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THE GENESIS OF THE ARISTOCRACY IN CONGRESS POLAND

I

The history of the national aristocracy has not been a well-researched subject in Polish historiography, although they were the highest social, cultural, political and economic elite of the diversified Polish nobility. Only a few historians have hitherto paid them any attention, though these studies have been neither thorough nor sufficient, especially in comparison with parallel scholarly work across Europe. It is important to stress that the effective studies of the nobility in the period between the Stanislas Augustus period and the first decades after the November Uprising (1830–1) would provide us with a wealth of information to complement the holistic picture of the society and the nation at such a peculiar moment. This was not only signified by the turn of the 19th century but also by the change from one social, cultural, political and economic system to another, from feudalism to capitalism. The noble elite of this period underwent an internal metamorphosis and transformation from its traditional outwardly distinctive condition at the very top of the pecking order (or even over it) blessed by the law, to becoming merely a social phenomenon whose position resulted not from judicial privileges but from unwritten ones, thus less ingrained accorded only by popular consent, the aristocracy in the modern sense of the word. What is more, the first decades of the 19th century in Polish territory (above all in the Duchy of Warsaw and Congress Poland) were characterized by new manners of vertical social movements originating for example from modern bureaucracy

which commenced to reforge the traditional noble elite and provide a vent for the limited, but perceptible, influx of arrivistes. Last but not least, those generations experienced the fall of the *ancien régime* in the shape of the partitions which decisively hurled them into an utterly new reality and also demanded the ability of adjustment which not everybody could live up to. In this short essay, I have tried to refer to some important issues and examples in order to outline a problem which is worthy of future examination against the backdrop of other similar Central European examples.

The Kingdom of Poland, an unusual creation of the Congress of Vienna, was in many respects a direct continuation of the earlier Duchy of Warsaw. It had the same core of legislation with the crucial principle of the nationwide legal equality of all citizens regardless of their social position or inherited estate. This formula, having originated from the legacy of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, was in obvious contradiction to the reality and tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the predecessor of both puppet states. In Congress Poland as well as in the Duchy of Warsaw the political citizenship, which granted people suffrage, could have been afforded not only by the well-born, but also by much broader society. It was an unprecedented situation and conspicuous evidence of the ongoing post-revolution liberalization, even though the franchise still remained strictly restricted to 'high society' of all kinds (but not only made up of nobles) — it should be pointed out, however, that even such exclusive qualifications in the electoral law, like property, tax or occupation were in fact easier to surmount than pedigree, which was unchangeable by any means.

In Poland this tendency to discard the fossilized and time-worn social standards and the superstitions closely connected with them can be traced to the reign of the last Polish pre-partitions king, Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski. Many of the outstanding native intellectuals such as Hugo Kołłątaj or Franciszek Salezy Jezierski devoted much of their attention to those issues, deemed it as the major cure-all for the most important and dangerous problems of the state. Nearly the whole group of the scholars consisted of nobles, but it is worth noticing some excellent figures from that circle, not only without such connections but also completely

devoid of 'feudal' ambitions, for example Stanisław Staszic. Those academics drew attention of their readers not only to the insanity of the medieval estates divisions (which stemmed from the palpable egoism of the noblemen),¹ but also constantly emphasized the paradox of the situation in which throngs of declassed petty nobility enjoyed unlimited political rights in flagrant opposition to the increasingly richer commoners from the middle class (bourgeoisie), that had hitherto been without such privileges and who could easily at that time have the necessary means to render substantially great services to the Commonwealth.² Those assumptions were followed by the notion of the sharp decrease of the 'noble brotherhood' (*szlachecka brać*) and the elimination of the numerous landless element — the motion was given rise by the Constitution of 3 May 1791 and secondary legal acts of the Great Sejm. The order emerging from the paragraphs of the constitution affected mostly the reformation of the social system. In spite of retaining their evidently dominant position and actual power, nobles lost their unquestionable exclusive right to be the sole political factor in the country. Not only were they deprived of the great number of their poor counterparts, who had served until recently as a perfect tool for various machinations of the aristocracy, but they were also forced to accept into their inner circle an enormous wave of ennobled newcomers, originating from the most successful part of the middle class. These movements were to be legally executed through temporal mass nobilitations of specific groups of people. Even if this action might seem to have been a desperate mean of maintaining at least the pretence of the previous estate, it is probable that after some time it would have to result in a complete change of quality — the dilution of the older nobility by the new. The parallel, practically universal, conferring of the noble privileges and honours could only result in the future creation of a modern type of citizenship, comprising all the free-men living in the country, irrespectively of their lineage.³

¹ Franciszek Salezy Jezierski, 'Katechizm o tajemnicach rządu polskiego', in *idem*, *Wybór pism*, ed. Zdzisław Skwarczyński (Warszawa, 1952), 68.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Stanisław Grodziski, 'Schyłek stanu szlacheckiego na ziemiach polskich' in Janina Leskiewiczowa (ed.), *Spoleczeństwo polskie XVIII i XIX w.* (Warszawa, 1987), viii, 97; see Maurycy Mochnacki, 'O rewolucji społecznej w Polsce', in

The times of Stanislas Augustus were a period of the incomparable rise of the position of the middle class, not only in terms of economic or social aspects but also a political one. It is needless to add that there was a close connection with the newly made great fortunes of bankers like Warsaw's financial elite — Piotr Tepper, Piotr Blank, Fryderyk Cabritt, Jakub Fontana, who enjoyed free access to the aristocratic and royal residences, which normally had remained unattainable for commoners, and often for nobles, too. Many such highly politically and socially ambitious people, strived for noble relations, even the highest, like in the case of physician's daughter Teresa Czempińska, the wife of the son of Castellan of Rawa, Siemianowski.⁴ It was not rare that some really great bourgeois could have sons-in-law from capitalistic as well as a noble background. Many of these successful people spent fortunes on building sumptuous and lavish mansions and acquiring vast land estates. However, few of them tried to obtain nobilitation (or even more infrequently *indigénat*,⁵ though some of them were capable of it).⁶ This changed in the exceptional year of 1790 where among the number of newly ennobled were several financiers, manufacturers, lawyers, merchants and a few craftsmen. Nearly all of them were counted among the richest and most important members of their social entourage, comprising the propertied middle class elite with the staunchest social and political aspirations.

It is extremely important to emphasize the crucial role played in the social evolution within the highest elite at the time by the court of Stanislas Augustus, himself not a scion of historical and ancient family. Within the space of the thirty years of his reign, the Royal Castle in Warsaw served as the setting for many illustrious social careers made by people of a predominantly

Pamiętnik Emigracji polskiej (22 Jan. 1833); Antoni Jan Ostrowski, *Żywot Tomasza Ostrowskiego*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1836), ii, 628–30.

⁴ Władysław Smoleński, *Mieszczanstwo warszawskie w końcu wieku XVIII* (Warszawa, 1976), 81. The Siemianowski family was old and eminent clan with senatorial tradition — Castellan of Rawa belonged to the most illustrious officers of the Crown.

⁵ Official recognition of Polish noble status and titles granted by Sejm to naturalized foreign noblemen.

⁶ For example count Piotr Riaucour, Warsaw banker, obtained Polish nobility in 1764 and also Piotr Tepper of noble English extraction, whose status was confirmed in 1790. Cf. *ibidem*, 44–5, 49, 95.

poor lineage.⁷ This environment was profoundly heterogeneous⁸ and varied from commoners (for example Franciszek Ryx⁹ and Marcello Bacciarelli)¹⁰ and descendants of petty nobility (like Arnold Byszewski¹¹ and Pius Kiciński)¹² to members of the rich landed elite but definitely not of primary importance (like Ludwik Gutakowski).¹³ Note that it was generally foreigners that fell into the first category, they were quite a numerous group in the royal household. The king had a wide range of abilities to shape his own elite politics, always being on the lookout for new friends and allies. Traditionally he was able to give seats in the Senate and ministerial posts (also in the Permanent Council). However, it ought to be stressed that he could not exert his power regardless of natural obstacles — mostly due to the strictly aristocratic and in fact hereditary character of the upper echelons of office. Yet in comparison to the earlier Saxon period, the access for *homines novi* (without senatorial ascendants) into the Senate was much easier, but such examples, of course, remained very scarce. A considerable change took place at the end of this period when Stanislas Augustus could have felt less hampered by political opponents (and the supervision of the dissolved Permanent Council) and

⁷ Witold Kula, 'Udział we władzy', in Witold Kula and Janina Leskiewiczowa (eds.), *Przemiany społeczne w Królestwie Polskim 1815–1864* (Warszawa, 1979), 405–19; Jerzy Michalski, *Sejmiki poselskie 1788 roku*, in *idem*, *Studia Historyczne z XVIII i XIX wieku*, 2 vols. (Warszawa, 2007), i: *Polityka i społeczeństwo*, 226–7; *Korespondencja krajowa Stanisława Augusta z lat 1784 do 1792*, ed. Bronisław Zaleski, *Rocznik Towarzystwa Historyczno-Literackiego w Paryżu* (1870–2), *passim*.

⁸ No detailed work about the last Polish king's court has yet been done, but there are some minor works touching some aspects of this problem. For example: Julian Bartoszewicz, *Panowie niemieccy na dworze Stanisława Augusta*, 2 vols. (Warszawa, 1852); Maria Rymaszyna, *Gabinet Stanisława Augusta* (Warszawa, 1962); Aleksander Czaja, *Między tronem, buławą a dworem petersburskim. Z dziejów Rady Nieustającej 1786–1789* (Warszawa, 1988).

⁹ A royal valet who became one of the king's closest confidants, rewarded with ennoblement and the *starostwo* of Piaseczno; about his family's consequent career see Teodor Żychliński, *Złota księga szlachty polskiej*, 29 vols. (Poznań 1879–1906), ii (1880), 281–94.

¹⁰ Ennobled court painter of the king and his personal friend, whose descendants amassed a considerable land wealth and noble prestige in Mazovia as well.

¹¹ General and influential favourite of the king (but not so respected by his peers), a forefather of well-known Polish aristocratic family.

¹² Director of the king's Private Cabinet and Castellan of Połaniec.

¹³ Supporter of the king during the Great Sejm (1788–92), Lithuanian Court Chamberlain and shortly Marshal of the Permanent Council.

bestowed such honours on a few of his closest friends (for example Pius Kiciński). Another manner of granting of ultimate recognition was the conferring of Crown land (*starostwo*) and subsidiary royal estates (as a tenancy), but actually the king seemed to be also restricted by the land-voracious magnates, always eager to control the most advantageous ones¹⁴. Nevertheless, the giving of titles of royal chamberlain¹⁵ and conferring of the two Polish orders (of the White Eagle and of Saint Stanislaus) maintained the king's personal prerogatives — especially the latter remained until the very end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth a very appealing and longed-for emblem of the privileged status for the old as well as for the new elite¹⁶.

The whole system of royal rewards, exercised on a grand scale, substantially undermined the real aristocratic monopoly on all benefices in the country — that naturally would have led to a massive unrest among the magnates, who also did not esteem the king so much before, if only because of his inferior paternal ancestry.¹⁷ The withdrawal of the highest grandees¹⁸ from the court was of benefit to ill-born courtiers, who could have vied with each other for the profitable posts but without the danger of rivalry with the well-born. A court career, even not so magnificent, was chiefly bound up with financial affairs and subsequent

¹⁴ For the details of magnates' thirst for Crown land in the preceding period, see Teresa Zielińska, *Magnateria polska epoki saskiej. Funkcje urzędów i królew-szczyzn w procesie przeobrażeń warstwy społecznej* (Wrocław, 1977).

¹⁵ An incomplete list of the royal chamberlains written by Antoni Magier: 'Lista imienna szambelanów króla Jmci Stanisława Augusta od r. 1764 do 1794 nom. w aktach Metryki Koronnej, Sigillata zwanych, zapisanych', in *idem*, *Estetyka miasta stołecznego Warszawy*, ed. Jan Morawiński, Hanna Szwankowska, Edward Szwankowski and Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki (Warszawa, 1963), 433–42.

¹⁶ Stanisław Łoza, *Kawalerowie Orderu Świętego Stanisława. 1765-1813*, (Warszawa, 1925); *idem*, *Order Orła Białego* (Warszawa, 1939).

¹⁷ Jędrzej Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki, czyli Historia polska*, ed. Przemysława Matu-szewska (Warszawa, 2005), 128.

¹⁸ Jędrzej Kitowicz left us a short account outlining the Polish magnates' viewpoint towards the Warsaw court: 'Those who were of great fortunes, thinking that the king devoted himself only to his favourites — small people, Italians, Germans and other foreigners or nationals raised from gutter to the nobility — stayed in their manors or were rambling through far-off countries not willing, because of the natural lordliness, to be on equal terms in the Royal Cabinet with such individuals who previously during the reign of the Saxons had been hardly allowed to enter the first Royal Hall'. See *ibidem*, 332–3.

social advancement. Not only did the king hand over multiple land properties to his supporters but also more than once arranged marriages between them and eligible maids of noble extraction, excellent colligations and sizable dowry, whose relatives had paid some attention to the courtly positions of their future kinsmen¹⁹ — note that only thanks to spousal relationship the entrée to the noble elite could be really achieved and afterwards retained.

II

Congress Poland consisted of the provinces which had been partitioned and curved up between three superpowers — states of different social standards and models. Everywhere the native nobles (landed, of course) played the most significant and leading role in the society but also in each country they were not only actually but also legally divided into two separate classes — superior and inferior, which stood in marked contrast to the historical situation in Poland. What is more, even the aristocrats, *de iure* distinguished as the highest stratum, were subordinated to nearly every whim of the monarch and continued constantly having fear of being *in* or *out* of the royal favour, which could have affected their court career prospects — '[Polish magnates] shuddered to think that being once the lords they all became soon subjects, equal to others and that taxes, the law and any further warrants and bans would be born on them'.²⁰ The character of relations between the nobles and the ruler (also the officials, the representatives of the latter) determined the political as well as social position of the former. An interesting description of the state of affairs (especially the situation of the elite) was left to us by count Fryderyk Skarbek:

After the partitions the humiliated noblemen, and particularly the magnates lost their sole national fault, i.e. the spirit fuelled with family arguments. Devoid of any power or any influence on the public matters they could not lead their clients or head some faction. Having lost their political importance

¹⁹ Like the marriage of Arnold Byszewski and Katarzyna Skórzewska, heiress of fortune and illustrious name. See Adam Mieczysław Skałkowski, *Arnold Byszewski*, in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (hereafter PSB), iii (1937), 180.

²⁰ Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki*, 654.

they retained only their personal pride that was not demonstrated to their compatriots but to foreign governors, providing themselves comfort in ability to express their disregard and contempt to them ... the nobility, despite their haughtiness was obliged to obey the government, because the latter did not recognize the hereditary privileges and was capable of intimidating and demoting them.²¹

A vast majority of the grandees fled from the former capital city and went away to the countryside where they could still exert considerable power.²²

Nevertheless, all three monarchies (Russia, Prussia, Austria) tried to win over the favour of the Polish society and particularly the nobility. Of course, the freedom guaranteed in the May 3rd Constitution to non-noble segment of the society was out of the question, but instead nobles were presented with an equal position to the remainder of the country's social elite. The government could dignify some of them with honourable offices (by way of securing their financial standing), and distinguish the others with aristocratic titles — in order to attach them firmly to the new authorities. On the other hand, many middle class representatives got their chance to achieve social advancement, like in the Habsburg Empire during the first two decades after the partition of 1772.²³ However, generally the Polish were virtually barred from participating in the government also within former Polish territory. Receiving such a shattering blow, even deserving individuals were unable to seize the sole possibility of raising themselves up from a state of limbo — at the same time some reaped the benefits from the political change and noblemen's

²¹ Fryderyk Skarbek, *Dzieje Polski*, ii: *Królestwo Polskie od epoki początku swego do rewolucji listopadowej* (Poznań, 1877), X.

²² For example: Anna Nakwaska, 'Wyjątki z pamiętników współczesnych', *Gazeta Warszawska*, 203 (22 July/3 Aug. 1852), 4 ; Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Pamiętnik o czasach Księstwa Warszawskiego, 1807–1809* (Warszawa 1902), 128; all three monarchies — Austria, Russia and Prussia, assured the nobility an exclusive right for possessing the land, so its position was even stronger than in 1791. See Grodziski, 'Schyłek stanu szlacheckiego', 102.

²³ Sławomir Górczyński, *Nobilitacje w Galicji w latach 1772–1918* (Warszawa, 1997), *passim*; Tadeusz Mencel, 'Magnateria polska w Galicji w polityce władz austriackich w latach 1795-1809', in Janina Leskiewiczowa (ed.), *Ziemiaństwo polskie 1795-1945. Zbiór prac o dziejach warstwy i ludzi* (Warszawa, 1985), 27-84.

'inactivity'²⁴ and themselves got in touch with the authorities, as did many Jewish neophytes in Prussia.²⁵

Last but not least a few lines could be quoted from the memoirs of Franciszek Gajewski of Błociszewo, a well-off noble from Greater Poland with close relations to the major local aristocracy:

the short habitation of the Prussians in Greater Poland left hardly a trace. There were not any Jewish proselytes or the Jewish, or trash [he meant people of socially inferior backgrounds] among the landlords, whose contemporary influx has endangered the dignity of the Polish nobility. Ancient grandee families, with some infrequent exceptions, have kept guard over the traditional honour of the nobility.²⁶

Apart from the accuracy of this statement, more important is the fact that Gajewski considered the first post-partition years the turning point in the social history — the eve of the new world, so disastrous for the old elites.²⁷

III

The creation of the Duchy of Warsaw could be deemed the herald of the breakthrough in the development of Polish society — its Constitution in the 4th paragraph ensured the complete abolishment of the estate's inequality and an even-handed general legal responsibility.²⁸ At the same time the Napoleonic Code was introduced which enormously reduced the authority of the nobles as well. An eye-witness of those changes, a refined aristocrat Leon Dembowski of Bronice commented on his fellows' dismay:

²⁴ Juliusz Willaume, *Fryderyk August jako książę Warszawski, 1807–1815* (Poznań, 1939), 58.

²⁵ E.g. Antoni Łabęcki. Cf. Władysław Sobociński, *Antoni Łabęcki*, PSB, xviii (1993), 171–2.

²⁶ Franciszek Gajewski, *Pamiętniki Franciszka z Błociszewa Gajewskiego, pułkownika wojsk polskich (1802–1831)*, 2 vols. (Poznań, 1913), i, 189.

²⁷ On the influence of the partitions on the decline of the Polish nobility see Grodziski, 'Schyłek stanu szlacheckiego', 98–100.

²⁸ See the articles on the citizenship *Dziennik Praw Księstwa Warszawskiego*, i (1810), 3–4.

the nobleman is afraid of the Code because he dreads losing his power over the peasants; he is distressed by the thought of appearing in court together, on equal terms, with some burgher or peasant, that the law is the same for him and a burgher, and that they enjoy equal rights to become a priest, an official or an officer.²⁹

However, it did not mean the end of the old distinctions — according to the Constitution the main difference between local diets (*sejmiki*) and provincial assemblies lay in the fact that only the nobility could make up the former. Yet in fact the concessions made to the benefit of the well-born were so subtle (the political significance of the diet was anything but huge), that Joachim Lelewel aptly discerned only the ‘hue of the estates’ (i.e. superficial existence of the feudal diversity) in the spirit and letter of the Constitution.³⁰ Then not only a multi-generation genealogy but also further assets proved to be of value, like land possession, which were straightforwardly punctuated in the constitution of Congress Poland.

In the Duchy the franchise was also granted to the non-noble groups, qualified in accordance with sufficient wealth, occupation or education.³¹ A shift in values, even if only legal, became unequivocally visible. Of course, it needs to be admitted that initially it seemed that manners of thinking were preserved almost unchanged. Throughout the history of the Duchy it is easy to indicate multiple examples of a feudal way of thinking³² like the bill of 1808 introduced by the Council of State concerning the exclusive uniform for noblemen,³³ although the same body

²⁹ Szymon Askenazy, *Łukasiński*, 2 vols. (Warszawa, 1929), i, 34.

³⁰ Joachim Lelewel, ‘Trzy konstytucje polskie 1791, 1807, 1815’, in *idem*, *Dzieła*, 10 vols. (Warszawa, 1957–69), viii, 533.

³¹ According to the Constitution (article 58) the right to vote in provincial assemblies concerned: all non-noble landowners, craftsmen and supervisors of the apprenticeship, merchants with fixed capital totalling a minimum of 10,000 zlotys, priests and vicars, artists, citizens ‘of eminent talents, knowledge or merits in the field of the trade or crafts’, retired or awarded with Honorary Cross (i.e. *Virtuti Militari*) non-commissioned officers and privates and commissioned officers.

³² At the very beginning of the Duchy, an author of a report for the Direction of Justice wrote: ‘the spirit of feudalism is prevalent in judiciary and everyday life’. Citation from Hipolit Grynwaser, *Kodeks Napoleona w Polsce. Demokracja szlachecka, 1795-1831* (Wrocław, 1951), 17.

³³ Session 153, in Tadeusz Mencel and Marian Kallas (eds.), *Protokoły Rady Stanu Księstwa Warszawskiego*, 3 vols. (Warszawa, 1960–96), iii, 1, 25.

changed its decision in a year and made a motion of extending this perquisite to all entitled to vote, for 'when the non-noble citizens together with the nobility are present in a public event, they should all wear the same vestures regardless of class'.³⁴ In spite of the fact that few (of the elite) would have sought the social revolution, the Napoleonic atmosphere additionally could have evoked such situation as the following:

[Count and Minister of Justice] Łubieński was bewildered at first by the profusion of the radical liberals, the so-called Jacobins, holding administrative posts. Amid them was the general's brother Ignacy Zajączek who expressed his strong abhorrence for the way Łubieński addressed Gutakowski [another grandee and high official] calling him 'Your Illustrious Highness the President'. He chimed in and exclaimed 'There is no Illustrious Highnesses here, only citizens'. This declaration spurred a vivid discussion, during which Zajączek remarked 'Nowadays everyone may bear any name he wants to'. To which Łubieński riposted 'I do not disown my ancestors'.³⁵

Even if it was an isolated incident, still it perfectly embodied the flavour of the times. The immediate consequences of this bloodless 'revolution' fired up by the arrival of the *Grande Armée* were rendered by the aforementioned observant chronicler of that era Leon Dembowski — 'the relationships between the nobility and the middle class tended to be quite distant and until the French entered the country the bourgeois had not been invited to noblemen's receptions. This changed since and some commoners such as Wojda [a future mayor of Warsaw and member of the Council of State in Congress Poland] were assigned to higher positions'.³⁶ The broadened conferring of citizenship onto the extra-noble circles brought about the mutation of the homogenous world of the political elite — the ducal Sejm, where a percentage of the deputies came from different backgrounds, could serve as an excellent example. The fact that they were elected by the non-noble voters was of great significance, for many of them did not fancy

³⁴ Session 258, *ibidem*, 33.

³⁵ *Pamiętnik Feliksa hr. Lubieńskiego ministra sprawiedliwości*, ed. Władysław Chomętowski (Warszawa, 1890), 139.

³⁶ Leon Dembowski, *Moje wspomnienia z czasów W. Księstwa Warszawskiego i wojny polsko-rosyjskiej 1831 roku*, 2 vols. (Petersburg, 1902), i, 356.

casting a ballot for the grantees. It was not easy to accept such a situation, as could be inferred from the following description of the official parliament's members introduction to the monarch:

The King [i.e. the Duke of Warsaw but also the King of Saxony] and even more Senft [the King's minister] were deeply confused when a deputy advanced in years was slowly approaching the throne. The King pitied him for having trouble with ascending the stairs and asked 'Who is this old man?'. I replied sincerely that he was a butcher so the King shrank on his throne. The Senate could not comprehend how it is possible to let such a man kiss the royal hand.³⁷

The foundation of modern bureaucracy should be considered the most important *signum temporis*. Only when the Poles could organize it on their own, did it entail irrevocable social changes of unmatched significance. In pre-partition Poland there were no real state offices at all. As a poor substitute could have acted for example royal chancellery or the Crown commissions, which came to life during the reformation period of the late 18th century. For most of the staff such a service was only an episode as well as a career vehicle enhancing future social and material status. The bureaucratic class (or the likes) was non-existent. Note that many of those ennobled in 1775 officiated in that administration and shortly after the bestowment of title quitted their posts and retreated to their country mansions, where they tried to play the roles of genuine noble landlords. During the interim of 1795–1807 within the Prussian part of the former Polish lands, no modification was introduced — almost all the official staff from the highest ranks to the petty clerks, were usually filled up with foreigners. The Polish nobility spent this time mainly far from the decisive centres, brooding on its glowing yesteryears and ostentatiously retaining the use of shallow land titles, orders etc.³⁸ On the other hand, the affluent middle class had not yet aspired for the official service, not to mention their complete incompetence in the field. The resurrection of the Polish statehood (modelled on the French pattern) came hand in hand with coerced institution of the officials' corps, which was erected surprisingly rapidly and without hurdles — ironically

³⁷ *Pamiętnik Feliksa hr. Łubińskiego*, 164.

³⁸ For example Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki*, 320.

a decade of the occupant's government decisively accounted for that. Those who chose the collaboration with the Prussians, under the new circumstances could reap the benefits from their experience, like heading various executive agencies.

Notwithstanding such examples, initially the Duchy suffered from the lack of sufficient legal knowledge and familiarization with the bureaucratic work.³⁹ At the beginning of the 19th century it was not a common practice of the noble progeny to attend academic classes — the bulk of students originated from the middle class or at least impoverished gentry.⁴⁰ But yet, the ducal bureaucratic class finally came into existence exclusively of noble origin — above all at the higher levels (Karol Wojda, Stanisław Staszic and some other were still the exception, not the rule).⁴¹ On the one hand, the prospects of receiving a steady salary must have been of crucial importance for the landless armigers (compelled to earn their living),⁴² but on the other hand, the prospect of payment encouraged the reluctance of the grandees, partly distinguished by their status as men of independent means which they were always very proud of, thus payment was not a source of prestige. If so, why did the cadre of the ducal civil services remain exceptionally composed of great landed proprietors throughout all the Napoleonic period and later on? One thing is certain, the driving force underneath was the strong conviction of peculiar predetermination to be on the very top, especially in terms of the administration, government and the power.⁴³ Being the plenipotentiary ambassadors of His

³⁹ Dembowski, *Moje wspomnienia*, 327; Anna Nakwaska, 'Ze wspomnień wojewodziny Nakwaskiej', *Kronika Rodzinna* (1891), 333.

⁴⁰ See for example, Willaume, *Fryderyk August*, 59.

⁴¹ There is a good account of ways to acquire a necessary knowledge without academic studies: 'he [Franciszek Grabowski] never learnt the law, only practiced under the charge of an attorney; all his juridical education was derived from manifests, suits and verdicts, from listening to litigations, from sorting the summaries, documents regarding those cases and eventually from searching through *Volumina Legum* articles useful to the defence'. See *Pamiętnik Feliksa hr. Lubieńskiego*, 168.

⁴² Because the majority of impoverished gentry (or nobility) found an occupation in the civil service the one way of augmenting their material income (and thus the social status) not beneath their dignity. See for example Grynwaser, *Kodeks Napoleona*, 56–7.

⁴³ How crucial was the status of 'being somebody' is illustrated by a story of Józef Radzimiński: 'the one, although formerly acting as voivode of Gniezno and therefore being the first who bade welcome to Napoleon in Poznań, was demoted

Majesty to the people, the officials made up a new elite, which was even enhanced with a special embroidery on the uniform 'so as to dignify them even more'.⁴⁴ Considering more material dimension, although bureaucratic work took more time than obligations connected with the erstwhile Commonwealth district posts, this line of career could more easily harmonize with looking after the family and the property⁴⁵ than other forms of noble occupation, like military service.⁴⁶ Last but not least, the average level of education within noble circles proved far better and expedient than among the others, not to mention the special time-honoured 'civil' upbringing, preparing each heir to the political life (even if then already a little out of date). In comparison with the generally poor condition of the potential recruits, that was an asset. The Minister of Justice's recollections give us a personal picture of the employment practice:

I do not gainsay that when introducing the new law in Poland, I did not want to break with the custom of placing the real aristocrats at the head of the mayorial courts. I have to confess I was persuaded by the reflection of ministerial councillor Morawski, who thought that the splendour and dignity of the tribunals demand the appointment of the esteemed but not-educated seigneurs.⁴⁷

It is interesting to note that sometimes not only the well-born were granted with the superior ranks, thanks to their highly exceptional advantages. When finally the government introduced the law of testing the future officials, it caused a great upheaval

to castellan. Initially receiving that humiliation sorrowfully, later he preferred accepting the lower honour to rejecting it'. See Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Pamiętnik Juljana Ursyna Niemcewicza o czasach Księztwa Warszawskiego (1807-1809)*, ed. Alexander Kraushar (Warszawa, 1902), 24.

⁴⁴ Session 258 in *Protokoły Rady Stanu*, 33.

⁴⁵ Franciszek Salezy Nakwaski, *Pamiętnik życia mego*, ed. Renata Żurkowa, in *Rocznik Biblioteki Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Krakowie* (Kraków, 1963), 121.

⁴⁶ Some grand nobles have thought it would be better for their male offspring to gain a bureaucratic post than to join the army — 'My uncle, eager to save his only child but not being able to prevent him from enlisting ... he ordered him to be sent to the military chancellery, not the regular army'. See Henrieta Błędowska, *Pamiętka przeszłości. Wspomnienia z lat 1794-1832*, ed. Ksenia Kostewicz and Zofia Makowska (Warszawa, 1960), 85.

⁴⁷ *Pamiętnik Feliksa hr. Lubińskiego*, 193.

among the noblemen. The danger of inter-class competition seemed to be inevitable so 'the thought of giving the civil instructions to sons became common with a view to protect them against being walked over by the people who, lacking any lineage, could socially succeed only on account of their personal skills'.⁴⁸ On no account could they, still pushing the social climbers around, stop thinking about the approaching threat from that side.

Now one crucial question should be asked — what kind of a class or stratum were the very high dignitaries of Duchy of Warsaw, virtually synonymous with the ducal aristocracy? From where did the people who were actually shaping the reality of the new state throughout its history originate? First of all, the ducal noble elite did not have a uniform structure. Taking the Council of Ministers as an example, from 1807 to 1813 there were 18 members. Only a few of them belonged to the hereditary ruling elite of the *ancien régime* — Stanisław Kostka Potocki and Stanisław Małachowski. Józef Wielhorski, although himself not occupying any post in the Commonwealth, was a scion of a great magnate clan. Ludwik Gutakowski⁴⁹ also was not a *homo novus* in that circle, though a son of the minor magnate without such an illustrious ancestry. He earned a respectable position by staying at the king's side but eventually gained in status after the partitions. The president of the family of ministers played a crucial role in Warsaw's social and political life embodying a new aristocracy that was to replace the ancient one. Among the most eminent of his relatives was his brother-in-law Walenty Sobolewski,⁵⁰ the son of Maciej Leon, Castellan of Warsaw and a close friend of King Stanislas Augustus (one of his very first chamberlains). Sobolewski's first cousin Ignacy⁵¹ also enjoyed a similar prestige. Their next of kin was Stanisław Grabowski,⁵² one of Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski's sons, born out of wedlock. Elżbieta Grabowska née Szydłowska and Ewa Sobolewska (also née Szydłowska) — the latter the mother of Walenty, Teresa and Marianna (the consecutive wives of Gutakowski), were stepsisters, so Walenty Sobolewski

⁴⁸ Skarbek, *Królestwo Polskie*, 113.

⁴⁹ Irena Homola, *Ludwik Gutakowski*, PSB, ix (1961), 177–9; Edmund Machalski, *Ludwik Gutakowski, Prezes Rady Stanu i Ministrów* (Dubno, 1938).

⁵⁰ Ewa Danowska, *Walenty Sobolewski*, PSB, xxxix (1999), 595–9.

⁵¹ *Eadem*, *Ignacy Sobolewski*, PSB, xxxix (1999), 567–70.

⁵² Jadwiga Zanowa, *Stanisław Grabowski*, PSB, viii (1959–60), 508–11.

with the Grabowski siblings were first cousins. Ignacy Sobolewski was also related to Grabowski through their wives, Józefa (Sobolewska) and Julia (Grabowska) Zabiello. Moreover, Walenty Sobolewski espoused Izabela, Grabowski's sister and Kazimierz Grabowski, a legitimate (?) son of Elżbieta Grabowska married Monika Sobolewska, sister of Walenty. This intricate genealogical⁵³ web clarified the meaning and the character of the new elite, inter-related and exclusive, due to their vested interest in the mutual support, although still barred from the establishment of any relation with the great historic families.⁵⁴

Jan Paweł Łuszczewski⁵⁵ of Strugi was also a former royal courtier, a member of a renowned and wealthy West Mazovian family but with no direct connections to the august magnates — his father acted only as a starost of Sochaczew. By reason of his occupation in Stanislas Augustus's cabinet as the secretary, and ensuing marriage with the well-related heiress (Antonina Cieciszowska), conspicuous activity during the Great Sejm (1788–92) and the personal royal support, originally the modest official became a real grandee on the national scale, and was appointed the first Minister of Interior Affairs of the Duchy. His posterity retained their truly aristocratic position, even if considerably diminished after the minister's demise in 1812 and not distinguished with so ambitious 'dynastic politics', until the very middle of the 19th century.

Another lordly clan traced its origin from a daring parvenu — count Tomasz Ostrowski⁵⁶ of Ujazd. Born to a middle class gentry with distant well-off relatives (of maternal line) and strong reminiscence of antediluvian magnitude,⁵⁷ aspiring to emulate

⁵³ See genealogical trees from Natalia Kicka, *Pamiętniki*, ed. Józef Dutkiewicz and Tadeusz Szafranski (Warszawa, 1972), 632–3; Kula, 'Udział we władzy', 410–11. This phenomenon was conspicuous also for the contemporaries. See for example Andrzej Edward Koźmian, *Wspomnienia*, 2 vols. (Kraków and Poznań, 1867), i, 49.

⁵⁴ An analogical situation took place not only in the area of the Kingdom, but also in the other provinces of the former Commonwealth, notably in Galicia where nuptial relationships between families with brand-new titles developed from the necessity of strengthening their actual position through backing each other.

⁵⁵ Maria Manteufflowa, *Jan Paweł Łuszczewski*, PSB, xviii (1973), 584–6.

⁵⁶ Tomasz Kizwalter, *Tomasz Ostrowski*, PSB, xxiv (1979), 579–83.

⁵⁷ Count Antoni Ostrowski, son of Tomasz, invoked in his memoir the medieval history of the family as the grounds for the purported eminent genealogy of the

the grandest, endeavoured to get a chamberlain's title in the royal court and afterwards won the heart of the King, who helped him to pursue an incomparably excellent career. Not only did he obtain the honour of Castellan of Czersk after a decade of service but also was awarded the highly prestigious (though hollow) post of Great Treasurer of the Crown at the very sunset of the Commonwealth. Beside two chivalric orders, a vast land fortune (in central Poland) and intermarriage into the Ledóchowski and Denhoff families (well-established senatorial clans), Tomasz Ostrowski rose to extraordinary dignity in the court. In 1798 the Prussian monarch recognized him with the comital title which actually crowned his long social pursuit. At the very beginning of the Duchy he could be considered one of the most important Polish dignitaries, whose opinions everybody (Napoleon too) had to take into account before any decision. He was assigned to be a Marshal of the Sejm and later the President of the Senate — a symbol of the utmost reverence. His destiny profoundly reflected the destiny of his sons — Władysław and Antoni, who following the paternal lead, took a leading role in the political and social life of Congress Poland.

It is time to raise the subject of the ducal Senate and, especially, its makeup. Titles of castellan and voivode, though deprived of the factual power or even the pretence of it, were generally seen as the most politically and socially prestigious honours possible to obtain — they drew a clear distinction between aristocrats and commoners, at least they should have done — as a reminiscence of the historic chamber, the Senate was thought to be modelled on. In 1809, the year when the parliament was summoned for the first time, there were 22 senators: 8 Catholic bishops,⁵⁸

Ostrowskis — the family mentioned by him was the Rawitas, who even if they were the forefathers of Tomasz and Antoni, were also ancestors of multiple other families of the Rawa Coat of Arms. It is a solitary passage about the ancestry because over the span of some centuries Ostrowskis were not part of the noble elite.

⁵⁸ Andrzej Gawroński, Jan Gołaszewski, Tymoteusz Gorzeński, Wojciech Górski, Franciszek Skarbek Malczewski, Tomasz Ostaszewski, Ignacy Raczyński, Franciszek Ksawery Radzyński. See Ireneusz Ihnatowicz and Andrzej Biernat, *Vademecum do badań nad historią XIX i XX wieku*, 2nd edn (Warszawa, 2003), 458.

6 voivodes⁵⁹ and 8 castellans.⁶⁰ By and large, all but the first group were the scions of wealthy magnate clans and most of them had already acted as senators before 1795. Composing the ducal upper house, it was crucial to win over the Polish patricians so they were more favourable to the king (and the French in fact). However, the majority originated from the mediocre magnates at best. On the other hand, not only genealogy proved valued but also personal fortune. For this reason there was a place for Count Wiktor Tomasz Szoldrski of Czacz, an extremely rich but rather upstart landowner from Greater Poland.⁶¹ The one who could not meet the requirements for the aristocratic status was Józef Wybicki of Manieczki, member of an average gentry family (son of a judge), connected with the high society through his wife Kunegunda Drwęska, a distant kin of the Skorzewskis and the Gorzeńskis (provincial but not so 'historic' grandees from Greater Poland). This abrupt rise to such a distinction (reckoned as nearly an inherent exclusive right of the few) met with the disapproval of some higher ranking noblemen as a flagrant breach with tradition. After many years Wybicki recollected that 'the sovereignty of mine made the magnates' minds boggle'⁶² and his contemporary adding 'the noble citizens were fearful ... they got to know that I did not think the world of their name, fortune or any connection, if the country's good was at stake'.⁶³

Soldiers made up the pivotal element of the ducal social landscape. The general staff, increasingly regardless of their background, become an agreeable part of the elite. In spite of the fact that still the apparent majority of the higher officers came into the world in palaces or less pretentious country mansions,⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Piotr Bieliński, Ksawery Działyński, Ludwik Gutakowski, Stanisław Małachowski, Stanisław Kostka Potocki, Józef Wybicki. See *ibidem*.

⁶⁰ Augustyn Gorzeński, Stanisław Jabłonowski, Jan Nepomucen Małachowski, Józef Radziwiński, Walenty Sobolewski, Karol Wodziński, Franciszek Ksawery Zboński. See *ibidem*.

⁶¹ Much about him was written by his cousin Franciszek Gajewski — Gajewski, *Pamiętniki Franciszka*, i, 139, 201.

⁶² Józef Wybicki, *Życie moje oraz wspomnienie o Andrzeju i Konstancji Zamoyskich*, ed. Adam M. Skałkowski (Kraków, 1927), 270.

⁶³ Gajewski, *Pamiętniki Franciszka*, i, 130.

⁶⁴ In reference to conferring of higher military honours not so long before (during the Insurrection in 1794) Franciszek Nakwaski recollected: 'Izydor Krasieński, as a 20-years-old young man being a sub-lieutenant of fusiliers, when the

there were so many celebrated army careers in the Duchy as never before. Examples of generals like Józef Zajączek, Józef Rautenstrauch, Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, Józef Chłopicki or Ignacy Blumer, the most spectacular and conspicuous, speak volumes. The atmosphere of the Napoleonic army was partly responsible for that — everybody could not only read or hear but also see those lords of post-Revolution Europe, marshals of France who, born as sons of innkeepers and coopers, had made great successes for themselves, having everything from money to princely titles and obtaining invitations from the best Warsaw houses.⁶⁵ The exceptional esteem for warriors was not confined only to social intercourse. In popular opinion the chivalric as well as patriotic (the Duchy had still defended its existence relying completely on the French successes) deeds and merits entitled them to be even aristocratic son or brothers-in-law, approving of the mutual equality⁶⁶. Such a step was not so prevalent, but in fact those which occurred would have been some decades before absolutely out of the question — general Stanisław Fiszer⁶⁷ and Wirydianna Kwilecka née Radolińska⁶⁸ ('marriage out of patriotism'),⁶⁹ general Karol Kniaziewicz⁷⁰ and Maria Stecka née Morstin (mother of princess Aleksandra Radziwiłł of Nieborów), Jan Henryk Dąbrowski⁷¹

Ossolińskis from Podlasie were just forming a new regiment and lacking somebody else to take leadership, introduced him [to Kościuszko] as the relation of them but the Commander in Chief, having seen that the youth without experience could not command a regiment, made him a general and sent him to the Sierakowski's staff'. Citation from Nakwaski, *Pamiętnik*, 118–19.

⁶⁵ Anna Potocka-Wąsowiczowa, *Wspomnienia naocznej świadka*, ed. Barbara Grochulska (Warszawa, 1965), 85–6, 91.

⁶⁶ For a sketchy overview, see Jarosław Czuby, *Wodzowie i politycy. Generalicja polska lat 1806-1815* (Warszawa, 1993), 226–7.

⁶⁷ Chief of the General Staff in the Duchy.

⁶⁸ Arranged with the help of Kościuszko; Kwilecka herself from senatorial and well connected family, was closely related to the Raczyński family of Rogalin, one of the richest magnates in Greater Poland. She left her memoirs with vivid description of her marital life, publicized in the 20th century by count Edward Raczyński.

⁶⁹ Gajewski, *Pamiętniki Franciszka*, i, 17.

⁷⁰ One of the most respected Polish patriarchs, noted for his military past which had resulted in severe physical injury.

⁷¹ Leader of Polish Legions in Italy, later one of the highest generals of army and senator in Congress Poland.

and Barbara Chłapowska,⁷² colonel Benedykt Zielonka⁷³ and Maria Mokronowska née princess Sanguszko,⁷⁴ count (since 1824) Stanisław Dunin-Wąsowicz⁷⁵ and countess Anna Potocka née countess Tyszkiewicz, Jean Babtiste Malletski de Grandville (naturalised Polish general of French extraction) firstly with Wiktoria Szydłowska (daughter of princess Konstancja Woroniecka) and secondly with countess Adela Krasieńska. Note that the majority of the aforementioned wives were widows or divorcees, thus women nearly independent of the others' influence, but of course hardly anybody, male or female, could throw down the gauntlet to the social inhibitions and prejudices with a view to retaining its advantaged position, let alone the acceptance of the spouse and children.⁷⁶ Not only the officers' elite found extraordinary favour with the aristocracy. As Leon Dembowski recounted — 'privates and non-commissioned officers, if their level of education was higher were being invited in by polite society and sometimes one could notice an ordinary soldier sitting beside a general'.⁷⁷ Despite the multi-century tradition of lionizing the martial virtues, especially in terms of social advancement,⁷⁸ the state of affairs in the Duchy was quite peculiar. Leaving aside the question of

⁷² From a well-known aristocratic family from Greater Poland, a cousin to baron Dezydery, Napoleon's aide-de-camp.

⁷³ Hero from Somosierra (during the French-Spanish War of 1809), awarded by Napoleon with the title of *chevalier*.

⁷⁴ We should note that her first husband Stanisław Mokronowski was also a warrior (esteemed for his career during the last years of pre-partition Poland) without the aristocratic genealogy which Sanguszko had, but with an important relation to his uncle general Andrzej who secretly married princess Izabela Poniatowska, a widow of great magnate Jan Klemens Branicki and sister of the last King — that kinship impacted his nephew destiny too.

⁷⁵ Famous for escorting Napoleon in his sleigh to Paris after the retreat from Moscow in 1812.

⁷⁶ There is need to add that Polish officers also married into foreign aristocratic families like Ignacy Blumer with countess Marianna Cecopierri (and they later lived together in Warsaw, and thoroughly participated in city's social life). See Stanisław Szenic, *Cmentarz Powązkowski 1790-1850. Zmarli i ich rodziny* (Warszawa, 1979), 230-4.

⁷⁷ Dembowski, *Moje wspomnienia*, 103.

⁷⁸ Walerian Nekanda Trepka, a Polish lawyer who lived in the 17th century, well-famous for his extreme repugnance towards all shifts in social pyramid, conceded only highly merited warriors as deserving ennoblement. See Walerian Nekanda Trepka, *Liber generationis plebeanorum. „Liber chamorum”*, ed. Włodzimierz Dworzaczek, 2 vols. (Wrocław, 1963), i, XXVII.

quasi-feudal devotion to the chivalric ideal, it would appear that the generally evoked patriotic emotions affected this case predominantly — much later it would be one of the kingpins in the constitution of an egalitarian concept of the nation.

The Polish extolled highly the Napoleonic bestowals such as aristocratic titles or knighthood, orders as well as the others (for example court offices). Apparently, there were no distinctions between the new and old elite — the latter for the most part did not bother about the proverbial poor parentage of their benefactor.⁷⁹ However, this elite was genuinely the heart and soul of the whole societal politics, in fact the backbone and the anchor of its existence. The so-called purity of blood had been fervently defended and preserved rigorously since time immemorial — and of course they did not open up their ranks to anyone whatsoever who wanted to gain entry into them. The patricians adroitly selected the most worthy material eligible to complement the existing elite in a manner to their spiritual and temporal advantage. The exact character of this way of thinking was expressed by Countess Anna Potocka née Tyszkiewicz, well known for her strong anti-arriviste bias.⁸⁰ Regarding Napoleon she admitted 'only great personalities or tremendous accomplishments gave the excuse for the overnight aggrandisement'.⁸¹ It could hardly have been said in a more straightforward manner.

The political geography of Central Europe lying at the root of those elite metamorphoses eventually resulted in the supplementing of the old aristocracy with an influx of a the more successful from the upper echelons of the lower classes. The Duchy of Warsaw encompassed only a small part of the pre-partition Commonwealth. Above all, the so-called *Kresy*, the far east territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian realm, was then a part of Russian Empire so the grandest and richest Polish magnates with historic

⁷⁹ Nevertheless, there were some foes and adversaries of Napoleon — one of the greatest was princess Izabela Lubomirska née Czartoryska who found him 'a villain, lifted by the favourable circumstances topmost'. She shunned any conversation about him and having to utter that odious name, she called him Little Buonaparte'. Citation from Potocka-Wąsowiczowa, *Wspomnienia*, 56.

⁸⁰ Very typical was her remark upon the members of Polish delegation to Napoleon in 1806 — she wrote about the 'nearly meaningless triumvirate' (they were Ludwik Gutakowski, count Feliks Łubieński and count Augustyn Gorzeński). See *ibidem*, 87, 337.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 108.

names were the tsar's subjects. There were a conspicuous lack in Poland of the Radziwills of Nieśwież, the Potockis of Tulczyn, the Branickis of Biała Cerkiew and their distant agnates could not by any degree live up to that unattainable standard of riches, acreage, prestige and general importance.⁸² Due to the fact that the entire *beau monde* consisted solely of the erstwhile Prussian subjects (with few exceptions),⁸³ even if a grandee in respect of the country, we ought to enlarge on the sombre economic situation of that territory which seriously impinged on social affairs.⁸⁴ In the 1790s serious crises struck the Polish land, and were exacerbated by unusual political events. The blunt manifestation of that was the bankruptcy of the main Warsaw banking companies, consequently followed by the pauperisation of old tycoon families and downfall in their magnitude. What is more, this ruination also deeply affected the highest noble elite, thoroughly affiliated with the main commercial enterprises. Adding the requisitions for war as well as the seizure of the goods during the ongoing wars, uprisings and eventually repressions after the Kościuszko Uprising (1794), the situation was critical. The so-called normalization in Prussia further encouraged the *status quo* — the collapse of trade and other business activities, vagaries of the market and drastic drop in the prices of grain and land constituted the gloomy reality of the turn of the 19th century in Poland. Even if somebody was able to sustain their exceptional economic position, as prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski of Puławy for example, he and his family in fact lost a lot and could no longer match their bygone affluence. The lesser families had greater problems.

Thus naturally in place of the old debased elite came the new one cashing in on the situation. The pre-eminent Polish historian, Józef Szujski (1835–83) once noted 'thousands of members of ancient clans passed into oblivion and on the other hand thousands of new ones took their deserted place'.⁸⁵ The

⁸² For example see Gajewski, *Pamiętniki Franciszka*, i, 17.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ Grynwaser, *Kodeks Napoleona*, 63; Barbara Grochulska, 'Echa upadłości warszawskich bankierów', in Andrzej Zahorski (ed.), *Wiek XVIII. Polska i świat* (Warszawa, 1974); Wiktor Kornatowski, *Kryzys bankowy w Polsce 1793 r.* (Warszawa, 1937).

⁸⁵ See Irena Rychlikowa, *Ziemiaństwo polskie 1789–1864. Zróżnicowanie społeczne* (Warszawa, 1983), 233.

apocalyptic visions of the Armageddon of the old aristocracy arose and prevailed within some circles flanked by the vision of the subsequent defeat of the new noble elite at the hands of the commercial one devoid of even the pretence of feudal grandeur. It was apparent that all those nightmares would have originated from the economic reforms and unavoidable emancipation of the peasantry, intensified social mobility and unlimited activity of capitalists. In 1817, two years after the establishment of the new regime, count Stanisław Potocki wrote — 'it is the very end of the destructive reign [of aristocrats] and the financial and industrial magnates have just taken their [i.e. noblemen's] place'.⁸⁶ From today's point of view those words seem quite hysterical when applied to that time, but they would prove accurate for some decades (one or two generations). The danger of breaking down the ancient barrier of the patricians and others hung like a sword of Damocles over the former — for a long time unimaginable, now a period of change loomed.

The new Polish aristocracy was a real child of the worldwide crisis at the turn of centuries, at the end of the worn-out Enlightenment and at the dawn of a new era. Regardless of the boundaries and political machinations of the European powers, the merging of feudal and post-feudal modern elites was impossible to elude, at least in order to transfuse some new blood into the aristocratic vascular system — at first glance it was an old practice but then the quality of the new was quite different. The final delimitations of the borders of the Duchy and later the Kingdom put the finishing touches to the whole construction — they were responsible for the exact personal selection of the future elites. Therefore the extraordinary success of the Mazovian landed magnates (really petty ones in scale of the whole Commonwealth) who nearly monopolized the fixed *beau monde* (new and old together with no distinctions) — the examples of the Ostrowskis, Rembielińskis, Nakwaskis, Krasińskis, Sobolewskis, Gutakowskis, Łuszczewskis, speak for themselves. They could have excellently adjusted to the new circumstances of their latest status, becoming heirs to the absent Radziwiłłs, Potockis, Sapiehas and Branickis, but to a certain extent — they were restricted in their political abilities (for instance because of the French protection) and social

⁸⁶ Grynwaser, *Kodeks Napoleona*, 217.

influence (on account of the invincible geography). As in the case of their predecessors, parvenus were building fancy country mansions, refurbishing monumental town palaces, founding lavish churches and fashionable mausoleums — all to the greater glory and celebration of their young names. Most of them did not miss a chance of fitting into the world of the all-Polish ancient aristocracy, which was clearly evidenced by the multiple unions between descendants of the pre- and post-Stanislas Augustus elite throughout the 19th century, also long after the collapse of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Congress Poland.

IV

As Congress Poland (or the Kingdom of Poland) could be generally looked upon as a direct continuity of the Duchy of Warsaw, also the societies of both were relatively congruous. According to the new constitution, given by the emperor and the King Alexander I rolled into one, the existence of the estate of nobles was confirmed, but as was the case formerly they were not assigned with any legal distinction apart from some second-rate exceptions. Originally there were some dissenting voices on the board of authors of that fundamental law, for a few yearned for the complete wiping out the feudal social prejudices and customs — for example Józef Kalasanty Szaniawski⁸⁷ who laid out his argument that it was useless to distinguish a nobility which had lost its political as well as economical importance.⁸⁸ On the other hand, this way of thinking implied the existence of the nobility estate shaped by its strong sense of distinctiveness. Interestingly no official document exactly defined the class — hence we could surmise it appeared to them pointless. The people of those times lived under the spell of the prevailing old Polish-Lithuanian noble tradition that the nobility represented the apparent highest stratum, almost separated from the society and existing above it (as the political nation). The membership of this group depended not on any legal regulation but on a popular

⁸⁷ Philosopher and political activist since the Kościuszko Uprising, in Congress Poland head of censorship and staunch advocate of far-right ideology.

⁸⁸ Maria Manteufflowa, *J. K. Szaniawski. Ideologia i działalność 1815–1830* (Warszawa, 1936), 47.

acceptance of the noble brotherhood who also based their rights upon the same. For several centuries they stood firmly against the idea of regulations legitimizing their pedigree. The last decades of the 18th century much modified the character of the advantaged society leaving a distinct weakness in its cohesion — actually only the landed armigers were seen, as approved members and the impoverished rest as excluded, even if most of them came of genuinely medieval chivalric blood. They were eliminated from the nation in a historic sense, but nobody could order them to give up their shared noble identity, though in the not too distant future it would be fairly tarnished.⁸⁹

In Congress Poland as well as in the Duchy, nationwide acceptance of the dominant position of the nobles pervaded not only on account of the tradition or existing European patterns but also on the still prevailing conviction of the naturalness of that state. Everybody, nobles and the others, accepted that social division, especially a bipolar one, still remained the soul of the nation, regardless of what it meant. But to modern historians the problem is not the question of the existence of the nobility but who constituted the nobility in the meaning of the term written in the Alexandrian constitution of 1815.

The constitution enlarged only on the subject of noblemen as owners (i.e. landed ones). They were listed in a special registry called the books of citizens held in each district (*powiat*) — on that grounds one could exert his privileges, like enjoying the most important and discriminative right to choose the nobility's own deputies to the parliament. The nobles empowered with the exclusive voting right composed the legally constructed social and political elite — the so-called ruling class, but on the other hand, nobody deprived the arms-bearing rest of their genealogically attested nobility — any nobleman could retrieve his citizenship if he only purchased some land. The noble possessors of country estates were the most ideal part of the greater entity because they had smaller or bigger fortunes

⁸⁹ Jerzy Jedlicki, *Klejnot i bariery społeczne. Przeobrażenia szlachectwa polskiego w schyłkowym okresie feudalizmu* (Wrocław, 1968); *idem*, 'Szlachta', in Kula and Leskiewiczowa (eds.), *Przemiany społeczne*, 27–56; about the petty nobility, especially its self-consciousness, see Ryszarda Czepulis-Rastenis, 'Uwarstwienie społeczne Królestwa Polskiego w świadomości współczesnych', in Witold Kula and Janina Leskiewiczowa (eds.), *Spółczeństwo Królestwa Polskiego* (Warszawa, 1965), i, 350–5.

derived from the land, which ensured the stability of retaining them for a quite long time — thus also the suitable and due material status relevant to their inherited social standing.

The essence of aristocracy in the territory did not alter despite the historical events, but the consequent further geographical changes in 1815 (after those of 1807 and 1809) affected the exact interrelation of the class's elements. The permutations of the political and social elite meliorated the status of some and diminished the others — for example the magnates of Greater Poland who became the subjects of the King of Prussia, the new self-created Grand Duke of Poznań were virtually bereft of influence in the Kingdom. On the other hand, the social climbers of the last decades still intended to move up the social ladder and could continue that path in the new reality, maybe even more favourable for their ambitious aims.

Józef Zajączek was the epitome of the new era's approach. His unexpected nomination as the royal *namiestnik* (practically a viceroy but without such a title) made him overnight the most important and eminent person in the country. The general, well-known for his radical social attitude, was born to an impoverished landed gentry family with some quasi blue-blooded ancestors in medieval times.⁹⁰ Contrary to the majority of other generals he was of profoundly modest origin, thus owed his success not to the family colligations but his own abilities (not only military). Gaining martial fame during service in the troops of Stanislas Augustus and Kościuszko, he was appointed one of the leaders of the Polish Legions in Italy and subsequently, in the Duchy, one of the commanders of the ducal army. And although he had belonged to high society for some time, most of the patricians, descendants of senators, were quite embarrassed learning who had become the Viceroy — Zajączek had not only been greatly elevated over his own social fellows but also over all unquestioned Polish aristocrats, also deserved such a honour on the grounds of the merits and genealogy. In 1818 the general was additionally awarded the title of His Serene Highness the Prince (it was the first of two princely titles conferred till the November 1830

⁹⁰ His far-off ancestor was Piotr Świnka (1396–1469), *subcamerarius* of Sieradz and castellan. On the subject of his further relations see Jadwiga Nadzieja, *Generał Józef Zajączek 1752–1826* (Warszawa, 1975), 27–35.

Uprising).⁹¹ Zajączek was barely suited into the new society one of whose most significant heads he had become almost overnight. However, the haughty grandees were obliged to accept him, for he was not a usurper but only carried out the will of His Beloved Majesty (the guarantor of the then optimal social system) which could not be questioned. Among his immediate relatives was his wife, Aleksandra née Pernet (firstly married to some Isaure, a physician), also well-regarded, irrespective of her even more inferior lineage than her husband's. She perfectly played her role of virtually a vicereine, feeling at ease in contacts with her peers, like countess Zofia Zamoyska or princess Maria Wirtemberska; besides in the presence of Grand Duke Constantine she behaved as if she was his complete equal. Two nieces of the Viceroy, Pelagia and Gabriela, also became members of the high society thanks to their uncle's career — the former's spouse, Jan Hilary Łubieński — a distant relative of count Feliks, came from gentry bloodstock; the husband of the latter, Józef Radoszewski built all his social and material success on the family capital of his wife — the Viceroy made him the president of the Voivodeship Commission of Kalisz and later his last will in 1826 allowed the Radoszewskis to live well for the rest of their own and their offspring's life.

As in the previous period, the Senate of Congress Poland performed a special role in establishing political and social relations.⁹² The post of senator still was seen very favourably — for such an individual the doors to aristocratic houses and societies were as widely open as for real heirs (disregarding even the actual ancestry). However, the intake of that group was genealogically quite diversified, far more than before 1815 (partly because of the quantity).⁹³ Beside the great magnates from ancient clans of *królewęża* (the little kings) like Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, Count Stanisław Kostka Zamoyski, Count Ludwik Pac, Prince Józef Lubomirski, Count Jan Tarnowski or Prince Michał

⁹¹ Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych (hereafter AGAD), Warszawa, Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Administracyjnej Królestwa Polskiego, 6, 149.

⁹² For instance: Małgorzata Karpińska, „*Nie ma Mikołaja!*”. *Starania o kształt sejmu w powstaniu listopadowym 1830–1831* (Warszawa, 2007), 148–9.

⁹³ Helena Dylągowa, *Towarzystwo Patriotyczne i Sąd Sejmowy* (Warszawa, 1970), 223; Ryszard Przelaskowski, *Sejm warszawski roku 1825* (Warszawa, 1929), 52–5; Jerzy Skowronek, 'Skład społeczny i polityczny sejmów Księstwa Warszawskiego i Królestwa Polskiego', *Przegląd Historyczny*, lii, 3 (1961), 466–91.

Radziwiłł, there were people of comparatively minor condition, 'younger brothers' of the first mentioned — Count Wojciech Męciniński, Count Stanisław Wodzicki, Michał Wodziński, Count Aleksander Bniński, Count Jan Poletyło, Franciszek Nakwaski. In terms of the above-mentioned divisions into the First and the Second Society, these people fell into the space between them. But there were also some genuine first-generation parvenus originated from nobility of completely minor rank, for example Feliks Czarnecki, Kajetan Koźmian, Michał Strasz, Aleksander Linowski or Franciszek Grabowski. The career of the latter is worth discussion.

Franciszek Grabowski⁹⁴ was a son of a supply judge (*podśędek*) of Ciechanów, also not a highly regarded Mazovian officer before the partitions. His juristic adroitness enabled him to start a promising career very soon, becoming a barrister and deputy for the Crown Tribunal in Lublin, additionally obtaining the titles of sword-bearer and deputy starost (*podstarości*). Shortly before the Kościuszko Uprising, Grabowski attained the highest office in the province in which he resided — sub-chamberlain (*podkomorzy*) of Krasnystaw. Following the end of the Commonwealth, he became totally involved in his occupation as a lawyer, winning widespread recognition, above all from Stanisław Kostka Zamoyski, the twelfth *ordynat* (heir of an entail) of Zamość, whose recommendation paved the way for his nomination for a member of the Central Government in Lublin in 1809 (as a counsellor and later counsellor of State). In the Duchy and Congress Poland his fervent conservative views combined with immense legal knowledge and experience drew the attention of observant aristocrats. Having become their most favoured protégé, the title of senator voivode was bestowed upon him in 1825 — note that without the usual previous nomination for the traditionally inferior castellan, more appropriate for newcomers. The success of the father smoothed the path of the son, Tomasz,⁹⁵ who in 1821 was appointed the Major Secretary of the Council of State, subsequently Referendary of State and eventually in 1829 Senator Castellan — the last with the great help of his father-in-law, Count Stanisław Tarnowski, the omnipotent general Aleksander Roźniecki (a relative of the

⁹⁴ Maria Manteufflowa, *Franciszek Grabowski*, PSB, ix (1961), 491–2.

⁹⁵ *Eadem*, *Tomasz Grabowski*, PSB, ix (1961), 513–14.

Tarnowskis) and Prince Franciszek Ksawery Drucki-Lubecki (friend of Franciszek Grabowski).

V

In this paper, we have not yet discussed the subject of aristocratic titles, and it is high time to do this. The titular convention had been officially prohibited for several centuries in the Commonwealth with the exceptions of some princely houses (originating from the medieval rulers of Lithuania and Ruthenia). In practice, titles were borne by many magnate families who even sometimes were addressed in that style (as the Tarnowskis or the Tyszkiewiczzes). In the 18th century, there was a galaxy of entitled patricians, barons, counts and princes⁹⁶ but only after the partitions that Western custom was consequently instilled there. In all three empires, titles played a crucial role in setting the aristocracy apart from the rest of the nobility. Therefore the former as a feudally conceived estate enjoyed its separate privileges, immunities and other exemptions which were the core of its distinctiveness. However, this could not affect Polish society much for the tradition was too strong and the imperial and royal governments were too reluctant to modify it to that extent — it was redundant. But a completely different matter was the mental aspect of that problem, the strongly entrenched consciousness of being a better part of the historically uniform noble brotherhood — that idea had permeated magnates' minds from the very onset of the parity throughout the nobility, but then, since 1795 (or even since 1773 on some territories) they gained the perfect opportunity to indulge their voracious desires to manifest the confirmation of their status — all people, even from peasantry or middle class, could be mistaken for an untitled grandee, a titled one could be not.

Prussian, Austrian and also Russian honours seemed to be generally well received (even if not sought after) by the members of high society, which is demonstrated by the total number of those

⁹⁶ Zygmunt Gloger, *Encyklopedia staropolska*, 4 vols. (Warszawa, 1978), ii, 257-9.

thus distinguished.⁹⁷ They gave satisfaction to the aristocratic aspirations of not only the progeny of real magnate clans but also to real parvenus who formerly had taken seats in the Senate as the first in their families like Count Pius Kiciński or Count Józef Mikorski, or had such ancestors but centuries ago — for example, Count Jan Dembiński. But in fact these many senators could be hardly evened up, e.g. Antoni Drohojowski and Stanisław Kostka Zamoyski, both counts created by the grace of the Habsburg emperor but socially, materially and politically very distant. Referring to Galicia, it was rather normal to bestow the titles not only onto the blue-blooded but also onto the pure commoners who nevertheless lived up to the financial qualifications (in Galicia, titles were virtually on sale, thus a popular byword ‘Galician count’ indicated the poor value of the title). In the Duchy and the Kingdom the titles were freely available — the Kings of Congress Poland as well as the Emperor of the French (but not the Duke of Warsaw!) awarded their merited recipients with such. The excessive use of titles had touched people from all noble backgrounds, superior and inferior. Looking at the epitaph⁹⁸ of princess Marianna Lubomirska’s parents, the Granowskis one could not resist the thought of the intended aggrandizement of their names with comital titles — could genuine princess have been a daughter of a common nobleman? She apparently might have not imagined that. Titles were favoured also by committed democrats and fervent adversaries of social inequality like counts Adam Gurowski and Bruno Kiciński.⁹⁹ Some attached great importance to them as for instance General Piotr Szembek who gave a grand party on the occasion of the Senate pronouncing his comital title lawful.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, there were so many examples of people not approving that practice and retaining the old customs. When the Senate still existed, it was composed of voivodes and castellans so all addressed them in that manner and respectively their children

⁹⁷ See Szymon Konarski, *Armorial de la noblesse polonaise titrée* (Paris, 1958), *passim*.

⁹⁸ St Peter and St Paul’s Church in Kamionka near Lublin; about Michał Granowski see *Pamiętniki Kajetana Koźmiana obejmujące wspomnienia od 1780 do roku 1815* (Poznań, 1858), i, 51-4.

⁹⁹ Jedlicki, ‘Szlachta’, 33.

¹⁰⁰ Józef Patelski, *Wspomnienia żołnierza 1823–1831* (Wilno, 1921), 42.

as well: for example, the son of a voivode was called *wojewodzie* and the daughter — *wojewodzianka*. But the traditional Western aristocratic title had one compelling advantage over the Polish one — it was hereditary and was passed to the next generations regardless of the actual material, political or social situation — it maintained extant until the death of the last male heir, always certifying the aristocratic position of its bearers. The usurpation of the titles was actually widespread, but in contrast to the mentioned examples of Prince Mirski or Count Kiszka-Zgierski, the real aristocrats followed the same path because of different reasons. The vast majority of them took for granted bearing such honours as if it was a natural and intrinsic right not requiring an official diploma or credentials (for example the Potockis).¹⁰¹ Others gave the impression of being convinced of their rights resulting from the conferral of a title on some distant relatives with the same name (the Krasińskis).

Another problem was accepting some features of aristocratic distinction instead of explicit self-entitlement — predominantly it was expressed by adopting the comital crown as a persistent heraldic element on their own coat of arms. This appeared on numerous things ranging from decorations of the palaces to epitaphs and gravestones. That is even more interesting if we discern that such persons presumably had not had any troubles with acquiring such titles, except with a nominal effort — did the crown over the shield make one more aristocratic though without a title, or maybe there was another reason? It is a new small field for future researchers to explore.

In Congress Poland, title-bearers were obliged by the law of 17 July 1817 to justify their rights to them before a special board of senators. The verification terminated in 1824 and in accord with this law, 112 noblemen were warranted by the King to hold the 10 princely, one *knyaz's* (Ogiński), 73 comital, one viscomital (de Verny),¹⁰² 20 baronial and seven French *chevalier's* titles. Those people constituted the only group able to use the cited honorifics in their public as well as private life. That number included also

¹⁰¹ Jerzy Łojek, *Potomkowie Szczęsnego. Dzieje fortuny Potockich z Tulczyzna* (Lublin, 1980), 30–2.

¹⁰² Gabriel Antoni viscount de Verny, a chamberlain of Stanislas Augustus, acquired an *indigénat* 21 June 1792. See AGAD, Księgi Kanclerskie Metryki Koronnej, 99, 301–6, 354.

titles given to them at the time by Aleksander I. That was the case of Józef Zajączek and Joanna Grudzińska¹⁰³ (she was at the very top of the list), who were the only created princes in the history of the Kingdom. Prior to the November Uprising, the Polish rulers conferred additional seven titles of a count, for example to the previously ennobled brothers Maurycy (in 1829) and Józef (in 1830) Hauke.¹⁰⁴ The legitimized titled aristocrats consisted of the great landowners as well as of mediocre clerks without any acreage. Generally, the titles of citizens of substantial patrimony were recognized. It is important to note that these titles were granted to 47 senators or their relatives, thus to nearly a half of all those who served between 1807 and 1830.¹⁰⁵

Summing up, according to the recounted facts and conclusions, we should draw attention to the phenomenon of unprecedented social elevation and acknowledgment of the individual abilities above family and genealogy. More and more common was the notion that personal assets and accomplishments meant in the modern world not only the same as the unforgettable achievements of the ancestors in the past but maybe were even of much greater importance. Some staunch conservatives perceived that as the wrong manner of introducing unwanted and harmful democratization which let the common clay come uppermost and at the same time brought the pure blue-blooded down.¹⁰⁶ However, they all had to yield to that change. Taking into consideration the cited declaration of Count Łubieński on his lack of consent for repudiation of ancestry — he either wanted them to be consigned to oblivion or stated that they mainly influenced his fate — one of the pioneers in the field of Polish bureaucracy knew the truth:

¹⁰³ *Dziennik Praw*, vii, 56–8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, xxvi, 135–43. Haukes, from the family of vague Flemish noble ancestry (due to that inexactness they needed nobilitation in 1826) were notable generals of the Polish army — Maurycy served as a deputy war minister and was a close associate of Grand Duke Constantine, Józef was selected by Nicholas I as his aide-de-camp. The daughter of the former, Julia, was married to prince Alexander of Hesse and by Rhine becoming the princess of Battenberg, mother of prince Alexander of Bulgaria and grandmother of queen Louise of Sweden and Eugenie of Spain. About the history of the family see Constantin Stackelberg, *Genealogy of the Hauke Family* (Washington D.C., 1955).

¹⁰⁵ AGAD, *Heroldia Królestwa Polskiego*, 1-5.

¹⁰⁶ Gajewski, *Pamiętniki Franciszka*, i, 44; Paweł Popiel, *Pamiętniki Pawła Popiela* (Kraków, 1927), 17.

everybody is the architect of his own fortunes. Only a few could then raise the argument of pedigree, for example, as a mitigating circumstance in the court. Epitomical was the speech delivered during a Sejm session in 1818 by Wincenty Niemojowski, a liberal member of the Diet from Kalisz region, who said that 'in the face of the law everybody is equal, all titles as well as the nobility should be cancelled as they are only idle words in the situation when everyone has the same rights according to the constitution'. That voice profoundly annoyed Senator Franciszek Grabowski who rising from his seat asked 'Do you disown your nobility?'. Niemojowski replied that it was of no matter for him whether he was or was not a nobleman, so Grabowski, totally appalled, left the chamber announcing that he could not preside over the over the parliamentary Commission where such ideas met recognition (and since then he never appeared at the sessions).¹⁰⁷ Those passionate words signified the denomination of the heraldic and genealogical prerogatives to the level of plainly social interactions. On the other hand, Grabowski was an example of the obstinate atavistic attachment to feudal mores and principles, perpetual, despite all the occurrences and conditions. Grabowski, himself from a family of parvenus elevated thanks to the amiable atmosphere of the political and social breakthrough, stood for the positional movements within the limits of the whole estate. With that way of thinking at least two paradoxes were connected — the first that any advancement elicited a change in inherited social position which should be immutable and the second, even more important — each success resulted not from the advantages of genealogy but personal merits, which could be partaken by the non-nobles as well.

In the first three or four decades of the 19th century, people witnessed the process of important social changes reinforced by political, cultural and economic events. The dominant factor in this were the current realities — the current post, current fortune, current decorations and other current honours and advantages meant everything. It was the beginning of the future cultural change in high society due to which in half a century one would ask 'Who are you and what do you do?' rather than 'Who were

¹⁰⁷ Leon Dembowski, 'Pamiętniki', Biblioteka Czartoryskich, Kraków, MS 3811, 446-7.

your parents and what had they got?’¹⁰⁸ In 1820, Kajetan Koźmian wrote in one of his numerous poems:

But if because I sit higher
I do not look upon the lesser as the people
Recently being a modest peasant, when my destiny was changed
I am ashamed of my family, that they come from the countryside
I am looking for ancestors through dusted documents
And although I could achieve my own glory, I bear somebody else's.¹⁰⁹

There is evident criticism in these lines of some previously mentioned practices — criticism expressed by a member of that group strongly identifying himself with it and what is more, highly acclaimed by his peers because of it. Koźmian could be counted as one of the many who reconciled the post-feudal values with nearly democratic views, to a different extent though, sometimes more or less unconsciously. The fact they thought in such a way in that period anticipated the existence of the modernized social and political aristocracy known in the second half of the century, on the eve of the First World War.

¹⁰⁸ Antoni Zaleski, *Towarzystwo Warszawskie. Listy do przyjaciółki przez Baronową XYZ*, ed. Ryszard Kołodziejczyk (Warszawa, 1971), 249.

¹⁰⁹ Kajetan Koźmian, ‘Prośba wieśniaka do fortuny’, in *idem, Wybór poezji* (Kraków, 2002), 51.