

# **Gender and Well-Being**

Interactions between Work, Family and Public Policies

**COST ACTION A 34**

**Second Symposium:**

**The Transmission of Well-Being: Marriage  
Strategies and Inheritance Systems in Europe  
(17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

**25<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

**University of Minho  
Guimarães-Portugal**

**Please, do not quote without author's permission**

**Magnates marriage strategies in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania  
in the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries**

**Dr Marzena Liedke**  
Institute of History  
University of Białystok  
Poland  
[mlie@wp.pl](mailto:mlie@wp.pl)

This text is a continuation of the research on marriage strategies in the Commonwealth of Two Nations and presents conclusions resulting from the research on marriage strategies of the magnates of Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Early Modern period.

In 1386 – 1795 Grand Duchy of Lithuania was in a union with Poland. Both countries formed a union as early as the 14th century, thus introducing pagan Lithuania into a group of Christian countries. Until the second half of the 16th century this union was of a personal character. Sigmund August, however, the last representative of the Jagiellonian Dynasty, which at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries was a serious competition even for the Habsburgs (as at that time Jagiellonians ruled over a great part of Europe: apart from GDL (Grand Duchy of Lithuania) and PC (Polish Crown), also in Czech and Hungary), led to the establishment of a real union in Lublin in 1569. Thus the Commonwealth of Two Nations was established. Despite closer connection between both parts of the countries, separate offices, courts and treasury were left. Moreover, as early as the 16th century differences in, for example, range of social structure or language used by some magnates and noblemen (Ruthenian was an official office language in GDL until 1699), were easily noticeable. In the last quarter of the 16th century the process of polonization and catholicization of GDL's noblemen and magnates became stronger. This phenomenon had its climax in the middle of

the 17th century, and since then almost all magnates and a great part of the noblemen of the Republic of Poland already belonged to Catholic Church and spoke Polish language. At that time a social structure in both parts of the country became uniform as well (e.g. a group of Knyaz (Princes/Dukes) existing in GDL gained the same rights as the rest of noblemen despite their economic situation). Formally uniform, in terms of the rights they enjoyed, the class of noblemen in the Republic of Poland was not homogenous economically or politically. It was composed of magnates as well as noblemen not possessing any land. That is why we would like to emphasize that in my presentation the issue of marriage strategies will be shown on the example of the class of magnates, whereas conclusions referring to middle noblemen will be presented in the text prepared for publishing.

Literature on marriage strategies in the Republic of Poland is more than humble. So far the problem has mainly been discussed with reference to lower social classes, mostly from the Crown territory, or noblemen in the Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>. There have also been publications about a woman's position in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania<sup>2</sup>. (In studies considering religious and economic issues or the ones connected with social promotion, as well as in monographs of individual families, the importance of a right choice of a marriage partner as a way to improve or even maintain the family social and economic status, was, of course, mentioned<sup>3</sup>. In case of mixed marriages a religious factor was stated, but separate research devoted to marriage

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Kuklo, *Rodzina w osiemnastowiecznej Warszawie*, Białystok 1990. M. Kamecka, C. Kulko, *Marriage Strategies in Poland: Social and Spatial Differences (16th – 18th Centurie)* w: „*Historical Social Research*”, t. 28, nr 3 (2003); M. Kopczyński, *Studia nad rodziną chłopską w Koronie*, Warszawa 1998; M. Koczerska, *Rodzina szlachecka w Polsce późnego średniowiecza*, Warszawa 1975; A. Szymczakowi, *Gentry Marriage in the Late Middle Ages. Love or Strategy?* w: “*Quaestiones Mediae Aevi Novae*”, t.9 (2004); J. Bardach, *Zwyczajowe prawo małżeńskie ludności ruskiej Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego (XV – XVII w.)* w: tegoż: *Studia z ustroju i prawa Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego XIV – XVII w.*, Warszawa 1970; M. Górny, *Uwagi o badaniu przewisk i nazwisk staropolskich*, *Genealogia*, t. 6, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> J. Sarcevičiene, *Kobieta w: Kultura Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Analizy i obrazy*, opr. V. Ališauskas i in., Kraków 2006; S. Lazutka, I. Valikonite, *Imušestvennoe položenie ženščiny (materī, ženy, dočeri, sestry) privilehiovannoho soslovija po I Litovskomu Statutu*, „*Lietuvos TSR aukštųjų mokyklų mokslo darbai. Istorija*”, 16 (2), 1976;

<sup>3</sup> E. G. K. Przyboś, *Awans społeczny Lubomirskich herbu Drużyna od XIV do początku XVII wieku*, „*Genealogia*” 4, 1994;

strategies has not been conducted.) Therefore I decided that even partial completion of this loop and observation of marriage strategies among the class of magnates in the GDL is well worth undertaking. Questions I found important are those about factors determining marriage strategies (political, economic, territorial, social, religious, “emotional” and other), forms of marriage strategies (e.g. agreements about children “in cradles”; breach of agreements; search on demand – e.g. sudden widowhood; kidnapping), age of contracting marriage, length of marriages: first and next, lifestyle after widowhood (widowhood or another marriage), and possible divorces.

Not all issues, however, could be specified precisely due to lack of appropriate details in the sources. (Basic analyzed material mostly covers coat of arms and other works of source – genealogy character<sup>4</sup>, as well as, e.g. letters<sup>5</sup>, did not always contain appropriate information. It is worth mentioning here that Polish coat of arms (Polish in the name but referring to GDL territory as well) are not only lists of emblems and houses using them, but presentations of rich resources of genealogical facts such as territorial background of a house, filiations and colligations, posts held by representatives of a particular family etc.).

The research has been carried out on the example of the Ruthenian Knyaz house of the Ostrogski (until the Lublin Union in 1569 the Lithuanian family in terms of a state, whereas after the annexation of Ukraine and Volhynia to the PC – already a crown family). Knyaz made a part of a broadly understood class of noblemen of GDL, but neither did they present a

---

<sup>4</sup> J. Wolff, *Kniaziowie litewsko – ruscy od końca XIV wieku*, Warszawa 1895; R. Żelewski, *Górkowa Elżbieta*, Polski słownik biograficzny, t. 8, Wrocław – Kraków – Warszawa 1959 – 1960, s. 424 – 426; K. Niesiecki, *Herbarz polski*, t. 7, Lipsk 1841; A. Boniecki, *Poczet rodów w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XV i XVI wieku*, Warszawa 1887; S. Uruski, *Rodzina. Herbarz szlachty polskiej*, t. 13, Warszawa 1916.

Tegoż, *Łaska I.v. Ostrogska z Kościeleckich Beata*, Polski słownik biograficzny, t. 18, Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1973, s. 222 – 223; W. Dworzaczek, *Genealogia*, t. I i II, Warszawa 1959;

Tegoż, *Ostrogski Ilia (Eliasz)*, Polski słownik biograficzny, t. 24, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1979, s. 480 – 481;

<sup>5</sup> E. G. w: Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie, Archiwum Radziwiłłów, dz. V.

uniform/homogenous financial status nor did they enjoy the same social and political importance. The Jagiellonian's relatives of a very high social position, for instance, belonged to them, as well as poor pauperized Knyazs. The Ostrogski house was absolutely powerful and wealthy and preserved their position until expiry of male offspring in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. (The text which is prepared for print will also consider Lithuanian – Ruthenian Knyaz houses of Ogiński and Żyżemski. The Ogiński family belonged to a group of middle nobility as early as the first quarter of the 16th century, but since 1633 we can observe the increase of their importance which they maintained until the end of GDL towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, belonging to a group of GDL's political elite. The Żyżemski family, on the other hand, never held senator positions, remaining middle noblemen).

In case of the Ruthenian house of the Ostrogski, 23 marriages (including 7 subsequent ones) were analyzed, between the beginning of the 16th century and the expiry of male offspring in 1620, and female in 1654, where 6 men and 10 women from this family were spouses.

The age of contracting marriage has been estimated only for 8 persons, mostly men (5 cases). The youngest among women was only 14-year-old Elżbieta Ostrogska, the oldest – 20-year-old Anna Alojza. The youngest man contracting a marriage was Aleksander Konstantynowicz, who was 21 at that time, whereas the oldest - Konstanty Iwanowicz, who married as late as at the age 46.

I managed to examine the length of marriages for 15 relationships, and it differed from a few months to 19 years. Average length of marriage of a representative of the Ostrogski house was almost 10 years. Marriages terminated with death of one of the spouses, whereas divorces have not been found.

Having huge property in Volhynia and Ukraine, the Ostrogski house as one of the most powerful in GDL and then in the Republic of Poland had quite limited group of houses where they could search a suitable marriage partner. These included the most outstanding Lithuanian – Ruthenian and Crown families. At first the Ostrogski were looking for partners in GDL (which was conditioned by Lithuanian law, among other things), quite early, however, they started to choose representatives of the Crown (and sometimes even neighboring countries, e.g. the relationship of Janusz Konstantynowicz and Zuzanna Seredi from Hungary), however, most of them came from south-eastern part of the country, that is lands which were geographically the closest to the Ostrogski estate). Above all, the Ostrogski took into consideration financial status and political importance of the families among which they searched future life partners. Marriages were to increase, or at least maintain, family property, and strengthen political importance of the family, as, for instance, in the case of the relationship between Konstanty Wasyl and Zofia of Tarnowski, a daughter of Grand Crown Hetman Jan, one of the leading figures of political life at that time. What is more, after childless death of her brother Zofia appeared to be the only heiress of her father's property. In general no notice was paid to religion. The Ostrogski belonged to Orthodox Church. However, they married female representatives of other religions quite early, mostly Catholic. (e.g. Konstanty Wasyl, who was later a zealous advocate of Orthodox religion at the time of the Brześć Union, married a Catholic, and all his sons married representatives of other religions as well). Perhaps they did not care about denomination of a future spouse as much because the principle saying that sons inherited religion after father and daughters after mother was still binding in the 16th century, at least formally. Therefore there was hope that a male line would preserve their ancestors religion. Even though, for example, Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski and Zofia of Tarnowski children were raised this way, at the time of

increasing Counterreformation it did not assure sons' loyalty towards their ancestors' religion. Apart from that, a group of "Greeks" among the richest was diminishing in time, and it was difficult to find a suitable marriage partner of the same denomination and at the same time preserve economic and political position.

Emotion was considered a factor conditioning marriage strategy quite rarely. In the Ostrogski family Ilia Konstantynowicz resigned from marriage arranged already by his father (with Jerzy Radziwiłł's daughter, apparently the most powerful Lithuanian magnate) and married Beata Kościelecka, a representative of the Crown who moved his heart. The fact that at the same time she was a daughter of the Crown Undertreasurer Andrzej certainly made it easier for the Duke to get married with love.

Generally parents, mainly fathers, decided about the choice of first, and sometimes also next spouses. (In GDL already at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Boyars obtained the right to decide about this, independent of Grand Duke's will. In the first half of the next century this right started to apply to representatives of Orthodox religion as well). After father's death guardians took over his duty in this matter. Mothers could not always freely influence the child's marriage independent of guardians' will. In specific cases when a monarch became a main guardian, which happened quite often among magnates, he made use of this right and decided about a marriage of women under his care according to his will. Halszka Ostrogska, whose mother tried to decide about her marriage but her decision was limited by the will of her brother-in-law, her daughter's uncle Konstanty Wasyl, and king Sigmund August himself as the highest guardian, is an excellent example here.

As for the forms of marriage strategies: in the class of GDL magnates children's marriages were frequently arranged already when they were minors, and not too rich market of offers was inspected beforehand. When a better candidate appeared, however, arrangements were broken despite the risk of trial and the necessity to pay damages. It happened that father's arrangements were broken by sons, e.g. Ilija Konstantynowicz already mentioned. Next marriages were usually planned by the interested parties themselves, however, if a father or relatives were alive, they were asked for advice. In such cases they tried to find a partner of a suitable social and economic position. It is difficult to say to what extent a feeling of loneliness, political and economic issues or, as we may assume, family house policy decided about next marriage. Konstanty Ostrogski, for instance, got engaged to Tatiana Słucka as soon as two weeks after his first wife's death. Knyaz had only one son with his first wife - Ilija, whom we already know, who died a few months after marriage with his beloved Beata, leaving her pregnant. The Duchess gave birth to a daughter, and if Hetman Konstanty had not married again and had not had a son with his second wife - Konstanty Wasyl, the Ostrogski family would probably have died already in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The reason for the next prompt marriage could be Hetman's advanced age or family house policy. A second son of Hetman Konstanty, Konstanty Wasyl, behaved just on the contrary after his first wife Zofia's death, he had as many as five children with, including three sons; namely, he did not remarry, perhaps as he did not intend to disperse his fortune too much, even though he lived as a widower for another 37 years or so, which should also be treated as a manifestation of the family house policy.

Another manifestation of the family house policy could be strengthening of one line of the family e.g. by designating some offspring (both sons and daughters) for clerical service not to disperse family property. It could prove dangerous and lead to family expiry, which in fact

was the case sometimes, e.g. the Gasztold family. A quick glance at the Ostrogski genealogical tree shows, however, that this family did not exercise such policy. Perhaps the Ostrogski did not exercise such policy for yet another reason. In case of such wealthy family it was hard not to think that behind their decision to assign some of their male offspring for clergy was hope they would achieve a bishop or archbishop status. The problem, however, was that the Ostrogski belonged to “Greek” Orthodox Church, whereas Orthodox “dukes” of the Church could not sit in the Grand Duke of Lithuania Council, nor in the Republic of Poland Senate, thus they practically lacked any political importance.

On the occasion of talking about the issue of choosing a lifestyle after widowhood, it should be emphasized that the male representatives of the Ostrogski did not marry widows. On the other hand, it happened that women from this family married widowers (a specific example of Elżbieta Konstantynówna “inheriting” a husband, Krzysztof Radziwiłł, after her sister’s death). It is worth mentioning here that a position of a woman, particularly a widow, was a bit stronger in GDL than in the Crown. Having a guaranteed financial existence, in general, a widow of a magnate did not always decide to marry again. She was quite independent financially and could decide about herself, administer her children’s properties and enjoy life to a much greater extent than in marriage or maidenhood. Beata of Kościelecki, already mentioned, remained a widow for very long, that is until her daughter became mature.

We should also mention that in GDL a specific form of marriage strategy were kidnappings or forced weddings. Such a case happened in the Ostrogski family. Despite the girl mother’s objection, but with her uncle’s permission, a daughter of Ilia Ostrogski and Beata of Kościelecki married Knyaz Dymitr Sanguszko who forced the girl to participate in wedding ceremony. It should be mentioned as well that there were no divorces in the Ostrogski family.

Summing up, (and including the results of the research on the Crown magnates (the Zamoyski family) it should be noticed that both in the Crown and GDL the most important reason for choosing such and not other candidates was the will to increase, or at least not diminish, prestige and financial state of the family. We may suppose political allies were at stake in many cases as well. Partner's territorial background as well as his/her religion initially played more significant role in case of families from GDL, in time, however, it was losing its importance due to the above mentioned motives. At the very end of the reasons conditioning marriage strategies of magnates of the Republic of Poland was love.

In general first marriages were thoroughly arranged by parents, sometimes even for their few years old children. The arrangements were not always observed. Forced weddings and divorces seldom happened.

The age of marriage contracting in the class of magnates reveals some regularity as well. Women married younger, already since they were 14. (The lowest admissible age of contracting marriages is specified in GDL's statutes, that is Lithuanian law rolls. According to them already a 13-year-old girl could get married. In miserable magnate marital market she was not always allowed to remain single much longer.) Men longer remained single (even though church law allowed marriages already at the age of 14) because of the need to acquire father's property to maintain/support the family, among other things.

Medical and political factors influenced marriages length. It became longer in time, first it was about 10 years on average for the Ostrogski, whereas later about 17 years for the Zamoyski.