

## WRITING SKILLS OF PODILLYA NOBLES IN MID-16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BASED ON 1563 TAX REGISTRY

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### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the writing skills of Podolian nobles in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The documentary source taken into consideration for the research is the 1563 Podolia Voivodeship Tax Registry, which includes hand-written notes and signatures of the estate owners. The analysis of these materials reveals the multilingualism of the writing produced in the territory of the Podolia Voivodeship. Ten linguistic combinations with the use of three languages – Latin, Polish and Ruthenian – were identified. The evidence points to the prevalence of Latin in writing. The second most used language was Polish, while the use of Ruthenian was insignificant. The relation of the language choice and ethnic identification is not straightforward, as the examples prove. The skill of writing was mostly the domain of officers (land, castle and private) who held positions that required them to write, as well as of representatives of the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

**Key words:** Podolia Voivodeship, nobles, writing skills

Most likely the ability to write has become an essential practical skill for an average Podillya noble in mid-16<sup>th</sup> century due to several circumstances. First, there was a social need for the writing skills among those noble community members who were required to write as part their everyday professional responsibilities, such as leading the offices (land, castle or trade), providing administrative services to manage the estate of wealthy nobles, working for out-of-castle *starostwo* chancelleries and private chancelleries of the rulers. Second, there was a tradition of studying at schools, such as Kraków University and, most likely, local cathedral and parochial schools. Education of the family members implied the requirement to get education for his descendants. To mid-level nobility, education was a kind of investment in the social capital of their families.

In Ukrainian historiography, the proposed paper offers the first time analysis of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century nobility's literacy at the time when the Ukrainian lands governed by the Crown and Grand Duchy of Lithuania were yet to be widely influenced by the ideas of Protestant and Jesuit scholarship. In the mid-1970s, Andrzej Wyczański

raised this topic and studied contentually similar material. In his substantial work,<sup>1</sup> he researched literacy in relation to social status of Kraków voivodeship nobility in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the similarity to the subject of his study and the analyzed documentary sources, there are several significant differences that render the comparison of literacy in the two voivodeships quite conditional and in some aspects impossible, in addition to the limitations imposed by the format and length of this article.

The paper focuses on two problems – multilingualism of Podillya nobility and its ethnic identification, which could potentially impact the choice of language for writing. Podillya voivodeship of that time was a frontier voivodeship located on the south-eastern border of the country and considered one of the poorest and unsafe areas. A continuous threat of Tartar attacks led to regular and fast rotations in the last name nomenclature of the noble residents of the voivodeship, which significantly complicates the study of their families. Besides, Podillya voivodeship was the smallest and the least populated area in the Crown, which makes the share of Podillya nobility not representative for the whole country. One more factor that put Podillya voivodeship apart from Kraków voivodeship was the ethnic composition of its nobility. Despite unfeasibility of calculating any ethnic proportions in Podillya, let's note that the share of Ruthenian nobility in the local noble corporation was quite large, which presents a strong difference from the ethnic composition in Kraków voivodeship.<sup>2</sup>

The document I analyze in this paper emerged at the time when the last king from House of Jagiellon Sigizmund the Second Augustus ruled over Polish throne and became famous for his successful reforms carried out in the Polish Crown. One of the most prominent reforms was the reform of the royal treasury and its supply from the income generated by royal estate, which, in turn, were used to support the regular army units. One of the sources of filling the treasury was a property tax withheld from the estate owners by the stipulation of the Sejm of 1562–1563 in Piotrków.<sup>3</sup> A specific feature of this initiative was the diligence of its implementation (given the whole preceding political process), which left behind uniquely detailed source materials, which, to my mind, open up a wider view on Podillya local community of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

The structure of the researched document is worth commenting. I study the final draft of the Tax Registry of Podillya voivodeship created in 1563 according to the

<sup>1</sup> A. Wyczański, *Oświata a pozycja społeczna w Polsce XVI stulecia. Próba oceny umiejętności pisania szlachty województwa krakowskiego w drugiej połowie XVI w.*, “Społeczeństwo staropolskie” 1976, t. I, Warszawa, p. 27–55.

<sup>2</sup> On Podillya nobility in the 16<sup>th</sup> century see: L. Białkowski, *Podole w XVI wieku: rysy społeczne i gospodarcze*, Warszawa 1920; В. Михайловський, *Еластична спільнота. Подільська шляхта у другій половині XIV – 70-х роках XVI ст.*, Київ 2012.

<sup>3</sup> AGAD, Archiwum Skarbu Koronnego (dalej ASK), dział I, 45, k. 215–287.

<sup>4</sup> The materials of this source have been already studied. See: W. Wittyg, *Wypisy heraldyczne z ksiąg poborowych województwa podolskiego z lat 1563–1565*, Kraków 1908, 17 p.; В. Михайловський, *Православні парафії Подільського воєводства за матеріалами поборових реєстрів 1560-х рр.*, “Український історичний журнал” 2012, № 6, с. 130–144.

decree of the Sejm of 1562–1563 by Kam’yanets Sword-Bearer (*miecznik*) Stanislaw Sroczycki.<sup>5</sup> This information is included in the title page of the document. As one can see from the daily marks, the tax withholding took place from July 3 to August 10 1563<sup>6</sup> most likely in the city of Kam’yanets. Structurally, the document is divided in two sections. The first, or to be more specific – the left-hand – part of the dual notebook page, was written by a scrivener, and included the information about the day the tax was paid, the name of the settlement, the name of the settlement owner, the name of the owner’s representative, and the size of the taxed property. The second – the right-hand – part of the dual notebook page presents handwritten notes of the owners, their representatives or other people, in case the property owners or their representatives were illiterate, who confirmed the withholding of taxes on the designated property with signatures and stamps in the presence of property owners or their representatives.

I would like to focus my observations about writing skills on several aspects. First of all, it is the language of an autograph. It informs several important conclusions about such things as education level, literacy, language preferences for specific legal purposes, but not for ethnic identification. The next aspect is a status of the signatory on the tax withholding notes. I look closely at the officers of land, castle, and trade offices with a special attention paid to different kind of scribes, people of the church, both Orthodox and Catholic. The format of this study leaves out such important aspects as biographies of people who autographed the pages of the researched manuscript, and speculations of their age and physical ability or inability to write properly.

I have studied 237 notes<sup>7</sup> of tax withholdings that represent property owner nobility of Podillya voivodeship in 1563. Let’s look at the language used to carry out this legal action. Unlike the scope of notes analyzed by A. Wyczański for Kraków voivodeship, the notes from Podillya voivodeship were written in three languages – Latin, Polish, and Ruthenian. While all the left-hand records of the notebook are written in Latin with an identical hand of a scrivener, the right-hand parts include a whole variety of prototype autographs consisting of the texts of the notes and signatures.<sup>8</sup>

All the available notes include the following set of linguistic combinations (note language goes first, signature language follows): Lat., Lat. – 137 records (57.54%); Lat., no signature – 8 (3.36%); Lat., Pol. – 12 (5.04%); Lat., Ruth. – 4 (1.68%); Lat., Lat.+Ruth. – 3 (1.26%); Pol., Pol. – 36 (15.12%); Pol., no signature – 3 (1.26%); Pol., Lat. – 3 (1.26%); Pol., Lat. – 3 (1.26%); Pol., Ruth. – 1 (0.42%); Ruth., Ruth. – 1 (0.42%). Thus, I identified 10 language combinations that were used during the tax withholding, with a clear prevalence of Latin as a preferred writing language of the Podillya voivodeship nobility. Does it mean that Latin was a dominant government language in this territory in mid-16<sup>th</sup> century? The answer to this question can be found in the personalities of those who left their notes on the pages of this

<sup>5</sup> AGAD, ASK, dział I, 45, k. 215.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, k. 215 v, 286 v.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth to note that not all the records in this document are closed with the owners’ or owners representatives’ notes. In total, there are 27 of such records.

<sup>8</sup> Hereinafter, Latin is referred to as *Lat*, Polish – *Pol*, Ruthenian – *Ruth*.

document. Occasionally, let's mention that the one Ruthenian note identified in the document along with Ruthenian signatures are one of the very few instances of using this language in official records and paperwork. One more specifics worth taking into account is the fact that not everybody who signed the notes also wrote the texts of their notes.

So who were the people who wrote and signed the tax withholding notes? They can be divided into two categories – the property owners and their representatives. Only 24 property owners were personally present at the tax withholding and personally wrote the notes, signed, and stamped them: Andrzej Cwiklowski alias Zambrowski (*Lat*); Pawel Wasylkowski (*Lat*); Tomasz Ginter (*Lat*); Stanislaw Dobek Lowczowski (*Lat*); Jan Jasienski (*Lat*); Mikolaj Karapczejowski (*Pol*); Maciej Dobromirski (*Lat*); Jan Dobromirski (*Pol*); Jan Krampski (*Pol*); vice-preor Wenceslaw (*Lat*); Nazarko Pilatowsky (*Ruth*); Ivakhno Diakovsky (*Ruth*); Jan Kolbus (*Pol*); Klemens Kostrzewski (*Pol*); Stanislaw Jacemirski (*Lat*); Jakub Borszczowski (*Lat*); Stanisla Zakrzewski (*Lat*); Jakub Chocimirski (*Lat*); Dmytro Mytko (*Lat*); organ player Jan (*Lat*); Jan Czermiński (*Lat*); Wawrzyniec Mileski (*Lat*); Stanislaw Wercejski (*Lat*) and Anna Nadolska (*Pol*). Out of all the listed, 15 persons used Latin, 7 persons used Polish, and only 2 persons used Ruthenian language. Upon a closer look, there were 3 persons from the circle of Catholic Church who used Latin writing for the obvious reasons. Tomasz Ginter served as a canonic and administrator of Kam'yanets parish,<sup>9</sup> a vice-prior Wenceslaw was a member of Franciscan order,<sup>10</sup> and Jan was an organ player at the Kam'yanets Cathedral.<sup>11</sup> Local officers preferred Latin as well: Kam'yanets castel judge (*sędzia grodzki*) Jan Kolbus, Kam'yanets master cup-bearer (*podczaszy*) Mikolaj Karapczejowski, future district judge (*sędzia ziemski*) Stanislaw Dobek Lowczowski, future district judge Maciej Dobromirski, future district judge deputy (*podśędek ziemski*) Stanislaw Jacemirski, captain (*rotmistrz*) and future Kam'yanets cup-bearer and greater lord of army (*wojski*) Jan Czermiński.<sup>12</sup> Thus one's ability to write was directly related to one's chance to have an office appointment.

Among those property owners who showed up to pay the tax, there was one woman – Anna Nadolska – who signed the note as *Anna Nadolska reka wlasna*<sup>13</sup> (Anna Nadolska', written by hand). Only three persons used Ruthenian language in their signatures: Kam'yanets archpriest Nazarko Pilatowski as “Назарій Пилатовський намесник каменецькій рукою власною” (Nazariy Pilatovskiy Kam'yanets representative written by hand), but the text of his note was written in Polish and by the

<sup>9</sup> AGAD, ASK, dział I, 45, k. 221.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, k. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, k. 277.

<sup>12</sup> *Urzednicy podolscy XIV–XVIII wieku. Spisy*, opr. E. Janas, W. Kłaczewski, J. Kurtyka, A. Sochacka, Kórnik 1998.

<sup>13</sup> AGAD, ASK, dział I, 45, k. 285.

scrivener;<sup>14</sup> Ivakhno Diakowsky, whose note was written in Latin by the scrivener; and Adam Miscovsky.<sup>15</sup>

The total number of people who put their signatures on the pages of this document constitutes 63. Their social and official characteristics are quite diverse. Status-wise, these people can be categorized in the following groups: officers (land, castle, city officers, administrators, scriveners), family (son, brother, father-in-law, brother-in-law), friends, neighbors, clients, servants, tenants, representatives of Khmilnyk area nobles, and persons without designated status. The specific of this group is that some persons served as signatories several times. The record setters are Jakub Jarkowiecki who signed 29 times for those nobles who could not write. Jarkowiecki likely was that very scrivener who drafted this document. The recurrence of his handwriting in the document, and a big number of notes drafted by him for the illiterate or low-skilled nobles testifies to his role in the process of tax withholding execution and creating the records accordingly. The runner-up by the number of signatures – 17 cases – was estate administrator of Bar *starosta* Mikolaj Nezabitowski. Two more persons with the abundance of signatures who confirmed the tax withholdings 11 times each were Jan Trzemenski and Andrzej Cwiklowski alias Zambrowski, who are designated in the document as the representatives of Khmilnyk nobility.<sup>16</sup>

Several officers who given their positions should have been able to write stand out in this list of signatories. Several more names of people who either had offices or very soon after concluding this document became officers could be added to the above-mentioned list. For instance, Kam'yanets district writer (*pisarz*) Stanislaw Wolski has put his signature in the document four times in the capacity of an intermediary for those who could not write.<sup>17</sup> He used Latin in all his records. One ore officer who signed 5 times was Kam'yanets master cup-bearer (*podczaszy*) Mikolaj Karapczewski.<sup>18</sup> He used Polish in his signatures, and also himself wrote a note.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Kam'yanets assistant *starosta* Jerzy Sulima wrote 5 notes by hand and confirmed them with his personal signatures.<sup>20</sup> Kam'yanets castel judge Jan Kolbus produced 4 records using Latin 3 times and Polish one time.<sup>21</sup>

The case of Jan Milanowski, who at the time served as a Kam'yanets esquire carver (*stolnyk*), is interesting. The records of him paying taxes from his villages Minkovci, Nahoriany, Laskivci, and Miliyova indicated that he was illiterate (*nesciens scribere*).<sup>22</sup> The same designation accompanied the records of him paying taxes for his friends.<sup>23</sup> He used Jakub Jarkowiecki and the scrivener of Skala castle Sta-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, k. 233.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, k. 238, 249, 256–257.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, k. 242–244, 260.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, k. 263–264, 271–272, 282.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, k. 226–227, 245, 254–255.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, k. 245.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, k. 230, 235–236, 249, 282.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, k. 221, 230, 238, 256.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, k. 241, 249.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, k. 231, 241, 246, 254, 266, 284–285.

nislaw to write the records. However, one time when paying taxes from his villages, after the record that Jan Milanowski, Kam'yanets esquire carver, cannot write, he stamped the record and using the hand of Jakub Jarkowecki acknowledges: (*Joannis Milianowskij dapifer t[e]rris Camenecen[si] nescie[n]s scribe[re] sigillo proprio et manu Jacobij Jarkowieczkij recognoso...*) and puts his hand-written signature under the list of his property: "Jan Milanowski, the son of mister esquire carver's" (*Jan Mylanowskij syn pana stolnykov*).<sup>24</sup> To my mind, this is a case when a person had elementary skill to put his signature in those special circumstances related most likely to the need to personally confirm the ownership of property, even though in this case the procedure had not been fully followed. The meaning of the phrase "the son of mister stolnik's" cannot be interpreted further, because Milanowski had poor writing skills and, respectively, his signature is pretty illegible.

An exceptional case among the officers cluster was a person designated as Fedir the customs officer, serviceman to the Kam'yanets sity starost, who wrote a note in Ruthenian by hand and put his personal signature. This is the only example of Ruthenian language use in official documents of Podillya voivodeship at that time. Very likely, there was a regular practice of using this language for official paperwork and doing business with neighboring Braclaw voivodeship and probably Moldovian principality.

To complete the overview of the officers group, let's list those who had to be literate – the persons designated as scribes. In addition to the abovementioned Kam'yanets district writer Stanislaw Wolski, there were six more scribes: the scribes of Kam'yanets *starosta* Jan Brzowski<sup>25</sup> and Jan Szomski,<sup>26</sup> the scribe of Zinkivci castle Mikolaj Wronowski,<sup>27</sup> the scribe of Skala castle Stanislaw,<sup>28</sup> Mikolaj Potocki's scribe Andrzej,<sup>29</sup> and assistant scribe of Stanislaw Wolski Jan Tokarski.<sup>30</sup>

A special case is a group of estate administrators, the composition of which is very extensive: *factor*, *provisor*, master's officer, estate administrator, senior officer. It is only logical that the persons who had those jobs should be able to write, even to be capable to provide simple reports about the estates they supervised. Overall, it was the case indeed. However, the Kurylivtsi and Borsukovci estate supervisor Walentij Brzezinski did not know how to write; Jakub Jarkowecki made records for him.<sup>31</sup>

To close, I would like to flag one more phenomenon, which seems important. It is a use of multiple languages in the notes and signatures. The persons who produced multi-lingual records were: Andrzej Cwiklowski alias Zambrowski, 9 times (*Lat* – 1, *Pol* – 8); Jakub Chocimirski, 8 times (*Lat* – 5, *Pol* – 3); Marcin Sledziowski,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, k. 241.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, k. 232.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, k. 250.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, k. 233–234.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, k. 240, 245, 248.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, k. 286.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, k. 263.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, k. 256.

4 times (*Lat* – 3, *Pol* – 1); Jan Kolbus, 4 times (*Lat* – 1, *Pol* – 3); Stanislaw Dobek Lowczowski, 3 times (*Lat* – 2, *Pol* – 1); Mikolaj Wronowski, 2 times (*Lat* – 2, *Pol* – 1). Stanislaw Zakrzewski<sup>32</sup> and Mikolaj Wronowski<sup>33</sup> wrote the notes in Polish, but signed in Latin one time each. The specifics of the bilingual use is that Andrzej Cwiklowski,<sup>34</sup> Marcin Sledziowski,<sup>35</sup> and Stanislaw Dobek Lowczowski<sup>36</sup> used Latin to confirm the ownership of their estates, while used Polish to confirm the ownership of somebody else's estates. At the same time, Jakub Chocimirski and Jan did not follow the same pattern. Meanwhile, the Zinkivtsi castle scrivener Mikolaj Wronowski personally wrote the notes both in Latin and in Polish,<sup>37</sup> but Stanislaw Zakrzewski confirmed his Polish language note with a Latin allegation – *manu propria significat*.<sup>38</sup>

It is very likely that the language preference for Latin in the signatures and the notes was given because its status was considered more prestigious. Such conclusion can be made based on the analyzed specific examples. However, their share is too small for a confident extrapolation.

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In the mid-16th century, one's ability to write was not a subject of pride among Podillya nobility. The analyzed document demonstrates that writing skills belonged to the domain of officers whose jobs were related to different kinds of paperwork. The most prevalent writing language was Latin. The nobles of various ethnic backgrounds preferred this language. A higher status of Latin is also observed in cases of bi-lingual writing. Latin was applied to put down the cases related to personal property ownership, while Polish was used to write the confirmation of somebody else's property – the assets of friends, neighbors, acquaintances or illiterate persons.

A notable presence of written Polish could be a sign of emerging all-European tendencies of the 16th century that introduced vernacular in the paperwork, and also of the absence of opportunities or possibilities to receive a traditional education that provided for the study of Latin as a writing language. Minor share of Ruthenian language in the document allow flagging the use of this language among the Podillya nobles of the 16th century. The reasons for neglecting Ruthenian vary: the prevalence of Latin in official document flow that imposed the use of Latin on ethnic Ruthenian population, as well as the absence of schools with instruction in Ruthenian.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, k. 253.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, k. 234.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, k. 218.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, k. 244.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, k. 223, 237.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, k. 233–234.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, k. 253.



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