer friend than [...] you”.<sup>59</sup>

A death of noble and honoured individuals was another reason for commenting on the political situation. In 1728, Anna Myszkowska in her letter to Konstancja Mniszchowa mentioned the death of the Crown Field Hetman, Stanisław Chomętowski (died 1728), and said that it “greatly frightened [her – U. K.]”<sup>60</sup> as it was “a great pity both for us [...] and for our Homeland”.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, it should be stated that in old Poland women, especially widows, willingly and effectively engaged in the political affairs of the country. On the one hand, their initiatives contradicted the traditional model, according to which women were assigned a specific place in society. On the other hand, their entry into the public space was forced by the specific conditions of the functioning of the nobility at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>62</sup> The personal qualities of individual ladies also played a vital role. Here one can name ambitions, intellect and shrewdness, which not only helped to expand family assets, but also build political careers for their children, relatives and clients. It should be remembered that the female world of politics functioned rather within a male space. Women, however, were able to penetrate its borders during the absence of their husbands or after their death. This could be particularly evident in the moments of greatest danger or while applying for the most important positions. At such times, it was the grace and care of male benefactors that became “a specific policy guaranteeing survival in the event of various misfortunes and creating some semblance of social security”.<sup>63</sup>

58 K. Denhoffowa née Słuszko to [S. E. Denhoff], s. l., 13. 8. 1701, BCz, sygn. 5792, f. 163.

59 S. E. Denhoff to K. Denhoffowa née Słuszko, s. l., s. d., BCz, sygn. 5790, f. 742.

60 A. Myszkowska to K. Mniszchowa, Przeworsk, 8. 9. 1728, AGAD, Czołowski Collection, sygn. 359, f. 47.

61 Ibidem, f. 47–48; also s. l., s. d., 1728, ibidem, f. 51–53.

62 See Urszula KICIŃSKA, *Rola wdowy w rodzinie i społeczeństwie staropolskim na podstawie drukowanych oracji pogrzebowych XVII wieku*, Sensus Historiae XII, 2013, no. 14, pp. 135–148.

63 B. POPIOLEK, *Najniższy podnózek*, p. 165.