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GRADUATES OF PADUA IN THE CHANCERY OF SIGISMUND III

ABSTRACT

The students educated in Padua had great influence on the royal chancery of Poland-Lithuania and it dates back to the Middle Ages. These studies offered a possibility of career, and the significance of Padua in the context of royal chancery centres around the preparation of renowned lawyers much needed in the activities of the state. The reconstructing the education of chancery secretaries or notaries requires further research on this large group of several hundred characters.

KEYWORDS: Padua, early modern, chancery, education, Poland-Lithuania

The research into the social elites of the Poland-Lithuania has a long tradition, and for several decades considerable attention has been paid to the groups of officials serving the royal chancery. This concerns both the secretaries and scribes. We already know such groups by name to a considerable extent, and attempts at syntheses are being effected. However, it should be accentuated that in some important issues we are only equipped with imprecise generalisations, relying on research intuition. This results from the magnitude of the archive material and the need for the painstaking prosopographical research (Chorążyczewski 2007: 14–43, Żądłowski 2008: 55–56). With reference to the reigns of individual rulers, teams of secretaries usually amounted to hundreds of people, and these came from all over the country. Even rarer are the analyses relating to the formation of the distinguished figures of the epoch. It suffices to refer here to the work of Thomas Graff on the Paduan Martin Campius Wadowita, an eminent theologian and professor of the University of Kraków. It appears to be necessary to add that such works are not frequent, precisely because of the size and difficulty of the bibliographical research (Graff 2018).

The importance of Padua for the instruction of the personnel seems to be indisputable, for it dates back to the Middle Ages. The earliest use of the humanistic writing in the royal chancery in the years 1418–1420 can be traced to Padua itself (Słowiński 1992: 71). On the other hand, at the beginning of the modern era, in respect of the well-researched chancery of Sigismund I the Old, it is known that out of seventy-one secretaries as many as eighteen studied in Padua, yet we possess no knowledge concerning the place of studies of additional secretaries (Wyczański 1990: 39). This, however, means that exactly

twenty per cent of the secretaries, that is mid-level officials, were in Padua. Interestingly, secretaries in this epoch gained their doctorates of laws mainly from Bologna.

Nonetheless, one could follow Antoni Mączak and ask whether the importance of heading for Padua was of different reason, and the legal education was to be significant, yet it was only a supplement, a type of the required base (Mączak 1986: 225, 228). More significant was to find one's place in a certain elite group, "doomed" to a career in the homeland. A brief note by Walerian Nekanda Trepka, fiercely pursuing bourgeoisie and peasants pretending to be noblemen, appears to confirm this hypothesis. Referring to a certain "town son from Kazimierz at Kraków", he says that "he became doctor of laws in Padua in circa 1634". He also notes names of other people who were promoted then with him, all of whom were plebeians (Trepka 1963: 458). We can feel Trepka's reluctance and a warning that these educated in good centres would build their careers, and most probably at the expense of the old nobility.

Let us, however, return to the chancery team of Sigismund III. Unfortunately, we do not possess precise data concerning the composition of the team. This promising research was hindered at a certain point, to be specific at the first point, that is while defining and describing the group. The fact that Sigismund III reigned for about forty-five years and his chancery or numerous chancelleries: Crown, Lithuanian or Swedish were large and the fluctuation of the staff high can in fact explain the reason for its hindrance.

The senior officials, sealers, registrars and grand secretaries are well recognised. We know about a large group of royal secretaries who amounted to around five hundred renowned officials, yet we have to remember about internal functional divisions which were not reflected in their titles. Nonetheless, divisions of the groups of secretaries according to their duties and functions have already been well presented (Żądłowski 2008: 57–58). Thus, there were secretaries employed in the chancery, there were also some who were envoys in diplomatic missions at home and abroad, there were also some who were assigned to the town, representing there their own king – an example being a secretary and a poet Jan Rybiński, residing in Toruń, and finally, there were honorary and titular secretaries who did not have any special duties. Alongside the secretaries, there was a large group of middle and lower-level staff – we know of two hundred scribes at the Crown Chancery, around thirty crown archive officers, several decree writers, and, above all, we shall not skip the Lithuanian Chancery, which was similar in number, or a Swedish Chancery of considerable size (Krawczuk 1993: 149–164). Undoubtedly, the staff of all the chanceries during the entire reign amounted to circa a thousand of officials better or less educated.

Insofar as the composition of the group is known, the reconstruction of the universities where they studied appears to be more problematic. For more than a half of them we do not possess any information, which may impede any generalisation. We can only attempt to refer to various point findings, evidence the existing fashions or trends, and endeavour to depict the attitude for particular models of instruction. Walter Leitsch, an expert in the royal court, claims that fashion for Padua during the reign of Sigismund remained among the employees of the chanceries (Leitsch 2009: 457, Barycz 1971; Lenart 2018). From the data available we can formulate a hypothesis that the percentage of the secretaries who studied in Padua was lower than during the reign of Sigismund I the Old, between 10 and 15 per cent. This is still a high number considering the competition between Bologna, Rome and also German universities or Paris.

Chancellor Jan Zamoyski is undoubtedly a number one figure among the Paduan secretaries. Even today, after four centuries, his works connected with the chancery arouse emotions, and what is most interesting, the positive ones. This was the case, for example, in 2020, when Aleksander Korolewicz of the National Archive in Kraków identified the foundation charter of Zamość issued in 1580, which had been considered lost to science since the second half of the 19th century.¹ The research into the activities of Jan Zamoyski is still bringing us new findings, particular attention should be paid here to the works by Ryszard Szczygiel (Szczygiel 1989).

The above Chancellor is also known as a promoter of good education, a founder of many foreign journeys, including those to Padua (Tygielski 1989: 130–134). Wojciech Tygielski points out that the creation of the Zamojska Akademia in 1594 was to bring numerous benefits, most notably educational ones for young people, but also prestigious, and probably also such that would strengthen and consolidate client relationships (Tygielski 1989: 134–135). The Academy was to become the “Padua of the North”, therefore the pattern was clear (Lovas 2021: 150).

To make Padua famous, Jan Zamoyski did much. Thanks to him, it also became an important centre for those who wanted to make a career in the royal chancery and to gain the favour of the Chancellor himself. However, let us mention that with reference to Zamoyski’s activities in this office, we are treading on a very unexplored ground. There are speculations that from the very beginning he was entrusted with the most important cases (Chorażyczewski 2017: 203–207). While doing so, he made use of his knowledge from the time when he was organising the Kraków Crown Archive. In the declining period of his life, when he was in conflict with the King, his chancery worked very poorly. Yet, chancellor’s achievements in office should be noted, which appears to be an important research postulate.

An example of a career based, among other things, on the studies in Padua is that of Jan Januszowski, a distinguished typographer, publisher and royal secretary. He was closely associated with Jan Zamoyski’s circle. It was Januszowski who was the first to be elevated to the noble status by the young King Sigismund III in January 1588 (or still in December 1587). This ennoblement, whose richly ornamented certificate has survived to this day, is still the subject of various diplomatic studies, not least because of its exquisite style and beautiful ornamentation (Kiliańczyk-Zięba 2007). With Januszowski’s many merits, however, it can be inferred that the king appreciated his contribution the most, especially to the creation of a propaganda campaign in favour of his reign in 1587. This was undoubtedly the very beginning of the shaping of public opinion by means of early proto-newspapers (Pieńkowski 2021: 303–304; Zawadzki 1997: 30).

A person who rendered great service to the assimilation of Italian culture and who was the memorable translator of “Jerusalem Liberated” is Piotr Kochanowski, who cannot be omitted from the list of writers associated with both Padua and the Chancery. Here, too, however, there is no detailed account of his many works, including his chancery work (Lechicki 2018: 188).

¹ <https://zamosc.naszemiasto.pl/sensacyjne-odkrycie-po-blisko-150-latach-odnaleziono-akt/ar/c5-8868339> (accessed 18.06.2022).

The significance of Padua in the context of chancery work centres around the preparation of renowned lawyers much needed in the activities of the state. A good example here is Andrzej Piotrkowczyk, a professor of the University of Kraków, Doctor of Laws and royal secretary. In Padua, he stayed as a guardian of young Radziwiłł brothers, Mikołaj and Albrycht Stanisław, the latter was to become the Chancellor of Lithuania (Mikuła 2015: 335–336). An example of such a dual career of a different Paduan is Jan Oktawian Waclawowicz, who was employed in the royal chancery as a scribbler, and was also Doctor of Laws and professor of the University of Kraków (Mikuła 2015: 422–423). Also Andrzej Barski-Kochler, Stanisław Pudłowski and Wojciech Nagot should be added to this group of professors instructed in Padua in this epoch, who, however, did not have any closer relationship with the chancery.

Padua is also present in the activities of the chancery, although, also in this case the information is scattered. In 1599, the Swedish chancery undertook somewhat complicated actions to settle a problem of debt which was incurred in 1572 by the Swedish noble Ture Bielke to the Duke of Florence in order to redeem himself from obligations in Padua (Krawczuk 2021: 258–259). Bielke belonged to the followers of King Sigismund III during the civil war in Sweden, and for that reason was executed in 1600.

The Italians often educated in Padua had considerable influence on the policies of Sigismund III and by implication on the royal chancery. The most distinguished of these was undoubtedly a Jesuit Antonio Possevino. His plans referring to the reconciliation with the Orthodox Church, cooperation with Moscow, or those related to Sweden arouse avid interest among the scholars until today (Possevino 2012). Here, however, we lack detailed explanation of his contacts with the chancery.

The studies into the relations and influence of Padua on various professional groups appears to be a very challenging undertaking. The fact of the lack of sufficiently precise databases enabling one to track the formation of networks and relations is problematic. The influence of the Paduan centre on the royal chancery of Sigismund III is indisputable, although students' routes usually led through several universities. And definitely, these studies offered a possibility of career, a change of their fortune.

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