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'The Famous Misters Mayors' of the Šiauliai Economy in the 17th Century: the Cultural Elites of Peasants and Townspeople?

*„Sławetni panowie wójtowie” ekonomii szawelskiej w XVII w. –
elita kulturalna chłopów i mieszczan?*

ABSTRACT

Most of the mayors (Pol. *wójt*) were wealthy individuals who, however, originated from peasant or urban backgrounds. Some also had noble ancestry, such as the mayor from Joniškis, Renald K. Łukoski, and the mayors of Šilėnai and Ramulėnai, Gregorz Juchniewich, etc.). For their service, they received a volok of land exempt from taxes. Thus, the mayors belonged to the socio-economic elite of villages and towns. Kinship ties, friendship, and neighborly relations allowed the office of 'mayor of rural commune' or town to be maintained for a long time (even for several generations). Close relations with the administration of Šiauliai economy enabled them to influence not only the peasants but also certain administrative decisions. Mayors and benchers acted as intermediaries between the village and the manor. The duties of the mayor according to the law from 1649 (reiterated almost in the same wording in 1657) were as follows: to ensure that the subjects lived in the holy Catholic faith and piety, to protect royal properties

PUBLICATION INFO					
	 WYDAWNICTWO		 UNIWERSYTET HUMANIUM CURIAE-SOLIDORUM	e-ISSN: 2449-8467 ISSN: 2082-6060	
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SUBMITTED: 2025.01.11		ACCEPTED: 2025.09.13		PUBLISHED ONLINE: 2025.11.28	
WEBSITE OF THE JOURNAL: https://journals.umcs.pl/rh		EDITORIAL COMMITTEE e-mail: reshistorica@umcs.pl			
DOAJ		DIRECTORY OF OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS		 Crossref 	
					
„Projekt dofinansowany ze środków budżetu państwa, przyznanych przez Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego w ramach programu Doskonała Nauka II”				 Minister Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego	

and estates, to grant vacant plots of land to peasants who were to pay rent, and to oversee the vacant plots. The village heads were also required to participate in court proceedings at the manor. Sources indicate, however, that the influence of the mayors was conditioned by one more factor – their education or ability to read and write. This phenomenon can be observed from the first half to the end of the 17th century (they could even write in Cyrillic, although they usually wrote in the Latin alphabet). The mayors consistently signed their names ‘in their own hand’ on various documents, tax registers, etc. It can be assumed that the ability to read and write enabled the village heads to actively participate in court matters (which was their obligation according to the manor law), to collect and establish taxes, to represent the interests of the subjects of Šiauliai economy in disputes and conflicts with the administration, with the tenants of the economy, and even with the king, in higher courts (e.g., the Treasury Tribunal of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), as well as to draft petitions.

Key words: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Šiauliai economy, mayors (wójtowie), literacy, education, the 17th century

STRESZCZENIE

Większość wójtów stanowili ludzie zamożni, którzy wywodzili się jednak ze środowiska chłopskiego lub miejskiego. Czasem mieli także szlacheckie pochodzenie (wójt janiszski Renald K. Łukowski, wójt Szylan i Ramulan Gregorz Juchniewicz itp.). Za swoją służbę otrzymywali wólkę ziemi zwolnionej od podatków. Wójtowie należeli zatem do elity społeczno-gospodarczej wsi i miast. Więzy pokrewieństwa, przyjaźni i sąsiedztwo umożliwiały utrzymanie urzędu „wójta wołosnego” lub miejskiego przez długi czas (nawet przez kilka pokoleń). Ścisłe stosunki z administracją ESz pozwalały wpływać nie tylko na chłopów, ale także na niektóre decyzje administracji. Wójtowie i ławnicy byli pośrednikami między wsią a dworem. Obowiązki wójta według ustawy z 1649 r. (powtórzone prawie w tym samym brzmieniu w 1657 r.) były następujące: zapewnienie, aby poddani żyli w św. wierze katolickiej i pobożności, ochrona posiadłości i majątków królewskich, przekazywanie pustych włók na własność chłopom, którzy mieli płacić czynsz, pilnowanie pustych włók. Wójtowie musieli też brać udział w sądach we dworze. Źródła podają jednak, że wpływ wójtów był uwarunkowany jeszcze jednym czynnikiem – ich wykształceniem lub umiejętnością czytania i pisania. Zjawisko to obserwuje się od I połowy do końca XVII w. (mogli pisać nawet cyrylicą, chociaż zwykle pisali alfabetem łacińskim). Wójtowie trwale podpisywali się „własną ręką” na różnych dokumentach, rejestrach podatkowych itp. Można przypuszczać, że umiejętność czytania i pisania wójtów pozwoliła im brać czynny udział w sprawach sądowych (był to ich obowiązek zgodnie z ustawą dworską), pobierać i ustalać podatki, reprezentować interesy poddanych ESz w sporach i konfliktach z administracją, z dzierżawcami ekonomii, a nawet z królem, w sądach wyższych (np. Trybunał Skarbowy WKL), a także do spisywania suplik.

Słowa kluczowe: Wielkie Księstwo Litewskie, ekonomia szawelska, wójtowie, umiejętność czytania i pisanie, edukacja, XVII w.

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about culture, we usually mean the culture of a particular society (specific social classes, castes, or groups), as something that can be achieved through deliberate effort. ‘Culture’ is relatively

understandable when we mean the self-improvement of an individual, whose culture we view in the context of the culture of the group and society¹. The concept of culture usually includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals and ceremonies, and more². In Lithuania, traditional oral culture continued to dominate even in the 17th century. Oral communication was especially relevant in small communities where interpersonal relationships prevailed, and cultural values, along with the skills for creating them, were passed down from generation to generation through close and constant interaction, both verbally and by practical example³. On the other hand, by this period, it was already difficult to manage without writing: it was necessary for carrying out official duties (even at the lowest levels), handling legal and financial matters (from property sale agreements to drafting wills or settling disputes), communicating with the authorities and the Church, and pursuing better education and career opportunities.

This article specifically examines the cultural aspirations of the peasants and townspeople of the Šiauliai economy (SE) who held a higher social status – being town or rural commune (Pol. *wójtowstwo*) mayors (Pol. *wójt*) – and their connection to 'high culture' through their relationship with the manor and the Church. The focus is primarily on the literacy and education of these mayors. On the other hand, a person who contributes to culture, no matter how significant their contribution, is not always a 'cultured person'⁴. Therefore, the claim that the literacy of the elders and their various cultural intentions indicate their refinement is somewhat risky. However, it is impossible to find another way to describe their involvement in the cultural environment of the elite at that time. The case of the Šiauliai economy will be used as an example. A case study of a specific micro-community allows for a deeper understanding of the subject and helps to find answers to the questions being raised.

It should be noted that although the scholarly literature on the history of peasants in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) during the early modern period has deep traditions and is quite extensive⁵, the cultural

¹ T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture. The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, New York 1968, p. 96.

² L.A. White, *Culture*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/culture> [access: 18.04.2025].

³ M. Lukšienė, *Lietuvos švietimo istorijos bruožai XIX a. pirmoje pusėje*, Kaunas 1970, p. 6; H.J. Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century*, New Brunswick–London 1991, p. 306.

⁴ T.S. Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵ S. Kościalkowski, *Ze studjów nad dziejami ekonomji krolewskich na Litwie*, "Rocznik Towarzystwa przyjaciół nauk w Wilnie" 1911–1914, 5, s. 1–168; A. Janulaitis, *Powstanie włościan szawelskich w roku 1769*, Wilno 1921; J. Jurginis, *Baudžiavos įsigalėjimas Lietuvoje*,

orientations of peasants and their integration into the ‘cultural society’ of the time have been little studied. One notable exception is the serious research that has begun on the process of Christianization in Lithuania⁶. Nevertheless, studies of peasant culture have mostly been limited to topics related to remnants of paganism and traditional folk culture⁷. The education of peasants and townspeople in the early modern period has been briefly reviewed by historians such as Juozas Jurginis, Kazys Misius, Meilė Lukšienė, Vaida Kamuntavičienė, Marcin Mironowicz, and others⁸. The education of peasants in the later period, specifically the 19th century, has been studied quite extensively⁹. Literacy is typically linked to the development of the school network. The number of parish schools in the 16th–18th centuries fluctuated, sometimes decreasing, sometimes increasing. It is true that young people could also learn to read and write at home. Additionally, the level of these skills must also be considered.

Vilnius 1962; idem, *Lietuvos valstiečių istorija*, Vilnius 1978; J. Ochmański, *Położenie społeczno-gospodarcze i walka klasowa chłopów w ekonomii kobryńskiej w drugiej połowie XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku*, “Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych” 1957, 19, pp. 45–89; R. Marčėnas, *Šiaulių ekonomijos valstiečių sukilimas 1769 m.*, Vilnius 1969; J. Kuzmaitė-Kiaupienė, *Kaimas ir dvaras Žemaitijoje XVI–XVIII a.*, Vilnius 1988; J. Jurkiewicz, *Powinności włościan w dobrach prywatnych w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVI–XVII wieku*, Poznań 1991; D. Karvelis, *Radvilų Biržų kunigaikštystės visuomenė ir jos komunikacija 1589–1655 m.*, Vilnius 2009; R.R. Trimonienė, *Vietos visuomenė ir valdžia. Tarpusavio sąveikos. (Šiaulių ekonomijos atvejis XVII–XVIII a. pradžia)*, Vilnius 2023.

⁶ Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija, ed. V. Ališauskas. Vilnius 2006; A. Bumblauskas, M. Bumblauskas, *Žemaitijos krikštas. Christianizacijos procesas XV–XVII amžiuje*, Vilnius 2018; L. Anužytė, *Žagarės miestelėnų ir valstiečių rūpesčiai mirties akivaizdoje (XVII a. pabaiga)*, in: *Istoriniai tekstai ir vietos kultūra. Historical scripts and local culture*, ed. J. Švambarytė-Valužienė, Šiauliai–Ryga 2004, pp. 186–192; L. Giedrimas, *Šiaulių parapija XVII a. viduryje: teritorija, gyvenvietės ir gyventojų krikštijimai*, “Žiemgala” 2021, 2, p. 23–28; R.R. Trimonienė, *Kobieta chłopska w obliczu śmierci w XVII wieku według ksiąg sądu dworskiego ekonomii szawelskiej*, in: *W kręgu rodziny epok dawnych. Śmierć*, ed. B. Popiołek, Kraków 2022, pp. 161–176.

⁷ For example: B. Buračas, *Lietuvos kaimo papročiai*, Vilnius 1993; N. Vėlius, *Senovės baltų pasaulėžiūra*, Vilnius 1983.

⁸ J. Jurginis, *Lietuvos*, pp. 84–86; J. Ochmanski, *Seniausios Lietuvos mokyklos XIV a. pabaigoje–XVI a. viduryje*, in: idem, *Senoji Lietuva*, Vilnius 1996, pp. 131–156; K. Misius, *Žemaičių aukštumos regiono švietimo raida XVI a. –1940 m.*, “Acta Academiae Artium Vilmensis” 2004, 34, pp. 255–262; M. Lukšienė, *Lietuvos švietimo istorinės raidos bruožai*, in: eadem, *Prie tautos kultūros pamatų*, Vilnius 2014, pp. 358–377; V. Kamuntavičienė, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės parapiinės mokyklos XVII a. antrojoje pusėje*, “Soter” 2002, 7 (35) pp. 117–130; M. Mironowicz, *Szkolnictwo prawosławne na terenie Rzeczypospolitej w II połowie XVI i na początku XVII wieku*, “Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne” 2018, 49, pp. 38–62.

⁹ For example: M. Lukšienė, *Lietuvos švietimo istorijos*.

Traditional methods will also be employed in the research, including the analysis and interpretation of historiography and empirical data. In this article, various written sources will be examined to analyze the cultural aspirations of the peasant elite in the SE: from financial reports and inventories to manor court books and visitation records from the Diocese of Samogitia. Scientific literature that reflects the topic to varying degrees will also be utilized. The so-called 'community studies' allow for a closer examination of how larger processes manifested in specific local societies and how they influenced individuals' lives¹⁰.

THE INSTITUTION OF MAYORS IN THE ŠIAULIAI ECONOMY

In 1589, the Warsaw Sejm of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in the constitution *Ordinance about the royal provisions in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*, listed six economies in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Grodno, Šiauliai, Brest, Kobryn, Mohylew, and Alytus. This was on the condition that 'the revenues from them would go to the treasury of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania'¹¹. However, it was only after the death (at the end of February 1616) of Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł the Orphan (*Sierotka*), the leaseholder of the Šiauliai rural district (since 1572), that a larger part of it was finally transformed into an economy in 1619¹².

In the 17th century, the SE was divided into territorial-administrative units known as tracts. These included the Šiauliai, Žagarė, and Joniškis (Pol. *szawelski, żagorski i janiszski*) tracts, as well as the Užmūšis rural district (Pol. *włość zamuszska*), with each tract comprising several rural communes, which contained dozens of villages. The Šiauliai tract had 8 communes, the Joniškis tract had 6 communes, the Žagarė tract had 3 communes, and the Užmūšis rural district had 2 communes. Additionally, the economic towns of Šiauliai, Joniškis, and Žagarė had their own mayors. The residents of Gruzdžiai (Pol. *Gruzdzi*), designated as a town in 1636, were likely only allowed to elect their own mayor

¹⁰ Look: R.R. Trimonienė, *Mikroistorijos ir lokalinės istorijos takoskyros problematika*, in: *Miestas, dvaras, kaimas Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje ir Lenkijos Karalystėje XVI–XVIII a. Lokalinės istorijos problemos*, ed. R. Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, Vilnius 2018, pp. 31–32, 34–38.

¹¹ *Volumina legum*, vol. 2, prep. J. Ohryzko, Petersburg 1859, p. 289; A. Tyla, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės iždas. XVI amžiaus antroji pusė – XVII amžiaus viduryje*, Vilnius 2012, p. 172.

¹² R.R. Trimonienė, *Vietos*, pp. 35–36.

based on the ordinance from 1689, or to remain under the jurisdiction of the village mayor¹³.

It is commonly believed that each rural commune encompassed around 100 volok of land; however, my research has shown that the commune in the SE included between 160 and 375 volok. The considerable size of the village seems to have been influenced by the fact that they followed the Land Reform Act not from April 1, but from October 20, 1557. This act stated that 'where rural lands and settlements are close to one another, one mayor can manage three hundred or four hundred volok'¹⁴. Thus, the scope of the mayors' work was quite broad (taxes were collected not only from households or chimneys but also based on the amount of land owned).

According to Juozas Jurginis, in Lithuania, a mayor was appointed¹⁵. In fact, according to Article 7 of the VoloK Land Reform Act of April 1, if someone receives a commune, they do not have to take an oath, as a monetary penalty (Old Rus. *вина*) has already been imposed'. However, in addition from October 20, it was stated that 'when elected to the rural commune, mayors and benchers must take an oath in accordance with the first laws'¹⁶. It should be noted that in the areas of Belarus within the royal economies, the traditional institution of elders (Rus. *starcy*) elected by the rural community persisted for a long time before being gradually replaced by mayors¹⁷. In Poland, the term for elected mayors lasted three years or longer (sometimes ranging from 5 to 7 years)¹⁸. The Ukrainian historian D. L. Pochilewich, who studied the history of peasants in the GDL, noted that the rural community would elect two candidates for the position of mayor once a year, around the feast of St. Martin, from which the manor would appoint one of them¹⁹.

¹³ E. Meilus, *Žemaitijos kunigaikštystės miesteliai XVII a. II pusėje–XVIII a.*, Vilnius 1997, p. 169; *Polskie ustawy wiejskie XV–XVIII w.*, in: *Archiwum Komisji Prawniczej*, vol. 11, eds. S. Kutrzeba, A. Mańkowski, Kraków 1938, no. 18, p. 172.

¹⁴ *Литовская метрика. Отделы первый-второй, Часть третья: Книги Публичных Дел*, vol. 1, Юрев 1914 (*Русская Историческая Библиотека*, 30), col. 587; R.R. Trimonienė, *Vietos*, p. 121.

¹⁵ J. Jurginis, *Lietuvos*, pp. 73–74.

¹⁶ *Литовская*, col. 546 ('А коли войтовство кому дают, присегати емк не надобе, кды жъ вже вина на войта описана'); *ibidem*, p. 587 ('а пры обиранию войтовства войтове и лавьники присегати мають водле первое уставы').

¹⁷ В. Голубеў, *Сельская община ў Беларусі XVI–XVIII ст.*, Мінск 2008, pp. 94, 131, 172.

¹⁸ *Historia chłopów polskich*, vol. 1, *Do upadku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej*, ed. S. Inglot, Warszawa 1970, p. 333.

¹⁹ Д.А. Похилевич, *Крестьяне Белоруссии и Литвы в XVI–XVIII вв.*, Львов 1957, p. 162.

This raises the question of what the actual procedure for selecting mayors was and how long their term lasted in the SE. Sources on this topic have essentially not survived, but a letter from King Jan Kazimierz Waza from 1659, recorded in the Lithuanian Metrics, may shed some light on this matter. In this letter, it was noted that the Vetnariai and Pasidabrė commune had long been vacant. Therefore, in 1657, the field marshal of the GDL and the leaseholder of the SE, Aleksander Ludwik Radziwiłł, sent a letter to the mayors of the economy proposing an election race between two candidates: Woznicki and the nobleman Jan Bartkiewicz. 'The mayors and all the benchers of this tract, as well as our subordinates' supported Bartkiewicz's candidacy. Radziwiłł noted that the latter not only properly fulfilled his duties as mayor but also, as befitted a nobleman, defended the homeland by gathering several hundred soldiers in Samogitia against the Swedes. As a result, on May 2, 1659, the king confirmed Bartkiewicz as the mayor of the Joniškis tract²⁰. In 1679, when a conflict arose between the community and the mayors, the delegates sent to the Sejm in Grodno sought that the mayors be removed from the office, punished for their abuses, and that the community be allowed to elect new ones²¹.

These cases confirm J. Jurginis's assertion regarding the procedure for electing a mayor. On the other hand, the choice of candidate depended on the leaseholder of the economy. The right to choose or accept the proposed candidate belonged to the mayors of the economy, the benchers of the specific tract, and the subordinates. Ultimately, the monarch approved the mayor's candidacy based on the proposal of court officials. However, even the aforementioned letter leaves many ambiguities. Other sources indicate that in 1657, Grzegorz Baczewich held the position of the Vetnariai and Pasidabrė mayor²². Bartkiewicz does not appear in any documents.

In response to the question of whether there were fixed terms for mayors, it can be argued that, essentially, there were none. A significant number of mayors could serve until their death (for example, J. Beinarowich.

²⁰ Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas [hereinafter: LVIA], fond 389, ref. no. 130, fols. 376–376v. According to the 1667 tax census, Jan Bartkiewicz lived in the Šiauliai rural district and owned one peasant farm. G. Błaszczyk, *Herbarz szlachty żmudzkiej*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2015, p. 256.

²¹ *Lietuvos valstiečių ir miestelėnų ginčai su dvarų valdytojais*, vol. 1, ed. K. Jablonskis, Vilnius 1959, p. 314–315 ('według woli całego włości woytow tychże dawnych złożyliśmy a nowych wpytow obrac sobie według dawnych ustaw całego włości p[o]zwoliliśmy').

²² Inventory of the Šiauliai Economy, 1657. Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie [hereinafter: AGAD], AR, dz. XXV, ref. no. 4163, fol. 98.

The mayor of Skaistgiris and Tyrelis, Jan Wysocki from the Žagarė tract, was listed as mayor in the inventory from 1649 as well²³). Alternatively, they could be dismissed from their position due to complaints from subordinates, conflicts with the court administration, or other reasons. Often, rural communes were passed from generation to generation (as seen in families like the Gineich, Kszykowski, Normanch, and others). For instance, the mayor of Vinkšnėnai, Jan Kriksztanaitis (*Kryksztanajc*) from the Šiauliai tract, is recorded in 1636, and in 1657, there is a mention of the 'Kriksztanaitis commune', in which Ignacy Kriksztanaitis (possibly Jan's son) served as mayor²⁴. On the other hand, an exception can be noted in the case of the Šiauliai mayor, Mikołaj Mickiewich. He likely held this position only from 1672 to 1673; afterwards, he is mentioned in documents only as a townsman, 'Mister' (*pan*)²⁵. One could speculate that Mickiewich lost his commune due to his inappropriate behavior, including constant accusations of brawling, insults, and so on²⁶.

In the documents of the SE, often the rural commune can be identified by the name of the mayor rather than the name of the locality, suggesting that their power took on a hereditary character. For example, in a will from 1692 made by Paweł Spirak from the village of Stungiai, confirmed by the mayor Stanisław Wisztakas, he is humbly referred to as 'our host'²⁷. In 1679, the subordinates of the commune of Šiladis and Pašiladis, complaining to the commissioners about mayor Karol Gineitis, claimed that no one in the district dared to go to the manor and talk about the wrongs done to them because they feared being beaten ('who as he took, so he beat whomever he wanted, having no oversight over him')²⁸.

The duties of the village head according to the regulations from 1649 (repeated almost in the same wording in 1657) were as follows: to ensure

²³ Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka, LIETUVOS EVANGELIKŲ REFORMATŲ SINODAS. XV: Varia2018: [Šiaulių ekonomijos 1636–1638 m. pajamų knyga, sudaryta dvaro raštininko Ostapo Kerdejaus (Kierdeia), valdant ekonomiją LDK dvarui maršalui Aleksandrui Liudvikui Radvilai] [hereinafter: LNMMB, LERS. XV: Varia2018], fol. 41, <https://www.europeana.eu/portal/lt/record/2021803/C10000685963.html> [access: 18.04.2025]; M. Hriškevičius, *Šiaulių ekonomijos karaliaus stalo dvarų istorinis aprašymas nuo jos pradžios lig pusės XIX šimtmečio*, "Mūsų senovė" 1922, 4–5, pp. 841–842.

²⁴ LNMMB, LERS. XV: Varia2018, fol. 3v; M. Hriškevičius, *op. cit.*, pp. 841–842; AGAD, AR, dz. XXV, ref. no. 4163, fols. 12, 35. Biblioteka PAU i PAN w Krakowie, ref. no. 2457, fols. 52, 74v (from 19 IX 1672 to 16 IV 1673).

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, fols. 59, 122v, 179v, 207v.

²⁷ *Žagarės dvaro teismo knygos (1670–1751)*, eds. A. Baliulis, R. Firkovičius, V. Raudeliūnas, Vilnius 2003, p. 160, nr. 50.

²⁸ *Lietuvos valstiečių ir miestelėnų ginčai su dvarų valdytojais*, p. 316.

that the subordinates lived in the holy Catholic faith and piety, to protect the royal estates and properties, to assign vacant lands to peasants who were to pay rent in cash (Pol. *czynsz*), and to oversee the vacant lands. The regulations from 1649 stipulated that rent in cash should not be collected in the villages, but only at the manor, in the presence of the mayors, and handed over to the officials (administrator, vice-administrator, and vicegerent). The courts in which the mayors were to participate had to be held only at the manor; if they were held in the village or elsewhere, the decisions would be invalid. If the mayor failed to appear in court, he would face a fine of four Lithuanian kopa grosz (or groat). The schedule for such lawsuits was established as follows: in Šiauliai on Monday and Tuesday, in Joniškis on Thursday and Friday, and in Žagarė on Tuesday and Wednesday. If the mayor was not present on that day, the officials had to inform the inspector, who was to impose a penalty on him. Mayors were required to come to Šiauliai every year on the feast of St. Bartholomew (August 24) or send two representatives. The ordinance from 1689 specified that the assembly of mayors must take place at the manor in Šiauliai. If the mayors do not comply with the orders of the economy administrator or his deputies and fail to appear at the assembly on the appointed day, they are to be punished by the administrator²⁹.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to gather information about all the mayors, but the available material allows for tracking certain trends related to their lives and activities.

It can be assumed that most of the mayors came from peasant or bourgeois families, but they were affluent. Sometimes they also had noble ancestry. They were the mayors of the Magdeburg city of Joniškis: from 1616 to 1625, Wojciech Ładoński, a writer in the royal chancellery³⁰; and from 1625 to 1641, Stanisław Łukoski. He is referred to as 'our secretary', meaning royal³¹. He renounced his 'lifetime right' in favor of his son Reinhold Kazimierz Łukoski, 'the chamberman of prince of His Majesty Kazimierz'. He served as mayor from 1641 to 1661. Later, in 1676, a certain Łukowski and Mikołaj Gabszewicz Jaskold, 'a companion of the squadron' of the Grand Treasurer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Benedict Sapieha, also appear³².

²⁹ R.R. Trimonienė, *Vietos*, pp. 124–126.

³⁰ *Lietuvos magdeburginių miestų privilegijos ir aktai. Joniškis. Jurbarkas*, ed. A. Tyla, Vilnius 1991, no. 2, pp. 18–19, 28–29.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 28–39; LNMMB, LERS. XV: Varia2018, fols. 7v, 36v.

³² *Lietuvos magdeburginių*, pp. 39, 68; Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Rankraščių skyrius [hereinafter: VUB RS], f. 7, Book of Acts of the Samogitian Castle Court [hereinafter: ŽPTAK] 14, 1652–53, 15/ 14467, no. 97, fol. 268v; no. 99, fols. 275–276.

The Žagarė mayor, Kazimierz Matysewich (also Matusowich, in 1670–1671), likely had noble origins. His wife Konstancja Pajsielewiczówna's sister, Krystyna, was married to the Livonian Master of the Pantry (Pol. *podstoli*), Michał Kazimierz Siemich³³. The mayor of Šiauliai in 1638–1640, Andrzej Gradowski, also came from nobility³⁴. Grzegorz Juchniewich, the mayor of Šilėnai and Ramulėnai from the Šiauliai tract (1657–1676), was also of petty nobility. In 1673, he owned about eight volok of land³⁵.

Mayors received a volok of tax-exempt land as compensation for their service. The salaries of mayors were determined as follows: court fees amounted to 3 groszy per 1 kopa (according to the Regulations of 1649). According to the Regulations of 1657, inspecting boundary damages for a mayor was set at 4 groszy³⁶. The wealth of mayors is evidenced by preserved wills and land purchase contracts. It was not uncommon for familial ties to develop between the families of mayors or with other lower-ranking court officials.

CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS OF MAYORS: WRITING CULTURE

Sources, however, indicate that the influence of mayors was determined not only by their wealth and the passing of the mayoral position from generation to generation, but also by another factor – their education or the ability to read and write.

In 1562, the royal courtier and Samogitian land inspector, Jakub Łaskowski, while carrying out the Volok reform in the Karšuva district with other officials, noted in the written instruction that, knowing that 'human memory is short, [...] the mayors cannot read.' Wanting to ensure

³³ *Žagarės*, p. 111, no. 3; 112, no. 4; 114, no. 6; p. 154, no. 47; G. Błaszczuk, *Herbarz szlachty żmudzkiej*, vol. 4, Warszawa 2015, pp. 57–58.

³⁴ Income book of the Šiauliai Economy, 1636–1638, fols. 11v, 23, 50; J. Drungilas, *Erelis lokio guolyje. Lenkų bajorai Žemaitijoje XVI–XVIII a. Migracija, kalba, atmintis*, Vilnius 2019, p. 150; VUB RS, f. 7, Book of Acts of the Samogitian Land Court [hereinafter: *ŽŽTAK*], 1595 (26/14600), no. 30, fols. 66–69v.

³⁵ VUB RS, *ŽŽTAK*, 1617, 44, 62/14688, fol. 151v; AGAD, AR, dz. XXV, ref. no. 4163, fol. 73; List of the income of the Šiauliai Economy, 1673: VUB RS, f. 4-A2016, fols. 115, 115v; LNMMB, LERS. XV: Varia2018, fols. 110, 148, 165, 243–243v, 246, 268; Inventory of the Šiauliai Economy, 1676 m.: Archiwum Archidiecezjalne Warszawskie [hereinafter: AAW], ref. no. 2/0/2/1, fols. 133v, 136, 140; Нацыянальны гістарычны архіў Беларусі [hereinafter: NHAB], fond 694, inventory 2, ref. no. 9527, fol. 199v; G. Błaszczuk, *Herbarz szlachty żmudzkiej*, vol. 2, Warszawa 2015, pp. 479–483.

³⁶ Regulations of the Šiauliai Economy, 1649, in: M. Hriškevičius, *op. cit.*, p. 845; Inventory of the Šiauliai Economy, 1657, AGAD, AR, dz. XXV, ref. no. 4163, fol. 19.

that his orders were carried out, he instructed that this directive be recorded in the court books³⁷. In 1622, a priest complained to the leaseholder of the SE, Hieronim Wołłowicz, about disobedient parishioners from the town of Šiauliai and four rural communes. Wołłowicz sent a letter to the mayors, demanding that those who did not attend church on 'holy days and Sundays' and 'did not observe the holidays announced in the church' be punished. Interestingly, the letter had to be translated into Lithuanian before being passed on to the mayors³⁸. Later, it can be assumed that most mayors had a good understanding of the Polish language, as it was necessary for communicating with the court.

The situation changed drastically in the second half of the 17th century, as most mayors became literate or at least knew how to sign their names. It can be assumed that the growing need for writing skills was driven by the expanding responsibilities of the mayors. They had to assist the manor in various financial accounting tasks, verify them, and participate in resolving court cases. This is evident from an examination of the SE documents.

The earliest preserved documents containing the signatures of mayors date back to the mid-17th century. Most of these are tax registers. It is true that not all mayors approved documents in writing at the same time, or at least this was not recorded in the sources.

From the tax registers (Pol. *wybiorki*) dating from 1650–1652, it is evident that in the Joniškis tract, where there were six rural communes, five mayors confirmed the tax registers. These were Aleksander Banaitis (Banajc, from the Gilduva and Upytė commune), Mikołaj Klausewich (from the Pamušė and Vilkiaušė commune), Marcin Buiwyd (from the Platonis and Kivė commune), and Jan Milwid (from the Voverkis and Audruvė commune). Instead of the mayor Waclaw Barun (from the Virčiuvis and Pošupė commune), Łukasz Palecki signed the document³⁹, so we do not know for sure whether Barun was literate.

In the Šiauliai tract, where there were eight rural communes, five or six mayors confirmed the tax registers. These were Bartłomiej Stira (Styr, from the Lygumai and Užkruoja commune), Stanisław Krzykowski

³⁷ Акты, издаваемые Виленскою археографическою комиссиею. Инвентари и разграничительные акты, vol. 2, Вильно 1898, p. 90; J. Jurginis, *Lietuvos*, p. 84.

³⁸ Biblioteka Jagiellońska w Krakowie, Oddział zbiorów specjalnych, ref. no. 5882-IV, fols. 35–35v; R.R. Trimonienė, *Petro Tarvainio „Linksmas pasveikinimas“ ir Šiaulių Šv. Petro ir Pauliaus bažnyčia*, in: *Šiaulių katedra. Istorija, architektūra, dokumentiniai ir ikonografiniai šaltiniai*, eds. T. Butautis, V. Ulinskytė-Balzienė, Šiauliai 2009, pp. 45–52.

³⁹ Register of various taxes, 1650, NHAB, fond 694, inventory 2, ref. no. 9527, fol. 59; Register of various taxes, 1650–1652, *ibidem*, fols. 68v, 69v, 70, 72.

(from the Voverkis and Pakulpė commune), Jerzy Juchniewich (from the Ramulėnai and Šilėnai commune), and Ignacy Krzczonowicz (from the Švedė and Vinkšnėnai commune). Mayor Kaspar Janowich (from the Pakruojė and Paobelė commune), 'being illiterate', did not sign; instead, Stanisław Mickiewich signed on his behalf, placing his 'own hand' on the document⁴⁰. Another mayor, Bartłomiej Wylejka, whose identification is complicated (it is presumed he was from the Šiladis and Pašiladis commune), also 'being illiterate', asked Kazimierz Domeika to sign for him⁴¹.

In the Žagarė tract, all village mayors signed the registers, along with the mayor of the town of Žagarė, Wojciech Bużyński. The village mayors were: Jan Wysocki from the Skaistgiris and Tyrelis commune, and Walenty Rybszewich from the Švėtė and Rotvėnai commune. Instead of Waław Żutowicz, who was ill at the time of compiling the register, his son Jan Żutowicz from Dowiata signed on his behalf⁴². We can assume that both the father and the son were literate. Interestingly, one of the mayors from this tract – Jan Wysocki – signed in Cyrillic script. He might have belonged to the older generation (he had been a mayor since at least 1638) and learned to write in 'Ruthenian script' not at a Catholic parish school, but from someone who knew the Ruthenian language (perhaps a scribe).

From the Užmūšis rural district, we have two signatures – those of mayors Hrehory Łukaszewich⁴³ and Jan Normanc. We know that Normanc collected taxes between 1636 and 1638⁴⁴, and therefore was regarded by the administration of SE as an educated person.

On April 12, 1691, at the general session held at the Šiauliai manor, attended by mayors, benchers, and 'men of the entire region', the ordinance was signed by: the mayor of the town of Žagarė, Józef Pajsiewich, along with Kazimierz Szlubowski, Kazimierz Jurkiewich, Ignacy Styra, Stefan Łuiewich, Krzysztof Jankowski, Mateusz Możejko, Aleksander Krogulecki, Michał Pauperowich, Jan Medynowich, Tomasz Witowt, Józef Grycewich, Kazimierz Klausewich, Kazimierz Bieniusewich, Stanisław Wisztak, Aleksander Gołka, Michał Pietrowich, and Jerzy Jakszewich⁴⁵. We know that there were a total of 19 village mayors and 4 town mayors in the SE, so it is clear that most of them were present at the meeting and were able to sign their names.

⁴⁰ Register of various taxes, 1650–1652, *ibidem*, fols. 75, 77v, 79v, 83v, 85, 87, 88.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, fol. 81.

⁴² *Ibidem*, fols. 108v, 111, 119, 123.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, fol. 127.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, fol. 115; LNMMB, LERS. XV: Varia2018, fols. 13v, 16, 30, 39v, 48v.

⁴⁵ Inventory of the Šiauliai Economy, 1691, AGAD, AR, dz. XXV, ref. no. 4164, fols. 26–28.

After the death of King Jan III Sobieski in 1696, political rivalry began, not only for the throne but also for control over the royal economies. In 1698, the ciwun (district governor) of Ariogala and standard-bearer of the Duchy of Samogitia, Jan Horbowski Zaranek, seeking the position of administrator of the SE, arrived in Šiauliai to campaign for support from the local community for his candidacy. A letter, titled 'points', was drafted to be sent to Prince Jakub Sobieski in Warsaw⁴⁶. The letter was signed by Kazimierz Fiedorowich, mayor of the Šiauliai tract; Piotr Sawicki (mayor of Šiauliai from 1674–1676, and again now); and, in place of mayor Jan Krzczonowich (mayor of Švètė and Vinkšnėnai from 1673–1682, and again now), Michał Krzczonowicz (with a short Latin note 'suptiltut'). Other signatories included Jan Bogdanowich and Ignacy Styra (the Styra family had previously held mayoral positions in the Lygumai and Užkruoja commune).

From the opposing camp of Zaranka and his supporters, the letter to Prince Jakub Sobieski was signed by the mayors from the Joniškis and Žagarė tracts. These included Walenty Grycewich, Piotr Danielewich, Józef Jodziewich, Józef Pajsewich (both mayors of the Žagarė tract), and Aleksander Gołka⁴⁷.

Separately from the tracts, the following mayors signed: 1) from the Joniškis and Žagarė tracts: Aleksander Krogulecki, Piotr Danielewich, Józef Grycewich, Kazimierz Janiewich, Walenty Grycewich, Paweł Zajniewich, Marek Staniewich, Józef Jodziewich, Józef Pajsewich; 2) from the Šiauliai and Užmūšis tracts: Jan Maliński, Michał Pietrowich (?), Alexander Mickiewich, Jan Ginejc, Kazimierz Fiedorowich, Krzysztof Jankowski, Michał Gościewich, Jerzy Jakszewich, Filip Bogdanowich, Jocius (?) Welikowich⁴⁸. Thus, a total of 19 mayors signed, and if we include those mentioned earlier, the number is even higher.

It should be emphasized that at this time, due to unrest among the subordinates of the SE, a number of mayors were changed, leading to many new names appearing. Often, these were members of new families who had not previously belonged to the ruling elite. For example, Józef Jodziewich was still a 'townsman of Žagarė' and a court servant in 1692, who was beaten by Kazimierz Kancz for 'complaining about the poultry at the court'⁴⁹. Marek Staniewich can be identified as Mal-

⁴⁶ June 19, 1698, Šiauliai. K. Zaranka's written 'points' from the SE, NHAB, fond 694, inventory 2, ref. no. 9527, fols. 289–292.

⁴⁷ A letter from subordinates of the SE to the Prince, 1698, *ibidem*, fols. 315–315v.

⁴⁸ A letter from subordinates of the SE to the Prince, 1698, NHAB, fond 694, inventory 2, ref. no. 9528, fols. 112–112v.

⁴⁹ *Žagarės*, pp. 146–147, no. 40.

cher Staniewich from Žagarė, who was beaten with an axe by Stefan Piotrowski in 1691 and confirmed a land sale agreement in 1695⁵⁰. Since 1691, the mayors included Józef Pajsiewich (the town mayor of Žagarė), Aleksander Gołka (from the commune of Vilkija and Geruva), as well as Krzysztof Jankowski, Józef Grycewich, and Jerzy Jakszewich⁵¹. Aleksander Krogulecki was the mayor of Platonis and Kivė even earlier, serving from 1676 to 1680 and again from 1691.

It should be noted that there was some doubt in the academic literature for a time regarding whether a signature indicated a person's level of literacy. Mark Hailwood argues that 'the signatures and marks /.../ represented the best evidence of literate skills available for preindustrial societies'⁵². He noted how signatures were made. In his view, children learned to read and write at the same time in schools. One of the first writing skills was the ability to sign at least their initials. Full signatures, including first and last names, indicate much better writing skills. Hailwood identified 'four broader skill categories: the tendency to sign a name in full; to produce a single or double letter; to draw a mark that was a recognizable symbol; or to make a mark consisting of one or two neat strokes, which were more or less equally widespread'⁵³. By examining the examples of signatures from the Šiauliai economy's mayors, it can be stated that they all wielded the pen with confidence, indicating that they were likely skilled in both reading and writing.

EDUCATION OF MAYORS

As mentioned, many mayors (as well as townspeople) of the SE were literate. It is probable that at least some of them attended classes at the local parish schools. Since there were no established criteria for teacher training, it sometimes happened that those who barely knew how to read worked as teachers, and there were also lower-ranking clergy involved. In these schools, children of both genders from all social estates could study (on the other hand, higher social estates often provided elementary education at home). The curriculum depended on the church's patron

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 140, no. 29; p. 284, no. 249.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 131, no. 9; p. 137, no. 25; p. 140, no. 30; p. 156, no. 48; Inventory of the Šiauliai Economy, 1691, AGAD, AR, dz. XXV, ref. no. 4164, p. 27; *Žagarės*, vol. 2, p. 131, no. 9; pp. 143–145, no. 37.

⁵² M. Hailwood, *Rethinking of Literacy in rural England, 1550–1700, "Past and Present"* 2023, 260, 1, pp. 39, 41.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 57, 62.

and the parish priest, but the preparation of the teachers working there was of greater significance. Generally, elementary schools taught the basics of religion, reading, and not always writing, even less frequently arithmetic, and sometimes even subjects from trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic), which also included Latin⁵⁴. In the instructions from the Samogitian Synod in 1639 regarding the visitation of parishes, it was stated, among other things, that it is necessary to ask whether children are being taught grammar and other liberal arts, as well as music, in addition to the catechism⁵⁵. It is evident that higher educational standards were not always upheld.

We know relatively little about schools in the SE. As is known, parish schools did not operate at all churches⁵⁶, and were often forced to close due to various circumstances. In a report from 1646 by the Bishop of Samogitia, Jerzy Tyszkiewicz, it is stated that 'almost all parishes near churches have separate schools, whose rectors or appointed bachelors teach children the catechism, the Ten Commandments, all duties of Christian devotion, as well as grammar, music, and other subjects to develop the children's talents, and receive regular salaries from their parishes'⁵⁷.

In the SE, the earliest parish school was established in the 16th century in Joniškis, and later, from 1600, it was mentioned in Žagarė, but it was abandoned after 21 years. In 1623, efforts were made to maintain a bachelor's position. Later, in 1643–1644, it was indicated that children should be taught by a bachelor who had received a good education⁵⁸. In 1619, a plot of land was designated for the school in Radviliškis⁵⁹. During a church visitation in Šiauliai in 1621, the bachelor Wacław Biezanowski was described as 'young and sufficiently educated, suitable for the position and for training youth'. In 1643, there were 20 children attending school. By 1676, the school was operating 'in the house of a foreigner' (*in domo aliena*). The visitation report stated that a young man was teaching there,

⁵⁴ I. Lukšaitė, *Pradinių mokyklų tinklo susidarymas*, in: *Lietuvos mokyklos ir pedagoginės minties istorijos bruožai*, ed. M. Karčiauskienė et al., Vilnius 1983, pp. 24–26; M. Lukšienė, *Lietuvos švietimo istorinės*, pp. 361–362.

⁵⁵ *Collectanea constitutionum synodaliū dioecesis Samogitiensis*, Vilnae, 1690, p. 98.

⁵⁶ V. Kamuntavičienė, *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 122. According to the author, in 1647 there were about 100 parish churches in the Diocese of Samogitia, while in 1664 there were only about 60. From 1675 to 1677, there were 67 parish schools operating in the area.

⁵⁷ *Relationis status dioecesium in Magno Ducatu Lithuaniae*, vol. 1, *Dioecesis Vilnensis et Samogitiae*, ed. P. Rabikauskas, Romae 1971 (*Fontes Historiae Lituaniae*, 1), p. 282; I. Lukšaitė, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵⁸ *Žemaičių vyskupijos vizitacija 1675–1677 m.*, ed. M. Paknys, Vilnius 2011 (*Fontes Historiae Lituaniae*, 10), p. 453.

⁵⁹ I. Lukšaitė, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31; V. Kamuntavičienė, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

but it was also noted that the classes were held together for boys and girls, whom the bachelor was teaching to read⁶⁰. In 1643–1644, there was also a parish school in Gruzdžiai (with broken windows), where the teacher was the organist⁶¹. In 1676, the visitor mentioned that in Joniškis, there was a school located behind the cemetery next to the parsonage⁶².

As we can see, parish schools in the Šiauliai region operated at various times in Joniškis, Šiauliai, Žagarė, Gruzdžiai, and Radviliškis. The scarce information does not allow us to draw conclusions about the level of education or who studied there. We can only speculate that at least some of the mayors may have received their education in these schools.

MANOR AND CHURCH. TENDENCIES OF CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS OF MAYORS

The cultural influence of the manor and noble culture can be demonstrated through the example of the Kriksztanaitis mayors, who, in the second half of the 17th century, changed their surname to Chrzczonowich or Krzczonowich. This form of the surname first appears in documents from 1646, although as late as 1657, the SE inventory mentions Ignotas Kriksztanaitis⁶³. The name change (Polonization) may have been related to a desire to identify with the families of petty nobility who lived in Samogitia and were listed in the 16th-century GDL records, and by the second half of the 17th century, even in the Šiauliai district. The family name means a person who has been baptized – ‘baptized’⁶⁴. In Lithuanian, ‘Kriksztanaitis’ means the same. Similarly, the mayor of Dubisėnai and Verduliai commune, Piotr Romanowich (who held office from 1667 to 1676), also Polonized his surname. His father, who served as a mayor in 1657, was known as Jan Roman. Interestingly, Petras married Magdalena, who came from the Krzczonowicz family⁶⁵.

Religious and cultural intentions (church patronage) can be traced through generous donations to local churches. In the Šiauliai church, altars for the Brotherhood of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary were founded. In 1649,

⁶⁰ *Žemaičių vyskupijos vizitacijų aktai (1611–1651 m.)*, ed. L. Jovaiša, Vilnius 2011 (*Fontes Historiae Lituaniae*, 11), pp. 116, 242, 479.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

⁶² *Žemaičių vyskupijos vizitacija 1675*, p. 505.

⁶³ LVIA, fond 11, inventory 2, ref. no. 175, fol. 70v.

⁶⁴ G. Błaszczuk, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 366–371.

⁶⁵ R.R. Trimonienė, *Vietos*, p. 257.

Grzegorz Ginejc donated 1,200 złoty to the Rosary Brotherhood. In 1652, in his will, he bequeathed part of his property (money, a volok of land where the folwark stands, and a village with 3 voloks of land) to the altar of the Brotherhood of Our Lady and requested to be buried there⁶⁶.

The family of mayor Piotr Mickiewicz donated a gilded chalice with a paten to the Rosary Brotherhood⁶⁷. In 1676, 'the renowned Karol Ginejc, mayor of Šiladis and Pašiladis, personally appearing at the current visitation as the executor of his uncle's will', returned the accounts of pious legacies for the altar of the Brotherhood of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, amounting to 800 florins⁶⁸. Ignacy Chrzczonowich / Krzczonowich funded an altar in the church dedicated to St. Ignatius, next to the altar of St. Anne⁶⁹. Mikołaj Styra donated four tin candlesticks⁷⁰.

In 1676, Andrzej Kazimierz Krzykowski donated a plot of land for the construction of a church in Meškuičiai⁷¹. Ławryn Baniewicz donated two silk sashes, embroidered with gold thread at the ends, to the church in Joniškis⁷². Piotr Gołka gave a small panel for the main altar to the church in Žagarė⁷³.

CONCLUSION

In the 17th century, there were around 22 mayors (Pol. *wójt*) in the Šiauliai economy at one time. Most of them came from peasants, while some were of urban or noble origin. The village chiefs belonged to the local elite of the economic community and were often wealthy and influential.

In summary, it can be said that the ability to read and write allowed mayors to actively participate in legal matters (which was their duty according to the manor law), collect and determine taxes, represent the interests of the subordinates of the Grand Duke of Lithuania in disputes and conflicts with the administration, with the economy's tenants,

⁶⁶ VUB RS, f. 7, ŽPTAK 14, 1652–53, 15/14467, no. 97, fols. 268–270; no. 99, fols. 275–276.

⁶⁷ R.R. Trimonienė, *Petro*, p. 49; *Žemaičių vyskupijos vizitacija 1675*, p. 484.

⁶⁸ *Žemaičių vyskupijos vizitacija 1675*, p. 491.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 472.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 484.

⁷¹ L. Jovaiša, *Meškuičių šv. vyskupo Stanislovo bažnyčios istorija*, in: *Lietuvos sakralinė dailė*, vol. 2, *Šiaulių vyskupija*, part 2, *Šiaulių dekanatas*, book 3, *Kužiai–Pavėkiai*, ed. S. Smilingytė-Žeimienė, D. Vasiliūnienė, Vilnius 2022, p. 81.

⁷² *Žemaičių vyskupijos vizitacija 1675*, p. 507.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 442.

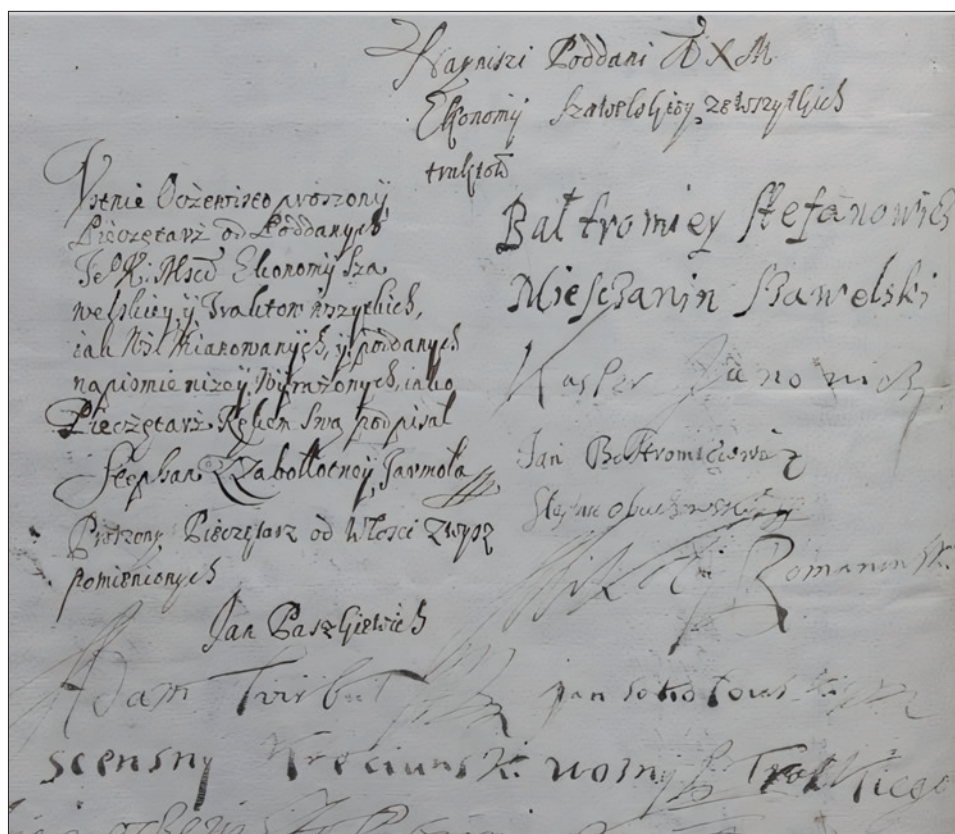


Fig. 2. Signatures. 1652, Letter to Marshal Duke A.L. Radziwiłł, NHAB, fond 694, inventory 2, ref. no. 9527, fol. 56v.

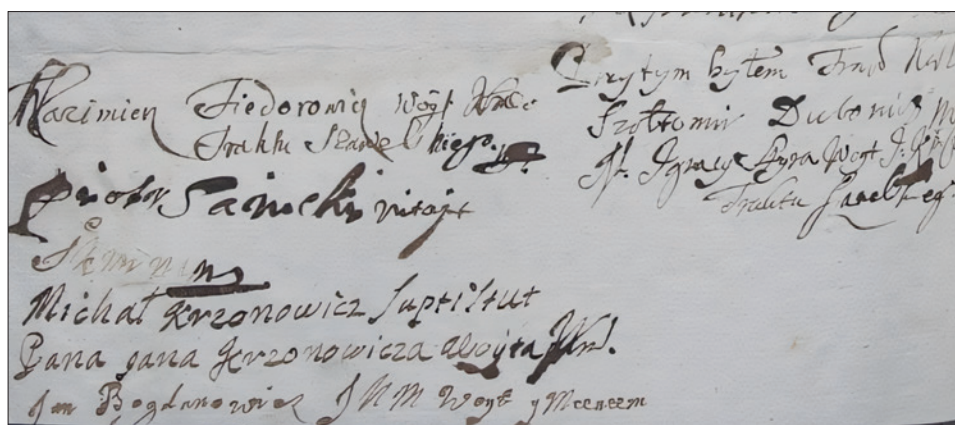


Fig. 3. Signatures. 1698, Letters from the Subordinates of the SE to the Prince, NHAB, fond 694, inventory 2, ref. no. 9527, fol. 291v.

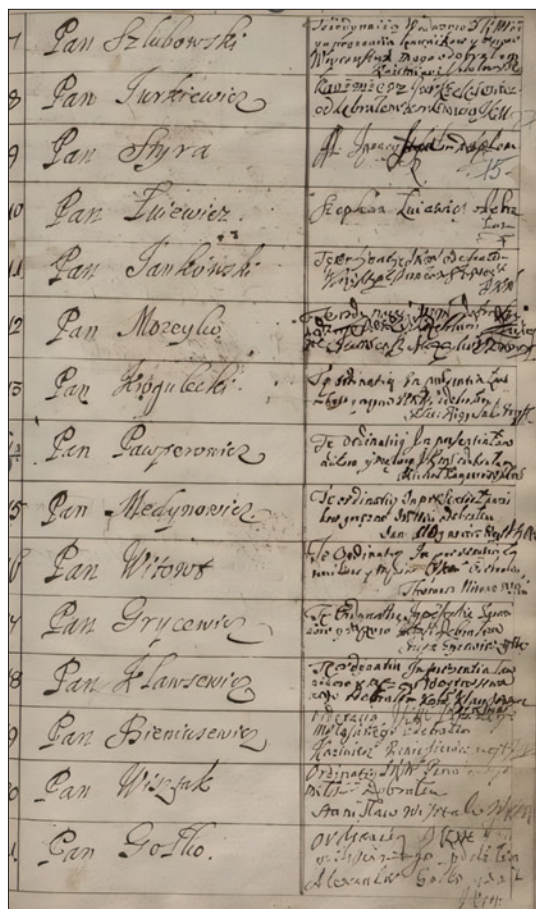


Fig. 4. Signatures. 1691, Ordinance, AGAD, AR, dz. XXV, ref. no. 4163, fol. 27.

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