
THE SOURCES ON THE EARLY MODERN LIVONIA IN THE POLISH CROWN CHANCERY BOOKS. THE FIRST YEARS OF SIGISMUND III VASA'S REIGN

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The Polish Crown Chancery, together with the Chancery of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, were responsible for the administration of Livonia from the second half of the 16th century to the capture of Riga in 1621 by Swedes. After that date only a small part of Livonia remained in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. There are hundreds of documents concerning Livonia which were registered in the Polish Crown Chancery Books (Crown Metrica). In the short period of 1587–1591 about 10% of all the registered documents relate to Livonia. This newly acquired province was a place of many quarrels and fights. The officers from Poland and Lithuania had to organize administration and conciliate old nobility and burghers. Moreover, religious differences did not make this task easier since Polish kings tried to renovate structures of the Roman Catholic Church in Livonia.

Key words: archives, administration, Livonia.

In the recent years a rapidly growing interest has arisen in the archives and history of the Polish Crown Chancery. This very institution was responsible for the administration of huge provinces of the Polish Kingdom: large parts of modern Poland and Ukraine. Moreover, in cooperation with the Lithuanian Chancery the Crown Chancery had an obligation to govern the territory of present-day Latvia, in the early modern period known under the name of Livonia.

Unfortunately, articles and books describing the history of the Polish central government institutions are mostly written by Poles in Polish. Therefore, there is almost no exchange of opinions among historians from other countries, who could exploit the afore-mentioned rich sources in the Polish Crown Chancery Books (Pol. *Metryka Koronna*), kept in the Main Archives of the Old Acts (Pol. *Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych*) in Warsaw. We can name here classical works

of Patricia Kennedy Grimsted as a fine English introduction to the problems of both Polish and Lithuanian chanceries.¹

The structure of the Crown Chancery was rather complicated due to its division into two sub-chanceries with the same function and status. Already in the 14th century there were two offices of the chancellor and vice-chancellor and in the 15th century the division into the Major Crown Chancery under the Crown Chancellor and the Minor Crown Chancery under the Crown Vice-chancellor took place. Consequently, since the beginning of the 16th century the records of the chanceries were kept separately in two Metricas, i.e. of the Major and Minor Crown Chancery respectively.

Already in the 19th century (also under the Russian occupation), Polish historians launched projects with the aim to present the above-mentioned rich sources of the Crown Metrica to the general public. The method and outcome of those projects differed from the publications of the historians working on the Lithuanian Metrica (i.e. books of the Lithuanian Chancery, which was responsible for the affairs of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania). Even today, we can see major dissimilarities in the approach to the publication of the Crown and Lithuanian Chancery Books. The documents from the Crown Metrica are generally presented in the form of short abstracts, while those from Lithuanian Metrica are published in full form.

The first project on the Crown Chancery Books, launched by Teodor Wierzbowski before World War I, was called *Matricularum Regni Poloniae Summaria* (MRPS). The abstracts were prepared in Latin and initially the Wierzbowski's team succeeded in publishing many thousands of abstracts. Alas, after the initial progress, this work was abruptly halted after World War I. The introduction of the communist rule after World War II did not help in renovation of this fine idea. At present we have six big volumes of MRPS covering the period from 1447 to 1574, published between 1905–1999, with thousands of abstracts in Latin at our disposal. The MRPS can also be found on the Internet.

In the 1990s a group of historians from Kraków and Warszawa decided to start a new project on the Polish Crown Chancery Books. The main difference between the new undertaking and the old MRPS series is the language of abstracts; they are in Polish, which ought to satisfy both professional historians and laymen. The project is called *Sumariusz Metryki Koronnej* (SMK – *Summarisation of the Crown Chancery Books*). From 2001 to 2012 we have succeeded in publishing five volumes from the reign of King Sigismund III Vasa (1587–1632), mainly from the first years of his rule in Poland and Lithuania.² Since 2009 Professor Krzysztof Chłapowski, affiliated to the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, is its Editor-in-Chief.

Let us, though, come back to the main theme, specifically, how the problems of Livonia are represented in the Chancery books dating from 1587–1591. This very period is seen as a crucial one in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzecz Pospolita*). Professor Kazimierz Lepszy stated that: *The interregnum of the year 1587, first years of the King Sigismund [III] Vasa's government and the Inquisitionary Diet are justly seen by our historiography as the breaking point in the history of Poland.*³

There were also big changes in the staff of the chancery, namely the supporters of the once powerful Chancellor Jan Zamoyski were pushed out of the office and substituted by clerks devoted to the new king. The final stage of this process was the nomination of Bishop Jan Tarnowski to the Vice-chancellorship in January 1591.

Three years ago, in the year 2009, Krzysztof Chłapowski published the fifth volume of the new summarization, covering the year 1591, which allows to check how the Crown Chancery worked on different topics. We have to remember that the documents concerning Livonia were registered in both Metricas (Crown and Lithuanian). Thus, the noblemen from Poland could choose Crown books and those from Lithuania the Lithuanian chancery registers.

In the period between 1587–1591 the Crown Chancery clerks registered 2235 documents in the four books of the Crown Metrica. In this group as many as 224 are related to Livonia, which makes 10% of the whole sample. The percentage is different when we take single books into consideration. In the book MK 133, from the period 1587–1591, just 12% of the documents bear some relation to Livonia. The afore-mentioned book of Metrica belonged to the chancery of the Chancellor Jan Zamoyski, who established many different ties with the said province. He himself and many of his officers and clients received some land donations and offices in Livonia.

In the book MK 134 of Vice-chancellor Wojciech Baranowski the percentage of the Livonian-related documents is much lower – on the average of 6 per cent. But already in the next book of this Vice-chancellor, i.e. MK 135 we can see a much higher rate of the Livonian documents, which constitute a group of 12 per cent. We can also find a simple explanation for this phenomenon: in the late summer and autumn of 1591 the king and his chancery stayed in the province of Livonia. Hence the percentage is reasonably high and even minor private cases are registered in the crown books. The next book, MK 136, shows a much lower quota, i.e. only 7% of acts related to Livonia.

The next question worth raising concerns the kinds of documents registered in the Chancery Books. We can state that the acts are only very rarely connected with 'great politics'. A fine representative of such a group is the protest from January 1588 of the Chancellor Jan

Zamoyski against the order of appointment of Polish and Lithuanian officers in control of Livonia which was proposed on the Diet by the Lithuanians.⁴

The greatest part of the documentation concerning Livonia constitute donations of various kinds. The king's grants and private testimonies of the gentry and burghers are dominant in the whole Crown Metrica. Nevertheless, the information in the 'Livonian' documents is quite rich and precise when compared to other acts. The king's secretaries meticulously registered exotic names of the Latvian peasants living in some remote *muiža* (manor). By way of illustration, we can mention here the following names: Pausens, Mulens, Priczens, Hantyns, Reigas, Massuls, Pengurs, Areniorts, Aniets, Kurlens, etc.⁵ After decades of cruel wars the province was so devastated that living people were of much higher value than even the best arable land.

The land donations were founded on two constitutions of the Polish-Lithuanian Diets; one from the year 1598 and the second from 1590. The first one, under the title *Daniny Inflanckie przeszłe* (Old Livonian grants), confirmed all the private privileges up to the end of the reign of Archbishop Wilhelm Hohenzollern, i.e. the year 1561. The privileges, which were issued later, had to be presented during the coming Diet.⁶ And indeed, on the parliamentary meeting in 1590 bills were passed under the title *Rewizya Inflantska* (Revision of Livonia) and *O sumach Inflantskich* (On the Sums of Livonia). The above-mentioned bills stipulated that specially assigned surveyors had to conduct the overall inspection of the lands and present the *scrutinium* during the next meeting of the parliament.⁷ Nevertheless, the constitutions and inspections were not eagerly enforced; this statement may be substantiated by the research into the Diets' proceedings in the years 1587–1632 carried out by Izabela Lewandowska-Marzec.⁸

The recipients of land donations belonged most often to the groups of soldiers or civil officers and their merits had to be described in the registered privileges. For example we can find there a dramatic description of an episode during the riot in Riga under the interregnum after the death of Stefan Batory [the so-called Calendar rebellion (1584–1589). – *Ed.*], the events of which were noted in several acts. Two Polish officers, namely *starosta* of Neuhausen (Valtaiķi) Maciej Leniek and Wojciech Orleski, were in Riga at the time and maintained increased vigilance. They discovered a conspiracy of Riga's burghers, who tried to besiege the fort called *Blokhaus*, located near Riga in Daugavgrīva. Burghers made an agreement with a Scotsman David by name, whose kinsfolk were in the *Blokhaus's* crew. David armed the crew of a big ship and reached the land in the proximity of the *Blokhaus* fortifications. Pretending friendship to the Poles, he tried to conquer the place but failed. Leniek and Orleski

got the ship in reward for their service, and Leniek was granted life tenure of the *starostwo* (district) of Neuhausen in addition. The leaders of the conspiracy were executed on 2 August 1589. Yet, already on 2 September 1589 King Sigismund III restituted the confiscated property to Margaret von Damm and her six small children – a family of the rebellious burgher Hans Brincken. On 14 November the king liberated the widow from all infamy.⁹ The Calendar rebellion in Riga was recently investigated by Anna Ziemlewska, who found many rich historical sources covering the afore-mentioned theme.¹⁰ Comparing her findings with the information from the *Metrica*, we can see that although the descriptions in the Crown Books are rather laconic, they contain many unique data.

The documents most often describe some land donations, e.g. in the year 1589 King Sigismund gave a small landed property in the district of Lennewarden (Lielvārde) and a tavern in the district of Kirchholm (Salaspils) to Stanislaus Ways, a former soldier, who distinguished himself in the Muscovitian and Livonian wars.¹¹ Sometimes we can even find some inscriptions describing insignificant rewards to the commoners. In 1589, the king confirmed a privilege to locksmith Heinrich Drank Skibechele. He received a half *hak* of the land, as a token of gratitude for his deeds. Under the Muscovitian occupation of Wenden (Cēsis) he made extra keys to the city gate. Skibechele handed them over to the troops of Stefan Batory, who regained Wenden, severely afflicted in 1577 by the Ivan IV army.¹² But no troops of the Commonwealth positioned in Livonia contributed to the stability of the region. The evidence is also to be found in the *Metrica* books, e.g. in the document of Jan Leśniowski, who bitterly complained about devastation of the Taurus (Tarvastu) castle by the soldiers garrisoned there.¹³

No wonder that among the acts there is also a group of privileges for the Catholic Church. In November 1589, during his stay in Mitau (Jelgava), King Sigismund III made a confirmation of King Stefan Batory donations. These were foundations of the parochial churches in Ronneburg (Rauna), Smilten (Smiltene), Ruyen (Rūjiena), Kokenhusen (Koknese), Dorpat (Tartu), Wenden (Cēsis).¹⁴ Some of these grants could easily lead to some conflicts with the local Protestant communities, as in Ruyen, where the newly established church was endowed with peasants and lands, which earlier belonged to the Lutheran minister. In the confirmation of the donations for the Jesuit Order in Dorpat, the king stated openly that his aim was to strengthen the Roman Catholic religion in Livonia.¹⁵ In the books of the Crown *Metrica* we can also encounter documents related to the above-mentioned land-survey commission, whose obligation was also to examine the case of unjust appropriation of the church estates.¹⁶

Only rarely do we find a document which should have been registered in the Metricas but owing to some obscure reasons it was not done. Gustav Manteuffel in his description of the Historical Exhibition in Mitau (Jelgava) in 1886 noted a solemn declaration of King Sigismund III Vasa from 18 April 1589, adorned with two big seals; one of the Kingdom of Poland and the other of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.¹⁷ The document was described as *Cautio religionis Frederico duci* and it constituted the confirmation of the rights of the Protestants in Kurland. In the book MK 135 there is no trace of this act; however, under this very date we do find two important privileges concerning Kurland and the ruling House of Kettlers.¹⁸ There is every likelihood that the Crown Chancery, with a dominant group of Catholic secretaries and notaries, was probably not particularly interested in preserving documents supporting the Protestants.

Some of the registered acts bear witness to the conflicts between the officers sent from the Crown Poland and the local noblemen. On 10 March 1588, on the request of Procopius Pieniążek, the *starosta* of Wenden and Ronneburg, the Crown Chancery registered a document, originally issued in the assembly in Wenden on 25 March 1587.¹⁹ In the datation formula the secretary displayed that the date was presented in the new Gregorian calendar, which was introduced in 1582 and observed in the Catholic countries. The above statement was significant owing to the afore-mentioned Calendar riot which troubled Livland and especially the city of Riga in the years 1584–1589. During the assembly of Livonian noblemen, Justine, a widow of Jodocus Fürstenberg, complained that the said Pieniążek did not permit her to use a small manor house Naukschen (Naukšēni). He did it against the will of King Stefan Batory and his commissaries, who sent the above-mentioned case to the king's court. Granted that the court adjudged her appeal, she should have returned the Naukschen manor house without any protest. She could still reap wheat sowed by the Pieniążek's people and store it in the stacks, but was not permitted to thresh it and sell the corn. The province was not remarkably peaceful, even under the reign of King Sigismund III, and the bloody assault of Krzysztof Pieniążek in the Nitaue (Nitaure) castle is the best evidence of the unruly times.²⁰

The process of reclaiming the old property rights by the Livonian noblemen was consequent upon great problems caused by war losses. Many privileges were lost in turmoil. Such was the case of the Blombergs. Heinrich Blomberg defended the castle of Smiltene against the Muscovites and was imprisoned with his wife and children. They lost their property and their privileges were destroyed. Thanks to the testimony of Caspar Młodawski, *starosta* of Smiltene, they managed to regain some of the lands, but not as the fief.²¹ The donation of fiefs constituted a subsequent peculiarity of Livland. According to an old,

medieval custom long forgotten in Western Europe, a nobleman who received the land in this form was obliged to do military service.²²

Sometimes the king confirmed many old privileges of one family in a new document. Such was the case of Johan Behr, the *starosta* of Pilten (Piltene), who got the confirmation of eight documents, or of Thomas ab Embden, the *starosta* of Riga, who asked for approval of eleven acts; in the last case the request was probably connected with the execution of the constitution from the year 1589.²³

Another, relatively small, group of registered documents were the investitures of the offices. Since most offices were newly founded, we often obtain information on remunerations, e.g. Bartholomeus Ostromięcki, the armourer of Livonia in charge of bombards, harquebuses, cannon-balls and powder, earned 300 florins per annum.²⁴

The picture of Livonia in the acts of Metrica does not differ from the view of modern historians. This land was heavily destroyed by the war, and almost in all documents we can find some remarks on the military struggles. Special commissioners, sent by the king or *sejm*, had a profound influence on the administration of the province, who comprised a commissioner general, administrator or governor. Although many efforts were expended to rebuild the province, we can still perceive numerous signs of a conflict between the old Livonian gentry and the newcomers, most often soldiers from Poland and Lithuania.

Of course, there is some inconvenience in limiting the research only to the books of the Crown Metrica. The singular case may be described supplemented with some interesting data, but only rarely will it be substantiated in another document. Such 'mosaic' communication of different, short stories is, however, not unknown to us in the era of the media coverage. We do know that apart from the books there was a special repository in the Crown Metrica, which contained single documents, some of them also referring to Livonia. The inventory of the Major Crown Chancery Metrica from 1627 shows *two black chests with Riga's documents*, another inventory of the Minor Chancery Metrica describes *Revisionis Livonicae liber unus*.²⁵

This article presents just a sample of documents related to Livonia. There are many more in other books of the Crown Metrica and they often remain unknown to the public. Hopefully, the summarization of these important sources will promptly proceed.

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AGRO JAUNO LAIKU LIVONIJAI VELTĪTIE AVOTI POLIJAS KROŅA KANCELEJAS REĢISTROS. Sigismunda III Vāsas pirmie valdīšanas gadi

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Kopsavilkums

Polijas Kroņa kanceleja līdz ar Lietuvas Lielkņazistes kanceleju bija atbildīga par Livonijas pārvaldi laikposmā no 16. gs. 2. puses līdz 1621. gadam, kad Rīgu ieņēma zviedru karaspēks. Polijas-Lietuvas (Žečpospolitais) īpašumā palika tikai neliela Livonijas daļa, t.s. Inflantija. Polijas Kroņa kancelejas grāmatās (Kroņa metrikā) ir reģistrēti vairāki simti ar Livoniju saistītu dokumentu. Neilgajā laikposmā no 1587. gada līdz 1591. gadam reģistrēto dokumentu vidū apmēram 10% attiecas uz Livoniju. Šajā jauniegūtajā provincē norisinājās daudz konfliktu un strīdu. No Polijas un Lietuvas atbraukušajiem ierēdņiem bija jāorganizē provinces administrācija un jāsamierina vietējie patricieši un namnieki. Šo uzdevumu vēl vairāk sarežģīja reliģiskās domstarpības, jo Polijas karaļi centās Livonijā atjaunot Romas katoļu baznīcas struktūras.