

ANNALS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA

**ANALELE
UNIVERSITĂȚII
DIN CRAIOVA**

ISTORIE / HISTORY

Bi-Annually Journal

Year XXIV, No. 2(36)/2019

November



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The Journal is published bi-annually

ISSN – L: 1224 – 5704

ISSN Online: 2393 – 3682

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Analele Universității din Craiova. Istorie (Annals of the University of Craiova. History) is indexed in:



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STUDIES AND ARTICLES

COMMENTARY BY JAN ZAMOYSKI, THE ROYAL SECRETARY, ON LEGAL CUSTOMS OF THE VLACHS OF SAMBIR FROM 1568

*Grzegorz Javor**

Abstract

The aim of the presented article is, first and foremost, to edit a source – extremely rare for the areas of the old Poland – of a narrative character on the Wallachian settlement, which consists of fragments of the inventory on the Sambir domains from 1568. It presents key elements of the political organisation of this community, of both individual mountain settlements and entire groups which created a supra-rural structure referred to as a *kraina*. It contains information on geographical realities of the ecumene which the Vlachs inhabited, but also on relations between the settlers and land owners, and in particular the subsidies and fees paid by the former to the latter. The account written in the old-Polish language is difficult to access for the European studies, hence I have made a decision to publish it in English and provide it with quite extensive footnotes where I have placed explanations of terminology which could have raised interpretational doubts in the text. The translation is preceded by information on the origins and process of Jan Zamoyski's mission, which are presented against the background of political battle that took place in Poland in the second half of the 16th century.

Key words: *Wallachian law, pastoralism in the Carpathians, Wallachian settlement, mountain farming*

Aims and Progress of Zamoyski's Mission in 1568

Jan Zamoyski, the author of the account presented below, was at that time a 25 year old royal secretary. This thoroughly educated humanist (a graduate from Sorbonne, Strasbourg and Padua, where he attained his doctorate degree) was to play an outstanding role in the future in the Polish politics at the turn of the 16th and 17th century by undertaking the office of a vice-chancellor, chancellor of the Crown, and great Crown hetman. This brilliant career was a result not only of his education or influential relatives, but also of an extraordinary conscientiousness in his court registry duties and effectiveness in performing the tasks entrusted to him (Korolko, 1991: 240). Writing of the *Inventory (Inwentarz)* took place in the circumstances of a conflict. It should be noted here that individual complexes of the royal domain in the old Poland were managed by the magistrates referred to as 'starostas' (*capitanei*). They were appointed with extensive judicial and administrative powers over the population living in area subjected to them and they performed police tasks, but in their hands rested also the economic management of 'starostwo', the county (*capitaneatus*), entrusted to

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them. The high income acquired by those means was passed to the royal treasury, but from the 15th century onwards these domains were more frequently becoming a pledge in exchange for loans granted to the monarch by the nobility. Until the moment of repayment, the income from the properties went to creditors, becoming the foundation for building the gentry's fortunes and the dominant political position of this group in the country. For this reason, one of the most important postulates of the political faction acting against the gentry – which was formed by the middle and wealthy nobility (the so-called movement for executing the laws and goods) – was to restore the properties to the ruler by a compulsory purchase of pledges. Implementation of this postulate was in an obvious way undermining the financial position of the magnates. Hence, it is not surprising they resisted the attempts of the repossession (Falniowska-Gradowska, 1984: s. 17-18).

All the abovementioned issues are visible also in the case of typically mountainous areas of the county with its centre in Sambir, situated in the Crown Ruthenia by the border with Hungary. Its previous tenant – a voivode of Podolia, Jan Starzechowski, died before the 16th of October 1567 (*Magistrates*, 1998: 145). He obtained the Land of Sambir and the county of Drohobych for life as a pledge for a loan granted to the royal treasury in 1564 in the amount of 21 000 zloty (Sucheni-Grabowska, 1974: 232, 244). Neither his sons, nor his widow implemented the Sejm provisions, which had ordered to return these rich areas to the king on the basis of the repurchase principle. For this reason the king delegated Zamoyski with a mission to take back the two counties, to collect the dues from the subjects, and what is the most important for us – to make a detailed inventory of the royal holdings in these domains which had been variously depleted during Starzechowski's lifetime. The mission of the royal secretary, commenced in autumn of 1567, had a dramatic course. The royal envoys were not allowed to enter Sambir, the roads they travelled on were damaged, and there were open threats and even physical violence. Ultimately, however, the mission ended with success. The family of Starzechowski was removed from the estates by the repayment of old debts of the monarch from 1569 and the family never recovered their previous position. On the other hand, the fortune of Jan Zamoyski rose due to the generous royal grants while the county of Sambir was obtained as a lease by the family of Herburt, his relatives (Grzybowski, 1994: 30-32; Leśniewski, 2008: 18-19). The result of this mission was also to make a detailed inventory of the seized domains, the fragment of which includes the description of legal customs of the Vlachs living in the area.

Presentation of the Published Source and Editing Rules

The presented archival item in the form of a manuscript, a fair copy of the volume, has an original title: “Inventory of the Sambir County Profits Obtained in 1568 after the Death of the Local Starost, Lord Starzechowski, a Voivode of Podolia, Written by Jan Zamoyski, a Royal Secretary”. It is stored in Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych (The Main Archives of Old Documents) in Warsaw, in the group: *Tak zwana Metryka Litewska* (The So-called Lithuanian Record), section IX, B, marked with a reference number 22 (AGAD, ML 22). It is still not available for scholars in a form of scanned pages published on the Archives' website. Its usage is further complicated

by the lack of proper page numbers which are mixed up particularly with its foliation. The last page was given number 532. Jan Zamoyski ordered his description in accordance with the adopted and consequently implemented model. The first part (pp. 1-307), written in the old-Polish language, consists of a very detailed description of two towns (Sambir and Staryi Sambir) and individual villages, which always includes the following elements: geographical locations and their borders, names and nicknames of residents together with the acreage of land cultivated by them, and the amount of rent paid for it; lands belonging to knyazes and popes, and the mills, windmills, fulling mills and taverns, etc. existing in individual settlements. Described on separate pages are the local saltworks and granges with the characteristics of crops and revenues they were providing. The next part (pp. 308 – sheet 488), written mainly in Latin, is a registry of documents, which in the majority refers to individual Wallachian lands of knyazes and privileges for popes. In the final part of the volume (sheet 489-532), individual towns and villages of a small county of Drohobych are described in an analogical way as in the case of Land of Sambir.

Serious research on the Wallachian communities living on the northern slopes of the Carpathians is not possible without reaching out for the mentioned sources. It should be pointed out here that the county of Sambir, situated near the border with Hungary in a typically mountainous area, played an exceptionally important role in the history of the Wallachian colonisation. The immigrants from across the Carpathians appeared there already in the 14th century. During the reign of Louis I of Hungary in Poland (1370-1382), when the power over this region was held on his behalf by Duke Wladyslaw of Opole as a governor of Ruthenia, it was here that the functioning of a Wallachian military district was recorded, undoubtedly modeled after this kind of organisations existed earlier in the Kingdom of Hungary. This demonstrates a significant potential of such settlement in Ruthenia in its oldest phase which is tangible in the sources. In 1377-1406 the office of a voivode of the Sambir Vlachs was held by Dziurdź (Romanian: Gheorghe) of Stupnica and Jurang after him (Fastnacht, 1962; 218-219; Gilewicz, 1929: 28-32; Wyrostek, 1932; 56; Jawor, 2013, chapter 3). There was a true explosion of this settlement here in the 16th century since the number of villages founded on the Wallachian law increased – compared to the previous period – by 90% (Inkin, 2004: 12-20).

The fragments of the inventory volume presented below is a source which is unique in this part of Europe for its author attempted not only to characterise the Wallachian community's customs in a larger area, but also to exceptionally aptly indicate the reasons for the expansion of this settlement model, in which the shepherding and agricultural activities were skilfully combined. It provides much more extensive interpretative possibilities in comparison to the analysis of documents associated with particular rural settlements, i.e. individual cases which historians usually use. Meanwhile, the language barrier and the already mentioned limited access to this source, narrow down the opportunity for its analysis and for that very reason the text is not known to scholars apart from those who are able to use Slavic languages. Therefore, I decided to translate it into English and I added scans from the original as an annex to this article. In the footnotes I included explanations of some terms, which could cause misinterpretation, and I indicated academic publications

regarding these matters. It is worth emphasising that various fragments of this source were cited – in a more or less professional way – by a few authors. This was done by I. A. Linničenko (1894: 171-174) already towards the end of the 19th century (in Russian language – and also in old-Polish language in footnotes), and then – on the basis of his work – a translation into Czech language was done by K. Kadlec (1916: 332-333). The renowned expert in the Wallachian topics, V. F. Inkin (1975: 299-330; 1978: 114-147), a historian from Lvov, often referred to the abovementioned work. It is also worth mentioning a Polish scholar S. Szczotka who also used this source (1949: 363-366).

Description of Legal Customs of the Vlachs of Sambir from 1568

[p. 3c] Location and Size of Land and Settlement of the County of Sambir

This county, as is apparent from chorography made on the occasion of this revision, is situated – not to mention fragmented private properties – between the lands in Mukachevo (Munkács), Uh, and Khust (Hust) from the side of Hungary, while in Poland – between the lands in Lesko, county of Przemyśl, Gródek, Drohobych, Stryi, to which it adjoins in a way that all the counties create a kind of one whole. Counting from the mountains known as the Beskids, along a straight line from the Hungarian border, counting from the south to the north, it has 12 miles¹, and 30 or more if counted by the roads. There are 2 towns in this county, 118 villages, and in addition 3 villages subjected to the saltworks. Moreover, the county has parts in a few villages where one or two peasants live. During the conducted revision it was stated that 24 settlements had been separated from the county. In the part examined by Jan Zamoyski, there are (apart from the fields belonging to towns and granges' areas):

- people on the farms 2733
- horticulturists (*zagrodnicy*)² and landless cottagers (*podsadkowie*)³ 285
- farm-manors (*dworzyszczka*) or feoffs⁴ 1352 ¼

[p. 3c] Rivers of the County

There are four considerable rivers in this county which collect water from numerous streams and smaller rivers, and they all flow into the Dniester. The first one is the Dniester, the second is the Stryi, and the third one is the Bystrytsia. Since all the villages are situated in the mountains on the rivers or their tributaries, the mountainous villages are commonly divided into three regions (*kraina*): of Stryi, of

¹ It is uncertain what type of 'mile' is referred to in the text. Depending on their type, they would stretch from 6300 metres to 7810 metres (Szymański, 2004: 164).

² In the Latin sources they are referred to as *hortulani*, who were a poorer group of the rural population. They owned buildings and small land plots, and made a living as labour wage-earners or they did handcraft activities (Samsonowicz, 1954: 194-196).

³ In the Latin sources they are referred to as *inquilini*, peasants who were deprived of their own land, forced to make a living by labour work (Jawor, 1991: 24-29).

⁴ Initially the farm-manors, *dworzyszczka* (Lat. *area, curia*), typical for the Russian and Wallachian law, were units of diversified size, dependent on the condition of soil, amount of land in the village and the needs of the granges. The tendency to spread them, align them, and then finally to associate them with feoffs (*lanens, mansus*) measuring around 25 hectares can be observed in some areas from the mid-15th century, while in other areas, more economically backward, only in the 16th century (Inkin, 1974: 27-29).

Dniester, and of Bystrytsia¹. *Kraina* of Bystrytsia was currently divided: a part of it was pledged to lord Stanisław Herburt, a castellan of Lvov, and the second part – to lord Jan Starzechowski, a voivode of Podolia. For this reason, the revision was conducted only on a part of the area and described together with the grange of Sambir. The fourth river of this county is Strwiąż, the upper stream of which belongs to the county of Przemyśl; below, on the river, are situated the properties of lords Tarłów and lords Herburt; further down, a few villages inhabited by farmers are the king's possessions. The river flows to the Dniester – next to the county of Sambir flow also the river San and Opor – and on its other side, from the west, also the river San.

[p. 2-4²] **On Wallachian Villages, Measurements of Cultivated Fields, Knyazes, *Krajnicy*, Assemblies Referred to as *Zbory***

Because the land of the county of Sambir is situated mostly in the mountains where winter crops are not born since winter lasts there for a long time and it quickly freezes in autumn, the vast majority of villages in the county of Sambir is founded on the Wallachian law. Their residents, apart from the few settlements situated closer to the fields, have no obligation to bear feudal burdens. For due to a poor land, there are no granges in there. Only for their own needs [3] oats, some rye, and cattle is b[red ...] they perform on behalf of the king⁴. They pay tribute in the form of rams and pigs on behalf of the king, they also supply wood to sawmills and some settlements supply ash to dyeing fabrics, and all the Vlachs are obliged to repair the castle in Sambir and supply it with wood (for fire). Since the villages are far away from the manor-house, the following customs prevail there: each *kraina* has its own *krajnik*⁵, to whom knyazes are subjected; each village has a knyaz, to whom peasants are subjected and they keep order within the village. All people from those villages get together in towns twice a year for assemblies (*zborny*), one of which takes place on the day of St. Peter⁶ – they refer to it as a “spring assembly”, and the second on the day of St. Martin – they refer to it as an “autumn assembly” [11 *listopada*]⁷. Therein, the knyazes bring rents and tributes from the residents of villages; also the courts take place there. Throughout the assemblies, the sentences are issued and penalties are imposed and charged. On this account, the starostas obtained considerable income. Nevertheless, they complained that legal penalties had been inscribed not as their income, but the king's [8]. (Apart

¹ *Krainy* were a type of ultra-rural communities which were characteristic for the Wallachian law. Until the mid-16th century it was a rule that there was one *kraina* in one set of land properties. Later on, their gradual division took place which resulted from the increasing number of population and the growing farm economy (Inkin, 1975: 304; Jawor, 2013: s. ...). They were probably organisations analogous to the structures common in the Romanian areas led by knyazes of the valleys (Popa, 1970: 10-14).

² Due to pagination error, page 3c is followed by page 2.

³ A few words are missing from the broken bottom edge of the sheet.

⁴ It most likely concerns some works done for the king.

⁵ Plural version: *krajnicy*; provided by the author for the clarity of the translation.

⁶ It most likely concerns a festive day on the 29th of April.

⁷ The issue of the Wallachian assemblies known as ‘zborny’ or ‘strungi’ was discussed by me in a few publications (Jawor, 1997: 179-186; 2013: chapter 5).

⁸ The further short fragment is obscure. It most likely refers to the fact that starostas were entitled to 2/3 of the imposed judicial penalties.

from *krajnik* and *knyazes*), the courts include also a deputy head of a county (*vicecapitaneus*), a royal court judge appointed to them. One can appeal to the *starosta* against their sentences. They are onerous to people for even if they have no dealings during the assemblies they must participate in them and labour in vain. For this reason, during the magistracy of Starzechowski, the *starosta*, those who had no court cases paid 4 groszy each in exchange for being released from the obligation of participating in the assembly.

Due to the function they hold, *krajnicy* receive cheese from every person who breeds sheep. *Starostas* appoint to this magistracy a person from amongst the *knyazes*. In the royal villages the *knyazes* usually have a few grain fields, socages from the residents and tributes referred to as *kolęda* (Latin: *strena*), *kolacze* (Latin: *crustulum*), etc. In their villages they have windmills, fulling mills, they keep the third part of royal rents, third part of a tribute in a form of sheep and pigs. (At times) instead of *kolęda* or *kolacze* for Easter and Christmas, or socages, they pay to the *knyazes* their equivalent in coin. On the other hand, the king has 2/3 of all rents, tributes and payments. (A new village was founded in such a way) that a peasant would go to *starosta* and ask him to allow him to settle a village by one of the streams. In return, he would pay several hundred or sometimes even one thousand zloty to the magistrate. (While entering such a contract) he would at once reserve for himself (material remuneration of the *knyaz's* lands) in a form of arable land, 1/3 of rents and tributes paid by the villagers, (right to build) windmills, etc. *Starostas* willingly agreed to such a contract because they did not rely on seeing rents and tributes paid by the residents of a newly-founded village since the period of a total exemption from payments lasted several years¹. *Starostas* immediately received the money without caring about the future. The proof of a contract between *starosta* and a tenant of a new village was an appropriate document which was then approved by the royal chancellery. *Knyazes* also benefited from this because after having redeployed the land (in a newly-founded village), they received 60 groats from the arriving settlers for the right to settle there. This is such a common payment that no one even haggles over it. The payment of this fee meant that the peasants – having paid it to the *knyazes* – treated these lands as their own heritage and therefore they traded it amongst themselves².

In order for the *knyazes* to attract the settlers more easily, they asked *starostas* for the non-payment period to last as long as possible. Although they were expected to divide the land for the farm-manors (*dworzyszcza*)³, their size varies in individual

¹ Depending on the customs prevailing in the individual property complexes, the timespan of the so-called 'wolniżna' (*libertas*) lasted from a few to even 24 years. Throughout this time the settlers coming over to a new village did not pay any liabilities to the owner.

² In the modern sense of the word, peasants were not owners of land in the old Poland. There is a considerable terminological chaos in the historical studies regarding those relations. It seems that the most convincing is the term: hereditary lease. This means that the land – with the formal consent of the owner or sometimes also after paying a special fee – passed from a peasant to his descendants.

³ See footnote no. 4, p. 10.

settlements. In the places where – during the foundation of the village – the knyaz paid more to starosta, they include more land.

[sheet 288-288 verso] **Tributes Paid in Rams and Pigs**

Apart from rents and fees mentioned above, each village – founded on the Wallachian law where sheep and pigs are being bred – pays a tribute in rams and pigs¹. Tribute in rams is paid around Whitsunday [May or June], which is referred to as *straga*², and in pigs – for Saint Martin's Day [the 11th of November]. These are paid not only by the villages that belong to the king, but also by the nobility and their subjects who let sheep and pigs graze on the royal lands. This tribute was once given also in oxen when there were not that many villages in the county, but nowadays this it is not done anymore. A higher income could have been obtained from this if the rams and pigs were paid for in coin. This would be more convenient also for the peasants and it is also possible the income of the royal treasury would have increased in this respect.

There is a custom that when the deputy head of the county (*vicecapitanens*) travels to the mountains to collect the tributes paid in rams, each settler gives him one grosz as a fee known as *keubenne* (*coquina*). Having calculated the entire income claimed from the houses in the villages where the *straga* is collected, it amounts to 69 zloty, 14 groszy. Together with the second *straga*³, this income amounts to 138 zloty and 28 groszy. Those who collect this tribute together with the deputy head of the county spend a part of this sum on food: meats, beer, etc. This *straga* lasts one and a half week. During this time the deputy head of the county and his people consume 7 achtels (barrels) of beer⁴, two heifers, and eight rams. He receives as much oats as he needs, and also chickens, butter and eggs for free from the peasants. Knyazes provide them with bread. They pay 40 groszy for one achtel of beer, 2 zloty and 15 groszy for a heifer, and 18 groszy for a ram. Overall, they pay 38 zloty and 8 groszy for food during two rounds of *straga*.

Conclusions

The text presented above provides a fairly detailed image of – in particular – legal and economic aspects of the functioning of the Wallachian communities from the northern slopes of the Carpathians. Its analysis should include the circumstances that the text was written relatively late, i.e. 1568. This was the time of the fall of the settlement based on the Wallachian law in the regions situated further away from the mountains. On the other hand, the mountainous villages were at that time subjected to a strong pressure from the great land properties, the aim of which was to adapt the system of the Wallachian obligations to the developing money-goods economy and to foster the economic model based on the production of crops in granges where peasants provided free land tenure. Apart from the effort to change the traditional Wallachian obligations, these attempts were aiming at limiting or completely

¹ The system of shepherds' tributes in the Wallachian villages is discussed by me in a recently published article (Jawor, 2018: 465-479).

² Wallachian word *straga* (*stronga*, *strunga*, *strunka*) had a few meanings, i.e. a tribute mentioned in the text, but also a judicial assembly – *zbor* (Jawor, 1997, 179-186).

³ It refers to an income from spring and autumn 'straga'.

⁴ According to J. Szymański (2004: 170), achtel is around 34 litres of liquid.

eliminating the Wallachian customs and its specific autonomy. This is manifested in the text even by the appointment of *krajnik* by *starosta* while in the Middle Ages it was the Wallachian community itself that selected him. This direction of transformations is also clear even in the postulates made by Zamoyski, like i.e. a change from tributes paid in natural products into rent paid in money. The problem for the detailed studies in the future is to distinguish between the archaic elements in the text, the roots of which date back to previous centuries, and the realities of the 16th century, new and imposed on the Wallachian communities from outside. This will not be possible without undertaking ambitious team research covering in its scope the entire area of the Wallachian migration in a broad timeframe. Otherwise, the studies will remain in a sphere of narrow and detailed research, the side effect of which are misconceptions or erroneous opinions resulting from the lack of understanding the extraordinary variability and diversity of this settlement trend in time and space.

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