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SEJMIK SZLACHECKI ZIEMI CHEŁMSKIEJ

1648-1717



TOWARZYSTWO NAUKOWE KUL

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THE GENTRY REGIONAL DIETS IN THE CHEŁM REGION IN THE YEARS OF 1648-1717

Summary

The book describes conventions and assemblies of the Chełm nobility organised with a view to find appropriate remedial measures that would satisfy the inhabitants of the local diet district. The point was to propose such measures that would solve respective problems that troubled the whole local community. It functioned for over three hundred years in the territory inhabited by the believers of various religions, many nationalities, and on the meeting of Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian cultures. Its undeniable authority can be credited to the participants of the proceedings, who especially when the power of the Polish-Lithuanian centre was dwindling, took over their prerogatives, which under normal circumstances were due only to the monarch and the parliament. It stood out among the remaining lands of the Crown Russia, for the range of its autonomy was broader. The Diet members from this region went directly to general diets; they did not have to consult their political plans with the representatives of particular diets of the Russian region in Wisznia. An important characteristic of the Chełm autonomous diets was also active participation of the inhabitants of the diet district in the political events of the state. Such leaders as Jan Zamoyski, Mikołaj Rej, Mikołaj Sienicki, Paweł Orzechowski, Zbigniew Gorajski, Jan Karol Romanowski, Jan Sobieski, or Stanisław Mateusz Rzewuski were remembered by the then participants of the diet conventions. Owing to those politicians, the second half of the 17th century saw an unprecedented development of the autonomous gentry diets. They controlled tax collections with which they did what they wished, organised the army, held elections of district officials, subsidised and exempted private people and religious institutions from various obligations on behalf of the state, sent diplomatic missions and created foreign policy. In reality therefore, they acted as small state organisms, without which the pre-partition Polish Republic would not be able to exist.

Analysing those gentry diets, the author modestly contributes to the research on the local parliamentary system of the Crown Russia, originated as early as the first half of the 20th century. Almost a hundred years have elapsed since that time but Polish historiography still has not produced a complete synthesis of any of these assemblies. The study has focused mainly on the Chełm and Krasnystaw municipal books stored in the State Archives in Lublin. They include universals, diet lauda, and parliamentary instructions, as such the most complete collection of the diet documents of the Chełm region. They are supplemented by archives created at the Chełm diets stored in copies in the Czartoryski Library in Kraków, the Łopaciński Library in Lublin, the National Library in Warszawa, and the Warsaw University Library. The Chełm municipal books, together with the attached diet documents, are accessible in foreign institutions. The sources of interest for us are stored in the archives: in Lvov (the Ukraine), and Mińsk (Byelorussia). Additionally, the manuscript archives are supplemented by the parliamentary records accessible mainly at the Ossoliński Library in Wrocław. Apart from the manuscript sources, the study has also taken advantage of printed archives. The "Acts of Cholmskago grodzkago suda," vols. 23 and 27, printed in Vilnius in 1896 and 1900, are worthy to be mentioned. The "Municipal and district Acts from the Period of the Polish Republic from the So-called Bernardine Archives in Lvov" were used more extensively, edited by Antoni Prochaska, and parliamentary constitutions published by the Volumina legum publisher. We have managed to settle many historical facts on the basis of the "Private diary written in Zamość..." by Bazyl Rudomicz, the rector of Zamoyski Academy. The lines of the borders of the Chełm region have been determined on the basis of the cartographic sources. Respectively, we have used mainly the materials edited by Aleksander Jabłonowski, Jan Jakubowski, Stanisław Litak, and Stefan Wojciechowski.

The study consists of five chapters. In order to gain a better knowledge of the issues in question, a map and tables have been attached, worked out on the basis of the sources and substantive studies.

Chapter one contains a general historical-geographical sketch of the area of the Chełm region. It is supplemented by information on the administrative and church organisation of the Chełm diet district and hierarchy of offices. The division of the land property is a key to a better understanding of the mentality of diet decision-makers and the purpose of their decisions. The further part of the chapter discusses also a genesis and kinds of the Chełm

diets. Moreover, much attention has been given to the number of those diets and personal composition of their participants.

The procedures of diet proceedings constitute a principal part of chapter two. It recreates the specific character of conventions and makes precise their regulations. This chapter also contains information about the elected functionaries and officials present at the diets: speakers of the diets, diet members, diplomats, deputies, collectors, judges, and army commanders.

Chapter three has been devoted to social problems. It reports on the relations between dieting gentry and urban and rural communities, together with the ties that bound them with the upper strata of society – state dignitaries and aristocracy. In this context, an important role is played by local conflicts, especially between townspeople and Jews, whose diet decision-makers used for their own and class purposes. The more important issues, addressed in this chapter, are the following: raising plebeians to the nobility, rewarding people who in some ways made the Chełm region famous, granting compensation, caring for prisoners of war, and conducting trade.

The essence of chapter four consists in mutual contacts of the diet nobility with the Christian Churches in the territory of the Chełm region. The taxes imposed on the Church, financial benefits it charged, and nobility goods were passed to the hands of the religious – such are basic causes of conflicts in which the Chełm diet decision-makers took part as well. The key role in this chapter is played by the diet patronage of the institutions of religious character. Under this concept we understand: subsidising the activities of churches and monasteries, granting them tax exemptions, and exemptions from benefits on behalf of the army, and helping in efforts to obtain exemption, or confirming a church foundation on behalf of the diet.

Chapter five, and at the same time the last one, lays out the position of the Chełm diet towards the key problems of the pre-partition Polish Republic. The question of electing a monarch and the way they held their office, tax system, working of the Diet and Crown Tribunal, foreign policy of the state and the army – such is the basic catalogue of questions and problems investigated by the Chełm diets in the period under discussion.

The list of all diets and diet functionaries, together with the sources, are included in the chronology of the diets of the Chełm region in the years of 1648-1717 (Annex 1). In Annex II we placed a list of the members of families which often participated in the Chełm diets.

Translated by Jan Kłos