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'O breves et infaustos populi favores'. The Controversies Surrounding Lieutenant Władysław Gorzeński during the Civil War in Poland-Lithuania (1715–1716)

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Abstract: On 1st October 1715 Władysław Gorzeński became the first marshal of the soldiers' union which began to fight against the Saxon forces of King Augustus II on Polish-Lithuanian territory, thereby unleashing a civil war between the monarch, supported by various officials, and the Polish-Lithuanian army alongside the masses of civilian nobility, united under the Tarnogród Confederation. Gorzeński is considered to be a man with numerous controversies surrounding his actions at that time. As a low-ranking officer whose career to that point had not been particularly eventful or scintillating, he surprisingly managed to take control over his unit from his superior – the historical sources known to us describe that entire situation as, at the very least, confusing. Later, as he was leading his forces against the Saxon, he displayed serious incompetence which led to various accusations of intentional sabotage and eventually almost made him a victim to a lynch mob. Having given up his command in the union after a mere two months, he was forced to seek protection among those who had recently been enemies. The purpose of the article is to discuss contemporary opinions, according to which Gorzeński was indeed an agent of the Saxons and a provocateur supposed to trigger the civil conflict into escalation and compare them with facts and sources which bring up a quite different picture of the person in question – a victim of a slander and anti-Saxon paranoia the most of the Confederation was succumbing to at the time.

Keywords: Augustus II Wettin, Civil War, Confederation, Great Northern War, Lynch, Mass Hysteria, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Saxony, Soldiers' Union, Tarnogród Confederation

The civil war that took place in the years 1715 and 1716 in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is a nuanced, multi-layered, and generally complicated episode of the so-called 'Saxon era' and the reign of Augustus II Wettin in Polish history. To this day, the only attempt to cover this topic holistically was made by Antoni Prochaska back in 1917. His article, divided into eleven chapters, was tendentious and based on insufficient

archival research but, most importantly, too short to properly cover all the important aspects of the period.¹ To this day, no proper monographic study has replaced Prochaska's outdated paper, despite research having been conducted and plans being notified.² Various shorter types of texts expand our views on certain elements of that conflict, albeit with none of them close to fully covering this blank spot of Polish historiography. This having been said, I make my attempt to add more insight into this research field, aware of the scale of the matters and feeling honest respect towards them.

The reign of Augustus II prior to the civil war has already been covered on many levels.³ The same can be said about the background and genesis of this conflict.⁴ Nonetheless, I feel obliged to briefly summarise the internal situation of the Commonwealth in the year 1715.

Augustus, being the elected king of Poland-Lithuania, was also the prince-elector of Saxony and, with help from his hereditary domain, made attempts to gain political leverage in the Commonwealth against the legal institutions that traditionally restrained and controlled the monarch – the most important among them being the Polish-Lithuanian parliament known as the *Sejm*. Wettin's most efficient tool turned out to be divisions of the Saxon army, located across the voivodeships of Poland and Lithuania. The official reasoning for that was the constant risk of invasion resulting from the ongoing conflict – pursuing the policy of *fait accompli*, the monarch had involved Poland-Lithuania in the Great Northern War as a belligerent against Sweden, bringing years of turmoil and damage to the Commonwealth, which both served as the theatre for most of its major battles and fell victim to resource-draining contributions extracted by every army on its soil. In the year 1704, with the help of his Polish collaborators, the Swedish King Charles XII installed his own puppet king, a member of the Polish opposition, Stanisław Leszczyński, and two years later forced Augustus to abdicate, seizing control over the Commonwealth, although

1 Antoni PROCHASKA, *Konfederacja tarnogrodzka*, Przewodnik Naukowy i Literacki XLV, 1917, t. XLIII, vol. 1–11.

2 The most notable example being Józef Andrzej Gierowski, one of the most competent and successful researchers of the 'Saxon era'. In the book *W Cieniu Ligi Północnej*, published in 1971, on p. 114 in footnote no. 49, he mentioned another book in preparation, covering that exact topic. Alas, he never managed to finish said publication despite remaining academically active for the next three decades.

3 Example works: Józef FELDMAN, *Polska a sprawa wschodnia 1709–1714*, Kraków 1926; IDEM, *Polska w dobie wielkiej wojny północnej 1704–1709*, Kraków 1925; Kazimierz JAROCHOWSKI, *Dzieje panowania Augusta II*, vol. 1–3, Poznań 1856–1890 (modern editions of the first two volumes: Oświęcim 2015); Jarosław PORAZIŃSKI, *Epiphania Poloniae. Orientacje i postawy polityczne szlachty polskiej w dobie wielkiej wojny północnej (1702–1710)*, Toruń 1999; Jacek STASZEWSKI, *August II Mocny*, Wrocław 1998.

4 That topic was covered in a brief article (Józef FELDMAN, *Geneza konfederacji tarnogrodzkiej*, *Kwartalnik Historyczny* XLII, 1928, vol. 3) as well as a broad and detailed monograph (Józef Andrzej GIEROWSKI, *Między saskim absolutyzmem a złotą wolnością. Z dziejów wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1712–1715*, Wrocław 1953) – both of which I am going to refer to further in the text.

only partially because of the resistance of many societal strata, especially former associates and followers of the overthrown monarch. In the year 1709, after a major defeat at the battle of Poltava, the Swedes were forced out of Poland-Lithuania and so was the puppet king they had established, allowing Augustus to return and restore his power. However, the internal and international consequences of the Northern War had a huge impact on Wettin – after his return, his position on the throne was never as firm as it was prior to his forced abdication. Sweden, although pushed away from the Commonwealth, was not yet defeated – the war was going to last for another decade at that point. The Saxon monarch, partaking in international scramble for territorial gains against his official allies, was forced to pay quite a lot of attention to the internal situation within Poland-Lithuania, fatigued and clearly discontented with the unending conflict, the costs of warfare and the presence of Augustus’ foreign army.

For many years, the threat of the Swedes’ violent return had remained the King’s greatest argument for maintaining the electoral army within the Polish borders.⁵ Saxon units, accountable only to the King and feeling no connection with the land where they were billeted or the locals, soon began to behave like conquerors in a conquered country, pillaging civilians with no fear of the consequences. The same could be said about the Russian forces, officially serving as allies to the Polish-Saxon side of the conflict.⁶ The frustration of the civilian masses, especially their noble component (the Polish-Lithuanian nobility, known as *szlachta*, was the only stratum of the society legally allowed to partake in the rule over the state alongside a king via the *Sejm*) was channelled directly against Augustus and his Saxon forces. But there was a particular social group that was even more oppressed by this regime – the soldiers of the Polish-Lithuanian armed forces. The King favoured the electoral troops, who were loyal only to him, over the local forces in a most

5 Another concern frequently brought up by the King as a reason for the higher military presence of the Saxons was the Ottoman Empire to the south, which for many years viewed Charles XII as their friend (if not ally) and recognized Leszczyński as a legal King of Poland. Wettin often referred to the combined threat of the Swedes and Ottomans, at the same time promising to relieve the Commonwealth of Saxon troops as soon as possible, but obviously attempting to buy them more time. Examples can be seen through his correspondence with Stanisław Szembek, the Primate of the Kingdom – see Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich (hereafter ZNO), Manuscript sign. 700, letter from Rydzyna 18 July 1714, fol. 42–42v; also: Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Manuscript sign. 6252, letter from Warsaw 19 April 1715, pp. 32–33.

6 Examples of the Saxon and Russian menace, as well as violations of the law, from the year 1698 (the first introduction of the electoral army into Poland) to 1715 in various diaries from the era: Erazm OTWINOWSKI, *Dzieje Polski pod panowaniem Augusta II 1696–1728*, ed. by Józef CZECH, Kraków 1849, pp. 5–6, 8–11, 63, 86–87, 89–90, 97–100, 108–109, 117–118, 159–160, 170–172, 179, 181–182, 202–204, 208–209, 211–213, 224–225; Wiktoryn KUCZYŃSKI, *Pamiętnik 1668–1737*, ed. by Józef MAROSZEK and others, Białystok 1999, pp. 24–25, 37–38, 40–42, 45; Krzysztof ZAWISZA, *Pamiętniki (1666–1721)*, ed. by Julian BARTOSZEWICZ, Warsaw 1862, pp. 161, 163–164, 258–259, 305–306.

visible and disedifying way. Polish and Lithuanian units were deprived of their quarters, as well as salaries and even basic supplies. That pathological situation, lasting for several years, resulted in decline of their fighting capabilities, as well as a decay of morale and sense of service. A symptomatic example was given by the *regimentarz* (unit commander) Jan Gałęcki, asking in the year 1714 for reinforcements not with firearms but rather farming tools, so that his men could finally feed themselves.⁷ It is no surprise that the eventual revolt against the current regime found its roots within the Polish military.

Władysław Gorzeński and his marshalship

The insurrection eventually took place on 1 October 1715 in Gorzyce, Sandomierz Voivodeship (currently Subcarpathian Voivodeship, south-eastern Poland). The division, under the *regimentarz* Stanisław Młodzianowski, was on the move towards Lviv, where the Hetman (official title of the supreme commander) of the Polish forces, Adam Mikołaj Sieniawski, was residing at the time. Sieniawski, asked by the Saxons to support the pacification of local anti-Wettin turmoil with Polish forces, proved reluctant. Aware of the sentiments within his own ranks and afraid of a potential and highly plausible clash between his own soldiers and the electoral ones, he gave orders to regroup in the Lviv region, where he could suppress any discontent more efficiently.⁸ However, the Hetman's plan failed on that day.

A detailed description of the events leading to the rebellion is known to us thanks to the anonymous account *Relacyja Transakcyi Związku w Woysku uczynionego* ('Account of the Founding of the Union within the Army').⁹ During Młodzianowski's absence, a significant group of soldiers (consisting mainly of people from the noble stratum) openly declared their disdain for the Saxons and lack of hope with regard to the perpetual lack of salaries, supplies, and even the most basic amenities. The proxies of the *regimentarz*, Lieutenant Bukowski and a certain military judge (personal data unknown), attempted to calm the situation down by organising a dinner for the protesters. After an hour, the situation, which was seemingly pacified, became unexpectedly stirred as a result of the sudden arrival of a late officer – Lieutenant Władysław Gorzeński, the commander of a cavalry unit. That elicited commotion in the camp, and the dinner guests began slowly to leave the gathering, amassing at Gorzeński's tent instead. Alarmed, the judge approached the group, where he had to face an accomplished fact – Gorzeński and his supporters were

7 Józef Andrzej GIEROWSKI, *Między saskim absolutyzmem a złotą wolnością. Z dziejów wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1712–1715*, pp. 18–19.

8 Ibidem, pp. 289–291.

9 ZNO, Manuscript sign. 3561, pp. 6–10.

officially forming a union (often referred to as a confederation or *konfederacja* in Polish). His pleas and arguments about disrespecting the chain of command and the authority of the Commonwealth appealed to no one. The soldiers finally gave way fully to their chagrin, expressing explicitly how much they hated their current situation – they felt as though the Saxons had conquered them without even raising their swords.¹⁰ Outnumbered and outshouted, but also fearing for their lives (the rebelling group was not only slandering but also threatening them) the remaining loyalist officers were forced to silently accept the institution of the soldiers’ union.

Invoking the Holy Trinity, the confederated military personnel made a solemn promise to maintain, in this particular order: love of the homeland, the authority of the Hetman, the Catholic faith, and, at the very end, the majesty of the King. They declared that their goal was to defend the violated laws of the Commonwealth – violated, naturally, by the foreign Saxon army, considered by them to be a parasitic scourge of Poland-Lithuania, already exhausted and damaged by the years of the ongoing war.¹¹

The one who became the official leader of the soldiers’ confederation – in the long tradition of Polish political movements called marshal (*marszałek*) – was Lieutenant Władysław Gorzeński who was most probably solely responsible for the success of the rebellious initiative. Very few historical sources of his activity prior to those events remain. What can be said for certain is that he was a native of the Greater Poland region in the north-western Commonwealth, active in military service at least from the beginning of the Great Northern War.¹² More details of his military activities through the years are barely recognised.

Within the next two months the soldiers’ union was joined by many other units of the Polish army, but also a much broader and more efficiently governed mass movement of the civilian nobility, equally frustrated and desperate as a result of Saxon pillage and injustice. On 26 November 1715 that movement created an official organisation and was later recognised as the Confederation of Tarnogród (*konfederacja tarnogrodzka*). Those

10 Ibidem, p. 8: ‘[...] *perswadował* [the judge – M. R.] *aby ad mitiora skłonili się consilia, ale wszystko incassim, bo tylko prośbą z pogroźkami mieszając wyrzucali, co to ich Sasi nie dobywszy szpady zawojowali.*’ A similar, although not identical depiction can be found in: ZNO, Manuscript sign. 277, p. 7 (currently a part of the collection of Львівська національна наукова бібліотека України імені В. Стефаника [V. Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv]).

11 The official act of the union, *Konfederacya wojska poprzyjęzona w obozie koronnym pod Gorzycami die Ima 8bris A. D. 1715*, was distributed to the noble masses via various handwritten copies, including: ZNO, Manuscript sign. 6608, pp. 9–13.

12 The noble *sejmik* (self-government) of his home province recognised his military efforts by granting him compensation for war loses on 5 February 1703 – *Akta sejmikowe województw poznańskiego i kaliskiego. Lata 1696–1732*, ed. by Michał ZWIERZYKOWSKI, Poznań 2008, p. 315.

two months also mark almost the entirety of Gorzeński's marshalship – by early December, the leader of the uprising at Gorzyce was forced to withdraw from his position.¹³ But why?

From the very beginning of the uprising, Gorzeński had been giving a display of utter military incompetence. Despite a constant flow of new followers from the rebelling units of the Polish army, the Marshal never mustered his forces (and his own courage) to face the Saxons in full-scale battle, reducing his actions to skirmishes and delaying actions while keeping the core of his army in constant retreat eastwards. No tactical advantage was ever taken of the few victories achieved by his men, such as the one on 8 October at Radgoszcz, where the confederates decimated a regiment of Saxon heavy cavalry. Gorzeński also easily gave up highly defensible positions at the crossings of the River Vistula near Sandomierz, allowing the enemy to pursue the Polish forces deeper into the rebellious eastern territories. In conclusion, his war efforts achieved nothing more than securing the November assembly in Tarnogród, but also made the rebels lose control over the territories that had so easily been claimed in the first weeks of the conflict.¹⁴ The Marshal's failures quickly began to cast accusations of varying gravity upon himself. Rumours were spread – of Gorzeński issuing ordinances while being drunk, of him maintaining suspicious postal correspondence with Jacob Heinrich Flemming (the Saxon fieldmarshal responsible for suppressing the Polish revolt and King Augustus' closest collaborator), and even of accepting bribes from him in exchange for sabotaging the confederates' military effort. By the end of November, Gorzeński was more commonly considered to be a traitor, a provocateur under the Saxons' clandestine command pushing Polish soldiers and nobles to their certain deaths, rather than an enthusiastically supported leader.¹⁵

What is worth mentioning, is that despite his defeats, the forces under his command kept increasing in numbers as a result of the constant desertion of the Crown forces from Augustus' cause, as they were more inclined towards their fellow soldiers and nobility members. Moreover, the Marshal himself reached officers who remained at the King's side and not only explained to them his own reasons behind the rebellion, but even attempted to sway them to his own movement. One such person who actively exchanged letters with

13 Antoni PROCHASKA, *Konfederacja tarnogrodzka*, vol. 4, pp. 357–360.

14 Józef Andrzej GIEROWSKI, *Gorzeński Władysław h. Nałęcz* in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* [hereafter PSB], vol. 8, Wrocław – Kraków – Warszawa 1959–1960, pp. 330–331.

15 Erazm OTWINOWSKI, op. cit. – the author of this diary covers in great detail the military endeavour of the rebels under Gorzeński's command (pp. 230–234, 245–248), as well as all the mentioned accusations and his eventual downfall (pp. 248–249). Although Otwinowski's account is considered debatable by many, it remains still the most reliable historical source for this poorly researched military conflict, especially its initial quarter – see Tomasz CIESIELSKI, *Konfederacja tarnogrodzka i obrady Sejmu Niemego – aspekt military* in: Michał ZWIERZYKOWSKI (ed.), *Sejm Niemy. Między mitem a reformą państwa*, Warsaw 2019, pp. 37–50.

Gorzeński during the first months of the war, was General Jakub Zygmunt Rybiński.¹⁶ If anything, such actions prove the Marshal’s good will, despite his clear incapability.

In early December 1715, when the soldiers’ union became a part of the already-functioning Tarnogród Confederation, the civilian authorities of the movement gave Gorzeński an ultimatum – the Marshal was supposed to give up on any military initiative, from now on becoming a dependent executor of the will of those higher in the Confederation. He kept refusing until he finally realised the sheer scale of the common hatred channelled towards himself by both the military personnel and the confederated civilians, all under a massively negative impression of his recent performance. Despised by almost everyone, the Marshal faced a serious threat of being lynched. Terrified by that prospect, he finally ceded his authority to Lieutenant Józef Branicki, hitherto his deputy. The new Marshal immediately complied with the civilian leadership of the movement, pursuing their strategic directives. That satisfied the confederates, but also increased suspicions and the hatred towards now denounced Gorzeński – especially when the confederate forces started claiming local but significant victories in the field from now on. Experiencing constant threats to his life and allegations of treason, the ex-Marshal had no other option but to flee. He found shelter in the city of Zamość, which, however, in January 1716 was seized by Saxons who did not welcome Gorzeński among themselves as their supposed supporter.

The ex-marshal spent the next seven months incarcerated instead and was most probably released because of the armistice between the belligerents in the summer of the same year. During his captivity, he attempted to contact the previously-mentioned Jacob Heinrich Flemming. His letter from 30 January 1716 to the king’s right-hand man seems to have been written by a completely different person when compared to his correspondence with Rybiński just two months previously. In that message, Gorzeński claimed that he had been forced by his own soldiers to become the leader of their rebellion¹⁷ and, having reconsidered his actions, openly regretted them and his participation in the movement. His conclusion was that he should have rather died than go against the Royal Majesty.¹⁸ The act of self-abasement paid off – Flemming did indeed vouch for him while discussing the matter with the King and even saved him from being delivered to the Hetman, who

16 Biblioteka Kórnicka PAN, Manuscript sign. 419, the correspondence between W. Gorzeński and J. Z. Rybiński exchanged on 24 and 25 November 1715, fol. 81v–86v. Gorzeński’s attempt to sway him turned out to be completely futile – see Adam PERŁAKOWSKI, „*Ta konfederacja nie stała się contra Majestatem...*” *Postawa Jakuba Zygmunta Rybińskiego, wojewody chełmińskiego, w czasie konfederacji tarnogrodzkiej (1715–1717)*, *Zapiski Historyczne* LXXXV, 2020, vol. 2, pp. 46–47.

17 It is worth highlighting that none of the archival cartularies referring to the events at Gorzyce mentioned earlier give any confirmation to that statement.

18 Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, loc. 3493/4, fol. 499v. I feel obliged to thank my reviewer for guiding me towards this manuscript of Saxon provenance, as well as towards various other sources and research papers which, ultimately, resulted in a major reshaping of my text’s conclusion.

had been asking for Gorzeński with the clear intention of punishing the Lieutenant for inciting his forces to rebellion.¹⁹ Nonetheless, although saved from both the Hetman and the confederates, the ex-Marshal could not leave Zamość for the next couple of months, until the aforementioned armistice.

Released from his arrest, Gorzeński headed towards the capital city, Warsaw. What can be found puzzling is his company – he reached his destination alongside Johan Adolf II, Duke of Sachsen-Weissenfels and the supreme leader of electoral army in Lithuania. In the town of Praga (a district of today's Warsaw), the unfortunate ex-Marshal wrote down one of the last signs of his recorded activity in the form of a letter from the day 10 August 1716. In the text, he refers to an anonymous recipient (probably Flemming, but it cannot be stated as being certain) as his benefactor, asking that person for support in his attempt to beg King Augustus for mercy.²⁰

From that point on, Lieutenant Gorzeński seems to be non-existent in any further historical sources. We can get an impression that his person got, in a manner of speaking, erased – especially from people's collective memory. The negative, traitorous picture of the first Marshal of the soldiers' union of Gorzyce was, of course, widespread and common in diaries of the era.²¹ However, the remaining members of the House of Gorzeński themselves tried to leave those connotations behind. It can be seen in the content of the most important and famous book of heraldry published in the 18th century – the work of the Jesuit Kasper Niesiecki compiled from the year 1728 to 1743. Many noble families influenced the publication by supporting the author with necessary data regarding their lineage – it can be considered symptomatic that the parts regarding the Gorzeński family contain not a single mention of the infamous Marshal.²²

19 Ibidem, fol. 501.

20 Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich [hereafter BKCz], Manuscript sign. 472, pp. 159–160. The letter, aside from the request ('[...] *upraszam jako nayuniżeniey, abym był rekomendowany protekcji Naaśnieyszego Pana [...]*'), also mentions his seven months of imprisonment and travel alongside Duke Weissenfels. What is worth mentioning is that Otwinowski's diary claimed that Gorzeński had been imprisoned beforehand by the confederates and thanks to the Saxon intervention he regained his freedom, which was supposed to be the final proof of his treason – see Erazm OTWINOWSKI, op. cit., p. 253.

21 Next to the already mentioned Otwinowski (footnote no. 13) we could also point out: Wiktoryn KUCZYŃSKI, op. cit., p. 46; Krzysztof ZAWISZA, op. cit., p. 308.

22 Kasper NIESIECKI, *Herbarz polski*, vol. 4, ed. by Jan Nepomucen BOBROWICZ, Leipzig 1839, pp. 217–219. What supports this idea is the fact that Władysław was a member of the secondary branch of the Gorzeński family. The main line, most prominent and active exactly in the period of Niesiecki's research and publications, most likely preferred their own achievements to cover any wrongdoing committed by their distant relative; see Michał ZWIERZYKOWSKI, *Pochodzenie i kariera Aleksandra Mikołaja Gorzeńskiego (1671–1754). Od drobnej szlachty do kręgów elity wielkopolskiej* in: Stanisław Borowiak (ed.), *Dawni właściciele Dobrzyca na tle swoich czasów*, Dobrzyca 2017, pp. 37–57.

Władysław Gorzeński – traitor or victim of mass hysteria?

The controversial perception of Gorzeński by contemporary public opinion remains undisputed, as depicted above. The diaries used as sources for the purpose of this article were all compiled relatively soon after the events that have been described, in the 1720s or early 1730s, and seem to represent the common opinion of the ex-Marshal.

Did he truly deserve the slander he received and to be branded as a traitorous provocateur? Surely, we have to admit that the very circumstances of Gorzeński's takeover of his division should be considered as a matter of concern at the very least. As stated earlier, reverting to the *Relacyja Transakcyi Związku* [...], the Lieutenant appeared in the camp in the crucial moment, when the entire crisis seemed close to settlement – and effectively sabotaged all the efforts of the remaining loyalists. Afterwards, allegedly just one hour after the establishment of the union, the anonymous recorder mentioned a visit of a noble named Radecki, a representative of the *sejmik* (self-government) of the Sandomierz Voivodeship, who praised the soldiers for their effort and promised the help of the local, civilian anti-Saxon movement – solidifying and legitimising their endeavour.²³ The unexpected arrivals of certain people at certain times can indeed deprive the whole revolt of the aura of a spontaneous outburst of accumulated frustration against the Saxons. This brings us to a question: could it rather have been a staged spectacle for someone's own clandestine purposes?

Such a hypothesis was surely familiar to Józef Andrzej Gierowski, who suggested highlighting the boundaries between Lieutenant Gorzeński and Jakub Morsztyn. The latter was, at the time, the most influential magnate of the Sandomierz region, a relative of the local voivode, but also a sponsor and the nominal chief of Gorzeński's cavalry unit. He was known for his conflict with the King, as well as the Saxon Colonel Hoverbeck, who was pillaging Morsztyn's domain with his troops. Gierowski believed that Jakub Morsztyn, who was very influential at the local *sejmik*, used his agents within the self-government and military ranks (Gorzeński) to brew and channel anti-Saxon discontent directly against the electoral troops in the region, precisely those vandalising his estates. This thought can be supported by the record of Erazm Otwinowski, who wrote straightforwardly about Morsztyn ordering Gorzeński to bring the division into rebellion.²⁴ In Gierowski's theory,

23 ZNO, Manuscript sign. 3561, p. 10: ‘*W godzinę po tym zjechał JMPan Radecki, poseł województwa sandomirskiego, dziękując, że biorą się do wspólnej z niemi ojczyzny obrony, deklarując, że nie tylko zasługami kontentując wojsko, ale i sami wspólnie niebezpieczeństwa podejmować będą.*’

24 Erazm OTWINOWSKI, op. cit., p. 232. However, Otwinowski's writing, undoubtedly very useful for research purposes, should be used with great caution. That author, compiling his diary several years after the described events, usually took rumors spreading both at the time and later for granted, occasionally altering or simplifying complex issues or context due to his own sympathies and agenda.

the expansion of the movement, succeeding Morsztyn's own schemes, was simply an effect of his narrow-minded approach (his goals never reached beyond pushing the Saxon forces out of the voivodeship) and loss of control over the genuinely revolting masses.²⁵ Gorzeński, although he eventually (and probably unexpectedly to himself) became the leader of a nationwide initiative, could at the very beginning indeed have been an agent pursuing the secret purposes of his benefactor. But could that benefactor have been more than just a local aristocrat chasing after short-term goals?

That seems unlikely. What is true is the fact that historians used to accuse King Augustus and his associates of staging a clandestine anti-parliamentary coup against the Commonwealth's political system. Our concern should not be whether that is true or not,²⁶ but instead whether the year 1715 would have been a right time for such an operation. The historian Józef Feldman, although in general not openly against the idea of the Saxons' intrigues, disputed their intentions to do it on the eve of the civil war. He claimed that Wettin and his court, having learned their lesson from the Great Northern War and the numerous failures of Saxon military, diplomatic, and political efforts through the previous fifteen years, would have been much more self-restrained with regard to any kind of hazardous endeavours. Most importantly, they would have remained especially cautious during such tense times, afraid of the potential backlash from the masses of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility.²⁷

Gorzeński did indeed maintain correspondence with Flemming, the King's right-hand man. However, even though his aforementioned letter from 30 January 1716 is clearly apologetic and remorseful, that remorse comes – in the Lieutenant's own words – from rebelling against the monarch in first place and not failing to fulfil any unclear goal.²⁸ Moreover, postal acts of self-abasement written and sent by confederates who sought conciliation with the opposite side were not uncommon, especially in late 1716, when the conflict was clearly reaching its conclusion. The war's conclusion rendered the royal court and dignitaries clearly weakened, but nonetheless maintained their foremost position in the Commonwealth. Particular confederates and ex-confederates, although openly fighting them just months or even weeks previously, realised what they had to do if they wished to continue their careers in the post-war period. Examples of such acts can be seen in the

25 Józef Andrzej GIEROWSKI, *Między saskim absolutyzmem a złotą wolnością. Z dziejów wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1712–1715*, pp. 292–293.

26 A summary of the historical debate regarding this controversial topic – with a conclusion leaning towards scepticism with regard to Wettin's will and determination to intrigue – can be read in Jacek STASZEWSKI, *Pomysły reformatorskie czasów Augusta II. Uwagi o dziełach i programach* in: idem, "Jak Polskę przemienić w kraj kwitnący..." Szkice i studia z czasów saskich, Olsztyn 1997, pp. 69–95.

27 Józef FELDMAN, *Geneza konfederacji tarnogrodzkiej*, pp. 493–497.

28 See footnote no. 18 above.

letters of Lieutenant Piotr Sokolnicki who, despite taking part in battles against the Saxons, became a *regimentarz* soon after the conflict,²⁹ and, even more intriguingly, Colonel Jan Chryzostom Gniazdowski, whose case will be more thoroughly discussed further in the text.³⁰ The difference between them and Gorzeński is that they sent their letters to the Hetman, Sieniawski. The ex-Marshal, who could not expect any mercy from the Hetman, preferred to message the court directly via Flemming.

This brings us to a conclusion that goes against the views of Gorzeński’s contemporaries: that he was not a provocateur, sabotaging the rebels’ common effort from the inside, but simply an incompetent commander who, at some point in his career, dared to seize more than he could comprehend and administrate efficiently. With such an outcome, all of the slander aimed at him would turn out false – but in this case, what caused it in the first place?

The leading and most reasonable theory in this case will be that Lieutenant Gorzeński was merely a victim of anti-Saxon prejudice, which had been festering in Polish-Lithuanian society for almost two decades by that point. The nobility’s opinion of Augustus II had been at a significantly low level at the very least since the eve of the Great Northern War. The resentment was so common and strong that at the beginning of the Swedish invasion of Poland (1702) the King had been accused of provoking a peasant-Cossack rebellion at the south-eastern fringe of the Commonwealth at the same time. Despite how cynical and with little regard to his elective state Augustus’s reign was, such implications can be considered nothing but absurd if we realise that the one both risking and losing the most as a result of two dangerous and simultaneous conflicts within the realm was the King himself.³¹ Nonetheless, it gives us some insight into how annoyed and tired of Saxon rule the society was at that point.

The anti-Saxon fixation, fully visible among the confederates’ ranks, meshes easily with another issue of the era – the phenomenon of exceptionally frequent lynching of political enemies, both real and alleged, by infuriated mobs. Augustus’s reign witnessed a surprising number of such outbursts of social frustration and hatred, hardly ever seen either earlier or further in Polish history. The examples are visible and drastic. The first one would be Michał Sapieha, taken prisoner by political enemies after the battle of Valkininkai (Olkieniki) on 18 November 1700 and murdered the next day. His brutal death can be considered a symbol of the ruthless civil war that destabilized the Lithuanian part of the Commonwealth in the late 17th century. The House of Sapieha had gained uncontested political leverage in

29 BKCz, Manuscript sign. 5952, letter no. 39628 (Węgrów, 17 November 1716). See also Jerzy DYGDAŁA, *Sokolnicki Piotr Antoni h. Nowina* in: PSB, vol. 40, Warszawa – Kraków 2000–2001, pp. 88–90.

30 BKCz, Manuscript sign. 5817, letter no. 12129 (unknown location, 18 December 1716). See also Przemysław SMOLAREK, *Gniazdowski Chryzostom Jan Niemira h. Trzaska* in: PSB, vol. 8, pp. 140–141.

31 Kazimierz JAROCHOWSKI, *Dzieje panowania Augusta II*, vol. 2, Oświęcim 2015, pp. 94–96.

the Grand Duchy, terrorising and forcing the mass of nobility into submission – the death of Michał was, in conclusion, an act of vengeance, considered just by many at that time.³² Another example is that of a man who was actually innocent and his fate was sealed only because of unfounded accusations. That person was Feliks Aleksander Lipski, the voivode of Kalisz, lynched at a mass gathering of the nobility in August 1702. Several weeks prior, Lipski was a member of a deputation sent to the Swedish King Charles XII, attempting to convince him to abandon his march into inland Poland and cease his military activities. The failure of the mission resulted in suspicion, and the latter, although bereft of any valid argument – in slander. Accused of treason and cooperation with the invading Swedes, Lipski was badly injured by an angry mob, which resulted in his demise the next month.³³ The impression of that tragic event brought another influential figure at that time to genuine fear for his own life. Rafał Leszczyński, one of the leaders of the anti-Wettin opposition, who actually cooperated with King Charles, was forced to withdraw from politics and presumably also left the country for a short time until the situation settled down.³⁴

Władysław Gorzeński soon turned out to be merely the first one to face accusations of treason and the fury of the confederate mob during the civil war. In January 1716, just a single month after his demission, the confederates' deputation agreed for an armistice with the Saxons on highly unfair and disadvantageous terms, resulting in both the revolting masses and the higher-ups of the movement being outraged – the treaty was almost immediately rejected by the civilian marshal of the confederation.³⁵ That brought down slanderous rumours of treason upon the heads of the confederate representatives – among them Mikołaj Rosnowski, who had been almost single-handedly responsible for convincing the Ruthenian Voivodeship to support the confederate cause. For his region, he was a similar figure to Gorzeński with regard to his military division, and eventually even shared his fate to some degree.³⁶

32 Kazimierz JAROCHOWSKI, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 180–188.

33 Ibidem, vol. 2, p. 71. For more detailed depiction of his missions and reasons behind the slander that resulted in his lynching, see Rafał KOWALSKI, *Poselstwo wojewody kaliskiego Feliksa Aleksandra Lipskiego do Karola XII w 1702 roku*, *Echa Przeszłości XXI*, 2020, vol. 2, pp. 77–101. It is noteworthy that that brutal incident occurred in the same village, Gorzyce, as Władysław Gorzeński started his revolt. The *Relacyja Transakcyi Związku (...)* mentioned that when Lieutenant Bukowski and the anonymous military judge began to receive threats, they were reminded of the Voivode Lipski, who had met his own end thirteen years previously on the very ground they were standing on – ZNO, Manuscript sign. 3561, p. 9: '[...] inne pogróżki na JMPana sędziego, że go przyłączą do nieboszczyka JMPana Lipskiego wojewody kaliskiego, który w tym miejscu rozsiekany.'

34 Jarosław PORAZIŃSKI, *Epiphania Poloniae*, p. 14.

35 Erazm OTWINOWSKI, op.cit., pp. 255–256; Antoni PROCHASKA, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 362–365.

36 Ibidem, vol. 6, pp. 527–528.

The confederates were capable not only of slandering, but also threatening and taking serious violent measures against one of the most influential, feared, and respected people in the Commonwealth – the Hetman Adam Sieniawski, the supreme commander of the Polish armed forces. Although the revolt initially viewed him as their protector from Saxon injustice and even a potential political leader,³⁷ their sympathies shrank almost as quickly as in Gorzeński's case. Disappointed with the Hetman's delay of any political declarations and general indecisiveness (indeed, by taking a clear side in this vague and complicated conflict, he would inevitably risk the wrath of the opposite one), they soon brewed accusations of his treason and secret cooperation with the King. The city of Lviv where the Hetman was residing, was captured by the confederate forces in April 1716. The rebels were ready to kill him on sight – allegedly, he was saved only thanks to the more reasonable commanders of the attacking forces.³⁸ Nonetheless, he was captured and imprisoned. Although he avoided being lynched, a new threat to his life emerged, which should be considered an attempted political murder. The idea of putting him on trial, which could be considered nothing but a show one, was popular among the confederates and once again, the intervention of a moderate and respected higher-up figures in their ranks (i. e. Janusz Antoni Wiśniowiecki, Voivode of Kraków) decided his fate. Eventually, Sieniawski could not feel safe until his escape from captivity in the summer of 1716.³⁹

Slander and implications of treason eventually fell even upon most famed and respected confederate commander of the civil war – the aforementioned Colonel Jan Chryzostom Gniazdowski, who for several months had been scoring most important victories for the anti-Saxon movement, forcing the electoral forces to withdraw from the western voivodeships as well as securing the political backing of the local nobility. What it took to lose all his support and influence was a single – yet definitely crucial – defeat in the battle of Kowalewo (5 October 1716), the last major clash of the conflict, which gave the King's side massive leverage during the ongoing negotiations. What emerged almost immediately afterwards were rumours of a bribe taken by Gniazdowski and losing to the

37 That idea was eagerly supported by Jerzy Dzieduszycki and the aforementioned Mikołaj Rosnowski, both representatives of the Ruthenian Voivodeship, where Sieniawski's political influence was the strongest. See: ZNO, Manuscript sign. 297, *Mowa JWJPana Jerzego Dzieduszyckiego*, approximately late 1715, pp. 339–341; Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Archiwum Radziwiłłów, Dział VI, Manuscript sign. II-52, *Dyariusz Konfederacyi Tarnogrodzkiej zaczętey i[n] d[ie] 26 Novembris 1715*, fol. 2v. It is noteworthy that the latter of the two sources mentioned that Rosnowski's suggestion to cede all military authority over the movement was met with a vociferous and outraged veto from the majority of the Tarnogród assembly. It is possible that it was the first major blow to his reputation, followed by the events of January 1716.

38 Erazm OTWINOWSKI, op. cit., pp. 263–266; A. PROCHASKA, op. cit., vol. 5, pp. 439–441.

39 Erazm OTWINOWSKI, op. cit., pp. 277, 286; Elżbieta RAFAŁOWICZÓWNA, *A z Warszawy nowiny te... Listy do Elżbiety Sieniawskiej z lat 1710–1720*, ed. by Bożena POPIOŁEK, Kraków 2000, p. 133.

enemy with malice aforethought.⁴⁰ We can easily see the similarities to the insinuations against Gorzeński from not even a full year earlier.

The lightness of the accusations of treason coming from the confederate side against even the most worthy members of their cause in the face of failure, combined with the visible brutalisation of Polish-Lithuanian politics at the beginning of the 18th century, seem to border on mass hysteria of the politically agitated masses, who were seeking no actual enemies but more probably scapegoats. Such a conclusion surely leads one to reconsider Władysław Gorzeński's role and situation during the civil war. The final argument I would like to bring up is the correspondence of Jan Jerzy Przebendowski, the treasurer of the Polish Crown and one of the King's closest collaborators among Polish citizens, to the point of being commonly accused by both people of his own time as well as historians of having purposefully acted against the *raison d'état* of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in support of the monarch's ideas. Przebendowski is known for maintaining a spy/client network and for his views on the opponents of Wettin's policies. He called for a decisive and immediate reaction to any display of social disobedience.⁴¹ Although many aspects of his career seem impossible to grasp through historical sources, he seemed to be one of the few Polish people whom King Augustus or Flemming would consider worth introducing into their clandestine plans.⁴² With the above in mind, the Treasurer's knowledge of Gorzeński, displayed in his letters to Adam Sieniawski (prior to the Hetman's incarceration), leaves little room for doubt. In the very first letter mentioning the soldiers' Marshal (wrongly dated 31 September 1715, most probably sent a month later), Przebendowski called the situation in the Sandomierz Voivodship a "needless provocation" and considered it a mere brawl

40 *Kronika poznańskich Karmelitów Bosych*, ed. by Piotr Franciszek NEUMANN OCD, Poznań 2001, p. 201; Erazm OTWINOWSKI, op. cit., pp. 291–293; Krzysztof ZAWISZA, op. cit, pp. 346–347. The unexpected turn in the confederate's sympathy clearly forced Gniazdowski to seek conciliation with the Hetman Sieniawski, hence the letter mentioned in annotation no. 40 above.

41 For example, in his letter of 28 October 1711 to Jan Szembek, the state chancellor, he suggested dissolving any military unit showing signs of rebellion and dismissing its members with no regard to any required procedures or ceremonies – *Listy Jana Jerzego Przebendowskiego podskarbiego wielkiego koronnego do Jana Szembeka podkanclerzego i kanclerza wielkiego koronnego z lat 1711–1728*, ed. by Adam PERŁAKOWSKI, Kraków 2010, p. 26.

42 In the case of Flemming, his cooperation with Przebendowski can be dated back to the very beginnings of the Saxon efforts to gain the Polish crown. Their wide and mostly secret cooperation can be considered one of the major reasons for Wettin's success – Jacob Heinrich von FLEMMING, *Mémoires concernant l'élection d'Auguste II pour roi de Pologne et les débuts de la guerre du Nord (1696–1702)*, ed. by Urszula KOSIŃSKA, Warsaw 2017, passim, especially pp. 295, 305–313, and 459. See also Adam PERŁAKOWSKI, *Jan Jerzy Przebendowski – faworytem Augusta II?* in: Mariusz Markiewicz – Ryszard Skowron (ed.), *Faworyci i opozycjoniści. Król a elity polityczne w Rzeczypospolitej XV–XVIII wieku*, Kraków 2006, pp. 423–433.

among frustrated soldiers – he seems to have been genuinely surprised by it.⁴³ However, the source which truly makes one question the entire theory about Gorzeński’s treason would undoubtedly be the letter from 6 January 1716 and more precisely its postscript: ‘*What does it mean that Sir Gorzeński was demoted, so he can now speak of himself: O breves et infaustos populi favores?*’⁴⁴

This Latin phrase, used as a title for the present article, stands for: ‘*Oh, brief and ill-fated sympathy of the people*’. Indeed, it sums up how Przebendowski apparently viewed Władysław Gorzeński – an accidental leader of spontaneous fuss which unexpectedly turned into a full-scale civil war. The Treasurer, surprised and concerned with the current of the conflict, considered the ex-Marshal to be just a troublemaker who lost his support and fame almost as quickly as he had initially gained those. Not a provocateur, not an agent of clandestine influence – just an ambitious man who abused the frustration of the people, but could neither channel it properly nor bear the backlash against his own wrong decisions. Given Jan Przebendowski’s position and role in the Commonwealth at the time, maybe his judgement of Gorzeński is much closer to the truth than that of those who vilified the ex-Marshal?

Conclusion

The sources covering Władysław Gorzeński’s controversial deeds and affairs are scarce and disjointed. However, it appears we do not require any new eye-opening discovery for the final judgement in his case. The Lieutenant, the first Marshal of the soldiers’ union of 1715, was a man who was incapable and inadequate to be the leader of a nationwide political movement. His failures and stubbornness in the matter, despite clear examples of good will, brought disgrace and slander upon him – and subsequently forced him to step out of the historical spotlight. The consequences he faced were the result not of treason, but rather the disappointment of an easily angered, hectic crowd.

This article could undoubtedly benefit from further archival research, especially in the collections of handwritten sources left by people of a much more undisputed position at Wettin’s court – for example, the man mentioned several times throughout the text, Jacob Heinrich Flemming (whose writings and documents should mostly be available in the Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden), or, on the Polish behalf, the Chancellor Jan Szembek

43 *Listy Jana Jerzego Przebendowskiego podskarbiego wielkiego koronnego do Adama Sieniawskiego wojewody bełskiego i hetmana wielkiego koronnego z lat 1704–1725*, ed. by Adam PERŁAKOWSKI, Kraków 2007, pp. 307–308.

44 *Ibidem*, p. 317: ‘*Quid hoc sibi vult, że tego JMPa Gorzyńskiego [original spelling; should be ‘Gorzeńskiego’ – M. R.] zrzucili, który mówić o sobie może: O breves et infaustos populi favores?*’

(research required in various archival institutions throughout Poland). With more of their insight into the events of late 1715 that could surely bring even more arguments; however, it would most probably not change the final conclusions.

In the final analysis, the point of this article, alongside determining Gorzeński's true motives, is to highlight the vast space of uncertainty, doubts and speculations which haunt our knowledge of Polish history of the 18th century – especially its more clandestine aspects, revolving around politics conducted in secrecy and caballing. The challenges ahead of any potential researchers of the internal situation of the Commonwealth at the time border on aforementioned topics such as prejudice, paranoia, and mass hysteria, but also social frustration and the limitations of a political community brought to despair. With that in mind, we shall face those challenges with respect and the acknowledgement of a bitter, yet certain truth: that not every question ever asked will receive a satisfying answer. However, in the controversial case of Władysław Gorzeński – at least the answer to the particular question around which this entire article pivots seems very clear.

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