



AGATA KWIATEK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5870-6805>

Institute of History,
Jagiellonian University, Cracow

THE ‘USEFUL MAN’ IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH OF THE VASAS — NEW PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN RESEARCH INTO THE CAREERS OF MAŁOPOLSKA NOBLEMEN*

Abstract: In the article I point to the need for conducting research into the political careers of activists from the lesser nobility, whose families were not part of the power elite. In contemporary historiography, lesser nobility activists have only attracted the attention of historians to a limited extent. Yet the development of research and the availability of sources have made it possible to carry out a broader analysis, encompassing activists from the lesser nobility who stood out by virtue of the level of their involvement in the country’s political life.

Keywords: careers of noblemen, Sejm (parliament), sejmik (local assembly), Crown Tribunal, clientelism.

1. Previous tendencies and new directions

In Polish historiography, the development of careers among secular activists from the lesser nobility in the early modern period has been approached in two ways. Firstly, by characterising specific communities

* The present article constitutes the theoretical foundation of research for my doctoral thesis *The ‘Useful Man’ in the Political System of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the Vasas*, carried out at the Doctoral School in the Humanities, Jagiellonian University; as well as the project ‘The political careers of secular activists from Małopolska during the reign of Sigismund III Vasa (1587–1632): strategies and methods’ financed by the National Science Centre (Preludium, no. 2022/45/N/HS3/01395). I would like to sincerely thank Professor Urszula Augustyniak and the other members of the Research Team for the Study of Courts and Elites of Power at the Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw for all their valuable insights and contributions to my research.

functioning within well-defined timeframes. In these cases the most important research has focused on examining, usually by means of the prosopographic method, groups comprising primarily members of the elite defined either sociologically as a power or political elite, or formally as an elite of senators and dignitaries.¹ These publications, to varying degrees, drew upon the achievements of Anglo-Saxon historiography.² Over the past decade, historians have increasingly turned their attention to the political activity of representatives of the lesser nobility, at times referring to them as local elites. Quantitative methods have also been used in analyses of officials or fixed-term functionaries as a group. However, in some more recent publications, prosopography has been gradually replaced by descriptive methods.³ Secondly, the topic has been tackled through the examination of the careers of various activists or their families.⁴

¹ Adam Moniuszko, 'Sędziowie sądów szlacheckich w województwie płockim 1576–1600. Próba rekonesansu badawczego', *Studia z Dziejów Państwa i Prawa Polskiego*, 19, 2016, pp. 39–67 (p. 39). Monographs: Stefan Ciara, *Senatorowie i dygnitarze koronni w drugiej połowie XVII wieku*, Wrocław, 1990; Krzysztof Chłapowski, *Elita senatorsko-dygnitarska Korony za czasów Zygmunta III i Władysława IV Wazy*, Warsaw, 1996; Edward Opaliński, *Elita władzy w województwach poznańskim i kaliskim za Zygmunta III*, Poznań, 1981; Edward Opaliński, *Rodziny wielkosenatorskie w Wielkopolsce, na Kujawach i na Mazowszu za Zygmunta III: Podstawy karier*, Warsaw, 2007; Zofia Zielińska, *Magnateria polska epoki saskiej: Funkcje urzędów i królewsczyzn w procesie przeobrażeń warstwy społecznej*, Wrocław and Warsaw, 1977. A statistical approach is also used in part by Andrzej Korytko, idem, 'Na których opiera się Rzeczpospolita': *Senatorowie koronni za Władysława IV Wazy*, Olsztyn, 2015.

² Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, London, 1929; Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880*, Oxford, 1984; Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Daedalus*, 100, 1971, pp. 46–71; Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1641*, Oxford, 1965.

³ Quantitative methods are used in the following publications: Leopold Buczacki, 'Urzędy powiatowe w Wielkopolsce na przełomie XVI i XVII wieku', *PH*, 74, 1983, 3, pp. 471–93; Jacek Pielas, 'Urzędnicy grodzcy nowokorczyńscy i ich kariery w XVII wieku', in *Dzieje biurokracji*, Radzyń Podlaski and Lublin, 2007–, vol. 4, ed. Artur Górak, Krzysztof Latawiec and Dariusz Magier, 2011, part 1, pp. 137–52; Jacek Pielas, 'Kariery urzędnicze i pozycja społeczno-majątkowa podkomorzych ziemskich w Małopolsce w XVI–XVII wieku na tle porównawczym', *Klio: Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym*, 32, 2015, 1, pp. 31–57; Witold Rodkiewicz, 'Kariery posłów koronnych na sejmy Stefana Batorego', *PH*, 78, 1987, 2, pp. 167–89. The descriptive method is the dominant one in the following articles: Zbigniew Anusik, 'Kariery ulubieńców Zygmunta III: Rola polityki nominacyjnej króla w kreowaniu elity władzy w Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1587–1632', in *Faworyci i opozycjoniści: Król a elity polityczne w Rzeczypospolitej XV–XVIII wieku*, ed. Mariusz Markiewicz and Ryszard Skowron, Cracow, 2006, pp. 215–44; Marian Wolski, 'Drogi i bezdroża średniozamożnej szlachty do stanu magnackiego: Wewnątrzrodzinne uwarunkowania awansu w czasach wczesnonowożytnych', in *Honestas et turpitudō: Magnateria Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku*, ed. Ewa Dubas-Urwanowicz et al., Białystok, 2019, pp. 13–29.

⁴ Monika Jusupović, *Prowincjonalna elita litewska w XVIII wieku: Działalność poli-*

In spite of this, the question of the political advancement of the Polish nobility has not been thoroughly examined. So far the issue that has been discussed in a relatively comprehensive manner is the composition of the elite, which obviously depends upon the availability of sources.⁵ On the other hand, when it comes to activists from the lesser nobility who not hold the most important ministerial offices, there is still plenty of room for further research. Members of the so-called 'local elite' influenced policies in the various palatinates (*województwa*), for example by formulating instructions for parliamentary deputies, while also impacting decisions made at the national level. Thus, as is stressed by Igor Kraszewski, in order to truly understand the political structures of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, we need to expand our knowledge of fixed-term functionaries.⁶

According to Adam Szweda, during the Middle Ages, individual careers and the advancement of entire families primarily relied on the ruler, who received various services in return. Szweda notes, 'It was the monarch's favour that was the main factor enabling individuals from outside the existing elite, even in the broadest sense, to gain prominence'.⁷ In the early modern *monarchia mixta*, where representative institutions played a significant role, the king was joined by the nobility participating in the sejmiks (local assemblies), which had a decisive influence on various aspects, including the election of marshals presiding over the assemblies; the election of members of successive parliaments;

tyczna rodziny Zabiellów w latach 1733-1795, Warsaw, 2014; Irena Kaniewska, 'Mikołaj Trzebuchowski zaufany doradca króla Zygmunta Augusta (droga kariery)', in *Faworyci i opozycjoniści*, pp. 101-17; Karol Łopatecki, 'Kariera siedemnastowiecznego ewangelickiego szlachcica Jana Kunowskiego', *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce*, 62, 2018, pp. 47-89; Jan Siedlecki, 'Mikołaj Skaszewski i Krzysztof Żelski — posłowie szlachty ziemi bielskiej na sejmy Rzeczypospolitej', *Studia Podlaskie*, 1991, 3, pp. 27-40; Jan Siedlecki, 'Kariera Prokopa Leśniowolskiego, starosty brańskiego (ok. 1590-1653)', in *Drobna szlachta podlaska w XVI-XIX w.: Materiały sympozjum w Hołnach Mejera (26-27 maja 1989 roku)*, ed. Stefan K. Kuczyński, Białystok, 1991, pp. 127-39; Sobiesław Szybkowski, 'Kariera Jakuba z Glinek: Przyczynek do badań nad elitą szlachecką czasów Jana Olbrachta i Aleksandra Jagiellończyka', in *Tractu temporis: Ludzie — regiony — fakty: Księga dedykowana dr hab. prof. UŁ Tadeuszowi Nowakowi*, ed. Tomasz Grabarczyk and Anna Kowalska-Pietrzak, Łódź, 2018, pp. 211-28.

⁵ See n. 1.

⁶ Igor Kraszewski, 'Deputaci do Trybunału Koronnego w latach 1626-1646: Przyczynek prozopograficzny', in *Trzeba dyscypliny — bez niej nie da się pasji składać wyrazić...: Studia z dziejów nowożytnych (XVI-XVIII w.)*, ed. Maciej Forycki, Adam Perłakowski and Filip Wolański, Poznań, 2012, pp. 229-71 (p. 231).

⁷ Adam Szweda, 'Służba w dyplomacji drogą do awansu społecznego?', in *Człowiek w średniowieczu: Między biologią a historią*, ed. Alicja Szymczakowa, Łódź, 2009, pp. 169-78 (p. 169).

and of deputies to the Crown Tribunal, the main court of appeal in Poland after 1579. Nearly half a century ago, Józef Leszczyński emphasised the positive role of sejmiks in the education of future active parliamentary deputies, who set the tone for parliamentary debates.⁸ During the debates, marshals played a special role, not only presiding over them but also ensuring that final resolutions would be written down.⁹ According to Władysław Czapliński, the existence of an egalitarian chamber of deputies was conducive to the emergence of a distinct type of parliamentary activist — an eloquent nobleman who could quickly respond to opponents' remarks and command respect.¹⁰ On the other hand, from Wojciech Sokołowski's perspective, the judicial sphere (including court sessions, tribunal sessions and election of tribunal deputies) constituted the third 'political theatre' of the Commonwealth, together with the Sejm (parliament) and sejmiks.¹¹

In view of these considerations, I believe that the most appropriate research approach today is to investigate noble activity in these three public forums: the Sejm, the sejmiks and the Crown Tribunal, and analyse their role in the development of noblemen's careers.¹² What deserves particular attention, in my opinion, is the activity of the Małopolska nobility. They stood out not only due to their status within the Commonwealth's political system, in which the sejmiks of the Cracow and Sandomierz palatinates held at Proszowice and Opatów respectively were termed 'higher', with their deliberations and decisions being accorded particular weight at the Sejm, but also because of their extensive involvement in the public life of the Commonwealth. This participation was evident at both the local level (sejmiks, regional courts) and national level (the Sejm and the Crown Tribunal). Their engagement extended to legally convened assemblies as well as actions against the king during events like the Sandomierz Rebellion

⁸ Józef Leszczyński, 'Siedemnastowieczne sejmiki a kultura polityczna szlachty', in *Dzieje kultury politycznej w Polsce*, ed. Józef Andrzej Gierowski, Warsaw, 1977, pp. 51–68 (p. 64).

⁹ Korytko, 'Na których opiera się Rzeczpospolita', p. 321.

¹⁰ Władysław Czapliński, 'Rola sejmów XVII wieku w kształtowaniu się kultury politycznej w Polsce', in *Dzieje kultury politycznej w Polsce*, pp. 42–50 (p. 48).

¹¹ Wojciech Sokołowski, *Politycy schyłku złotego wieku: Małopolscy przywódcy szlachty i parlamentarzyści w latach 1574–1605*, Warsaw, 1997, p. 38. It should be emphasised that the Crown Tribunal has been overlooked in previous research due to a lack of sources and literature.

¹² In the case of the Crown Tribunal we have primarily Igor Kraszewski's brief paper, which is only an introduction to further research (see footnote 6) and a fragment of one of the chapters of Sokołowski, *Politycy schyłku*, pp. 50–56.

1606–07 and Lubomirski's Rebellion 1665–66.¹³ The chronological scope of the study is defined by the dates of Sigismund III's election and John Casimir's abdication Sejm (1668). The rule of the Vasa dynasty is a key period in the history of Polish parliamentarism, when the political system became consolidated and, at the same time, continued to evolve. During this time illegal assemblies began to be convened without the monarch's consent, military confederations and rebellions took place, and the *liberum veto* principle was accepted in practice — all of which contributed to a change in the nobility's political attitudes.¹⁴

Research into the careers of representatives of the Małopolska nobility is facilitated by the availability of sources as well as a growing body of secondary literature. A few years ago, a group of historians published lists of deputies to the Crown Tribunal, making it possible to carry out an analysis of the judiciary.¹⁵ Additionally, critical editions of sejmik records from Proszowice, Zator and — a recent addition — Lublin for the entire period in question are at our disposal.¹⁶ Moreover, the Pawiński and the Ulanowski Files, held in the Libraries of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Kraków, include copies of some of the Sandomierz sejmik records;¹⁷ others can be found in other archives and libraries with the help of a list of assemblies compiled by Zofia Trawicka.¹⁸ Using sejmik records, we can partially reconstruct the composition of the parliamentary delegations from the various palatinates as well as the Duchies of Oświęcim and Zator, and to establish the names of the sejmik marshals. Documents that have survived to this day include land and castle court (*gród*) registers from the

¹³ Marcin Sokalski, *Między królewskim majestatem a szlachecką wolnością: Postawy polityczne szlachty małopolskiej w czasach Michała Korybuta Wiśniowieckiego*, Cracow, 2002, p. 6; Sokołowski, *Politycy schyłku*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Edward Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna szlachty polskiej w latach 1587–1652: System parlamentarny a społeczeństwo obywatelskie*, Warsaw, 1995, p. 16.

¹⁵ *Deputaci Trybunału Koronnego, 1578–1794: Spis*, 3 parts, Warsaw and Lublin, 2017 (hereafter *Deputaci*), part 1: 1578–1620, ed. Henryk Gmiterek; part 2: 1621–1660, ed. Dariusz Kupisz; part 3: 1661–1700, ed. Leszek A. Wierzbicki.

¹⁶ ASWK, vol. 1: 1572–1620, ed. Stanisław Kutrzeba, Cracow, 1932; vol. 2: 1621–1660, ed. Adam Przyboś, Cracow, 1953; vol. 3: 1661–1673, ed. Adam Przyboś, Wrocław, 1959; *Akta sejmikowe województwa lubelskiego 1572–1632*, ed. Henryk Gmiterek, Lublin, 2016; *Akta sejmikowe województwa lubelskiego 1633–1668*, ed. Henryk Gmiterek, Lublin and Radom, 2021.

¹⁷ *Akta sejmikowe województwa sandomierskiego 1574–1699*, BPAU-PANKr, Teki Pawińskiego, 8338; *Lauda sandomierskie z lat 1655–1704*, BPAU-PANKr, Teki Ulanowskiego, 8594.

¹⁸ Zofia Trawicka, *Sejmik województwa sandomierskiego w latach 1572–1696*, Kielce, 1985, pp. 259–69. As most castle court registers from the Sandomierz palatinate have been destroyed, we cannot use the original records entered in them.

the Kraków palatinate, Lublin District, parts of registers from the Duchies of Oświęcim and Zator, as well as the Pilzno District and the Sandomierz palatinate — records that constitute an important source for the study of the genealogy and wealth of noble families.¹⁹ In addition, the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, the National Archives in Kraków and the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków hold tax collection registers, mainly from the Kraków palatinate, which also include data on the financial standing of representatives of the nobility.²⁰

In traditional historiography, the activity of the Małopolska nobility has been presented mainly in the context of sejmiks. Several studies have been published, delving into the inner workings of the Opatów and Lublin sejmiks and more recently, similar research has emerged focusing on the Proszowice sejmik.²¹ Additionally, numerous shorter publications have surfaced, with their authors focusing on various aspects of sejmik activities in the above-mentioned palatinates and detailing the composition of groups among envoys to the Sejm.²² Taking a broader approach, Wojciech Sokołowski and Marcin Sokalski have explored issues related to the attitudes and positions of Małopolska envoys during the periods of 1574–1605 and 1669–74.²³ Finally, articles published in various journals and in the Polish Biographical Dictionary contain shorter or longer biographical notes on noble activists. Therefore, even though comprehensive research on politically active nobles from Małopolska has not been conducted, the

¹⁹ Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (hereafter ANK), Księgi ziemskie krakowskie, 1; Księgi ziemskie zatorskie, 2; Księgi ziemskie pilzneńskie, 3; Księgi grodzkie bieckie, 4; Księgi grodzkie krakowskie, 5; Księgi grodzkie oświęcimskie, 5; Księgi grodzkie sądeckie, 7; Księgi grodzkie pilzneńskie, 8; AP Lublin, Księgi ziemskie lubelskie, 1; Księgi grodzkie lubelskie, 8.

²⁰ AGAD, Archiwum Skarbu Koronnego, IV, 31, 47, 48, 60, 109, 115; ANK, Rejestry poborowe województwa krakowskiego, 1, 2; BJ, 186. Andrzej Wyczański, who analysed the composition of the synods of various denominations from 1560–70, has come up with a classification of members of the nobility on the basis of tax collection data; Andrzej Wyczański, 'Szlachta krakowska — uczestnicy synodów różnowierczych 1560–1570', *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej*, 47, 2002, pp. 305–10.

²¹ Trawicka, *Sejmik województwa*, pass.; Magdalena Ujma, *Sejmik lubelski 1572–1696*, Warsaw, 2002; Rafał Kobylec, 'Sejmik województwa krakowskiego w latach 1572–1648', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, 2022.

²² Grzegorz Gębka, 'Reprezentacja sejmowa województwa lubelskiego za panowania Jana Kazimierza Wazy', *Res Historica*, 17, 2004, pp. 39–53; Kazimierz Przyboś and Adam Walaszek, 'Reprezentacja sejmowa województwa krakowskiego w XVII wieku', *SH*, 20, 1977, 3, pp. 377–402; Agnieszka Sidorowska, 'Lubelska reprezentacja sejmowa za panowania Władysława IV: Próba analizy pochodzenia społecznego i karier', *Res Historica*, 7, 1999, pp. 35–51; Waclaw Urban, 'Skład społeczny i ideologia sejmiku krakowskiego w latach 1572–1606', *PH*, 44, 1953, 3, pp. 309–33.

²³ Sokołowski, *Politycy schyłku*, pass.; Sokalski, *Między królewskim majestatem*, pass.

availability of sources and the current state of historiography encourage optimism regarding the potential realisation of the proposal presented in this article.

2. The activism criterion

Urszula Augustyniak proposes the introduction of an activism criterion in accounts of the elites of the early modern Commonwealth. She observes that the reality of day-to-day involvement in public life is difficult to measure, and has therefore been omitted from studies of noblemen's careers in favour of measurable factors.²⁴ Nevertheless, Edward Opaliński typologises the political culture of the nobility down to the mid-seventeenth century as participatory, characterised by an acceptance of the political system, within the framework of existing structures, as well as the ability to formulate personal demands.²⁵ Opaliński stresses that 'the nobility believed that advancement should be a reward for contributions to public life'.²⁶ Elsewhere he adds, 'The political system of the Commonwealth, at least until a certain moment,²⁷ preferred a model of a political career based on public activity in sejmiks and the Sejm. If we examine the most brilliant political careers in they are largely the careers of active parliamentarians'.²⁸ The biographies of various activists, including Catholics, Protestants and the Orthodox, as well as regalists and oppositionists; who pursued their careers during the reign of Sigismund III and of his sons, both from Małopolska and across the entire Kingdom, have led me to apply the indicator in question to those nobles who, despite not coming from families belonging to the central power elite of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,²⁹ built their

²⁴ Urszula Augustyniak, 'Elita władzy — elita wpływów — elita uznania: Rywalizacja w kręgu elit politycznych jako czynnik zmiany systemu rządów i modernizacji struktur władzy w Rzeczypospolitej czasów Wazów', in *Spółeczeństwo a elity*, ed. Iwona M. Dacka-Górzyńska and Andrzej Karpiński, Warsaw, 2018 (Spółeczeństwo Staropolskie. Seria nowa, 5), pp. 87–116 (p. 100).

²⁵ Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna*, pp. 7, 294–96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁷ Opaliński does not specify from which point the model of noblemen's careers in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth began to be based on activity in the Sejm and sejmiks. I presume that this stems from his research interests, which focus on noble careers during the Vasa period, when the phenomenon in question became more noticeable: Opaliński, *Rodziny wielkosenatorskie*, p. 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁹ Aware of the many difficulties associated with the classification of members of the nobility, I am inclined to adopt the definition of the elite formulated by Karol Żojdź. He has suggested that the group should include individuals who held prominent positions on the central level (ministers and leading dignitaries) as well as governors,

careers through involvement in public life.³⁰ However, stressing the activism criterion calls for further research into the political advancement of selected noble activists — marshals of the sejmiks, parliamentary envoys as well as tribunal deputies — elected to hold public office a specific number of times. All three cases shared a common characteristic: the method by which individuals were designated for these positions through election. Election reflected the candidate's popularity and usefulness, not only for the local nobility but also for members of the elite, including the monarch himself. They were all interested in recruiting individuals to these institutions who favoured limited cooperation, taking various forms but which did not lead to a complete marginalisation of the political independence of representatives of the nobility.

The concept of an 'activist' was prevalent in traditional historiography, where it was typically applied to noble representatives who had served as Sejm envoys at least four times.³¹ Although this criterion was initially established for noble activists pursuing their political careers during the reign of the last Jagiellons, it was also used by Witold Rodkiewicz, Wojciech Sokołowski and Jan Seredyka for the reigns of Henry de Valois, Stephen Báthory and Sigismund III.³² Opaliński, in his writing about the

castellans and bishops highly placed in the official hierarchy, provided they were involved in political activities on the national scale and took active part in the work of the Sejm and the Senate. Unlike Krzysztof Chłapowski, Żojdź refuses to identify the power elite with the elite of senators and other dignitaries, a position with which I am inclined to agree; Karol Żojdź, *Wszyscy ludzie króla: Zygmunt III Waza i jego stronnicy w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w pierwszych dekadach XVII wieku*, Toruń, 2019, p. 46.

³⁰ For examples of biographical notes of noble activists, see: Stanisław CHRZĄSTOWSKI of Brzeź (d. 1660): Władysław Czaplński, 'Kilka uwag o działalności sejmowej Stanisława z Brzezia Chrząstowskiego', *Reformacja w Polsce*, 12, 1956, pp. 254–60; Marcjjan CHEŁMSKI (d. 1641): Marcin Sokalski, 'Działalność parlamentarna i sejmikowa Marcjana Ścibora Chełmskiego', *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum*, 5, 2021, 1, pp. 71–98; Marcin Michał DĘBICKI (d. 1690): Maciej Matwijów, 'Drogi kariery osobistej Marcina Michała Dębickiego, trybuna szlachty sandomierskiej drugiej połowy XVII wieku', *SH*, 49, 2006, 2, pp. 123–38; Maciej Matwijów, 'Marcin Michał Dębicki (ok. 1610-ok. 1689), trybun szlachecki XVII wieku', *Czasopismo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich*, 16, 2005, pp. 7–95; Jan PISARZOWSKI (d. 1679): Agata Kwiatek, 'Przyczynek do biografii Jana Pisarzowskiego z Pisarzowic, pisarza i sędziego ziemskiego zatorskiego, sześciokrotnego deputata do Trybunału Koronnego', in *Dwory i życie dworskie w nowożytnej Europie (XVI–XVIII w.)*, ed. Patryk Kuc, Cracow, 2020, pp. 95–116; Marcin BRONIEWSKI (d. 1624): Janusz Byliński, *Marcin Broniewski — trybun szlachty wielkopolskiej w czasach Zygmunta III*, Wrocław, 1994; Jan SWOSZOWSKI (d. 1615): Janusz Byliński, 'Jan Swoszowski — wytrawny parlamentarzysta i prawnik z czasów Zygmunta III Wazy', *Sobótka*, 1993, 2–3, pp. 175–88.

³¹ Irena Kaniewska, *Małopolska reprezentacja sejmowa za czasów Zygmunta Augusta*, Cracow, 1974, p. 75.

³² Rodkiewicz, 'Kariery posłów', p. 172; Sokołowski, *Politycy schyłku*, p. 12.

Wielkopolska nobility during the reign of Sigismund III, expanded this category to include those who served as envoys to the Sejm at least five times and several times as sejmik marshals. However, like his colleagues, he did not provide a specific rationale for this distinction.³³ When it comes to Małopolska, it is important to consider that the various sejmiks delegated different numbers of envoys to the Sejm: Proszowice and Opatów each sent six, Lublin three and Zator only one. This discrepancy means that, despite the fact that some envoys owned land in other provinces, not all of them had equal opportunities to advance their careers through election as envoys.

Another challenge emerges when it comes to sejmik marshals. Although the number of completed local assemblies, especially the election sejmiks that met before Sejm sessions, the relational sejmiks that heard reports from envoys after Sejm sessions, and *sejmiki deputackie*, which elected deputies to the Tribunal should have been similar in the various palatinates and districts where sejmiks were held, we encounter certain issues. These difficulties are attributed to the destruction of castle court registers from Sandomierz, which necessitates relying on copies, as well as gaps in the castle court registers from Oświęcim. Consequently, in these cases, it is impossible to compile a relatively comprehensive list of the assemblies that took place and the marshals who presided over them, as can be done based on records from the Proszowice and Lublin sejmiks. Interestingly, when compared to the Sejm and the local assemblies, discussing Tribunal deputies as a group is somewhat easier. In this institution, the number of deputies elected from each area was more similar: the Kraków and Sandomierz palatinates each elected two deputies, while the Lublin palatinate and the Duchies of Oświęcim and Zator each sent one. Despite the fact that most records produced by the Tribunal were destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising, these lists allow us to follow the careers of Tribunal deputies. The functioning of the institution and its significance in the pursuit of political careers by noblemen can be reconstructed from private correspondence. A prime example is the case of Jan Piszczowski, a clerk and then land judge of Zator, who served as a Tribunal deputy six times. His extensive collection of letters, primarily dedicated to Tribunal-related matters, is held by the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków.³⁴ Unfortunately, very few collections of letters from non-elite noblemen have survived, further limiting researches in this regard.

³³ Opaliński, *Elita władzy*, p. 10.

³⁴ BJ, 5816.

It used to be assumed that Polish nobles began their political activity at the age of between twenty-five and thirty.³⁵ According to Piotr Guzowski's latest findings, noblemen of that age could expect to live on average for thirty-four to thirty-nine more years in the eighteenth century.³⁶ However, the period of political activity of the various individuals must have been shorter in most cases. It is therefore necessary to conduct statistical research on the analysed group to establish a conventional and flexible boundary that distinguishes noble activists by the level of their activity. This boundary should take into account the frequency of sejmik and Sejm sessions, as well as the four-year terms of secular deputies to the Crown Tribunal.³⁷

Nevertheless the careers of parliamentarians, marshals and Crown Tribunal deputies should not be considered separately. All these positions were equally important as elements of the political system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Noble activists would often pursue their careers both in local assemblies as well as in the Sejm and the Tribunal. Moreover, we need to bear in mind that in many cases activists did not limit themselves to one palatinate in holding public offices. For example, the land judge of Kraków, Maksymilian Jarzyna, a true record holder when it comes to the Tribunal, was elected deputy seven times: once from the Rawa palatinate in Wielkopolska and six times from the Kraków palatinate.³⁸ Public functions were sometimes performed by activists who were related. In these cases involvement in national political life became a career building method for the whole family. During the the Vasa period well-known activists from the Lublin palatinate included Paweł and Mikołaj Lubieniecki, a father and son who were Polish Brethren and had links to the Radziwiłł Family.³⁹ If their careers

³⁵ Sobiesław Szybowski, 'Kariera urzędnicza Mikołaja Kościeleckiego ze Skępnego: Problemy chronologiczne i identyfikacyjne', in *Droga historii: Studia ofiarowane prof. Józefowi Szymańskiemu w 70. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Piotr Dymel, Krzysztof Skupieński and Barbara Trelińska, Lublin, 2001, pp. 149–60 (pp. 150–51).

³⁶ Piotr Guzowski, *Rodzina szlachecka w Polsce przedrozbiorowej: Studium demograficzne*, Białystok, 2019, p. 116.

³⁷ This rule was usually observed, although some activists owned estates in different parts of the Commonwealth, so they were sometimes elected as deputies from various provinces.

³⁸ *Deputaci*, part 1, p. 269; part 2, pp. 93, 131, 158, 187, 220, 244; *Urządnicy*, vol. 4/2, nr 197, 317; p. 228; Adam Boniecki, *Herbarz polski*, 16 vols, Warsaw, 1899–1913, vol. 8, 1905, p. 281.

³⁹ *Akta sejmikowe województwa lubelskiego 1572–1632*, pp. 145, 189, 324; *Akta sejmikowe województwa lubelskiego 1633–1668*, pp. 113, 302; Stanisław Kryczyński, 'Lubienieccy na służbie u Radziwiłłów', *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce*, 28, 1983, pp. 233–40.

were to be examined separately, then given the criterion proposed by the above-mentioned historians and my choice to study only the careers of activists, these two noblemen would not deserve a moment's attention. Therefore, despite the fact that I suggest the use of statistical criteria, I believe that we should not necessarily reject cases which do not quite fit the model.

Although a major role in the public life of noble activists in the early modern period was played by holding offices in the senate, central authorities, at the court, the royal chancellery, the military, and the castle and land courts (*sądy grodzkie i ziemskie*), in my view their role in the development of noblemen's careers was different from that of the representative institutions mentioned earlier. Senators as well as crown dignitaries usually came from families from the Commonwealth's elite, which is why their careers have been discussed more extensively in historiography.⁴⁰ Moreover, when they began their careers, they possessed significantly more wealth and patronage, received better education and political refinement, and frequently had higher aspirations, setting more ambitious goals for themselves. With regard to local offices (judicial, land and castle court as well as titular offices), it has to be said that although they were often an important stage in advancement, they were not always its only cause. Even in the case of locally elected offices like chamberlain, judge, deputy judge and land clerk, it was the king who appointed from among four candidates put forward by election. In addition, today we have only lists of these officials, and the sejmik records rarely include the names of all four candidates. On the other hand members of the castle courts, despite playing an important role in the Commonwealth's legal and political system, were appointed not by the local nobility, but by the local starosta, a royal official. Authors of lists of local officials from Poland usually omit this group of officials, so establishing its composition would mean having to analyse a massive body of sources. With regard to the Crown chancellery and secretariat, it should be stressed that in comparison with the sixteenth century the activity of laymen rarely led to the individuals in question gaining considerable political influence.⁴¹ Court officials, on the other hand, were able to pursue their political careers primarily on the basis of royal favour.

⁴⁰ See n. 1.

⁴¹ Augustyniak, 'Elita władzy', pp. 101–02.

3. Clients or ‘useful people’?

Scholars studying the nobility’s mentality on the basis of literary works describing role models stress that for noblemen involvement in political life was a calling or profession, equated with service to the Commonwealth. It represented both a duty stemming from their birth and a right to hold offices and be given various honours.⁴² However, before embarking on any public activity, noble activists had to win the support of their local communities; we know from the literature that sometimes they accomplished that thanks to the intercession of a powerful patron. Thus research into the careers of active representatives of the nobility will be combined with reflection on the functioning of the clientelist system in the early modern Commonwealth. However, it is worth pointing out at this juncture the persistent belief that the significance of the nobility came to be substantially limited by the country’s elite from as early as the first half of the seventeenth century. This belief stems from the research carried out so far into the nobility, focusing – with some exceptions⁴³ – on discussing the activities of the factions and coteries of the various magnates. Yet we should view the question of clientelism also from the perspective of people previously unjustly referred to in historiography by the collective term ‘clients’, considering how magnates protection could – but did not have to – influence noblemen’s careers.

Opaliński stresses that for representatives of great senatorial families, the factor determining the pursuit of political careers was ‘usefulness’ to the monarch. This usefulness could be demonstrated across various spheres of public activity, including service at court, in the army, employment in the crown chancellery, or diplomacy.⁴⁴ This concept has been examined by Wojciech Tygielski, who analysed the social circle of Jan Zamoyski using an extensive collection of sources from the Central Archives of Historical Records. Tygielski observes that letters requesting patronage for individuals often contained references to the usefulness of the individual recommended to the chancellor. In my opinion, this concept of ‘usefulness’ represents one of the characteristic features of noble activists climbing the political career ladder.⁴⁵

⁴² Urszula Świdarska-Włodarczyk, *Homo nobilis: Wzorzec szlachcica w Rzeczypospolitej XVI i XVII wieku*, Warsaw, 2017, p. 124.

⁴³ Urszula Augustyniak, *Dwór i klientela Krzysztofa Radziwiłła (1585–1640): Mechanizmy patronatu*, Warsaw, 2001; Żojdź, *Wszyscy ludzie króla*, pass.

⁴⁴ Opaliński, *Rodziny wielkosenatorskie*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Wojciech Tygielski, *Listy, ludzie, władza: Patronat Jana Zamoyskiego w świetle korespondencji*, Warsaw, 2007, p. 183.

Consequently, I propose to introduce the term 'useful people' to describe nobility activists who were not part of the power elite, but who participated in national and local life, and who, in connection with their public functions, performed certain favours for individuals of similar or higher status or who expressed the opinion of the community they represented in the national forum, thereby building their socio-political standing as well as gaining popularity and prestige. Thus, involvement in various activities and in many institutions was for these 'useful people' the main career-building element, often ending with their rise to high offices or considerable political influence. I would see among them not only parliamentary envoys, sejmik marshals and Crown Tribunal deputies, but also land and castle court officials, tax collectors, or envoys taking part in numerous missions.⁴⁶ The introduction of the category of 'useful people' (that is noble activists who enjoyed a degree of political autonomy and were able to function both within and outside the clientage networks), will make research into the society of the Commonwealth's noble society more nuanced.

4. Factors determining noble career paths

In recent article Marian Wolski proposed expanding research into noblemen's careers to include additional factors, which he categorised into two groups: objective and subjective. In the first category, also referred to as intra-family factors, Wolski considered aspects such as the life expectancy of the fathers, the duration of care provided to minors by widows and family members, the number of children, family solidarity, and property divisions. Subjective factors, which solely depend on the individual in question, encompassed attributes like one's character, eloquence, appearance, as well as physical and mental health⁴⁷. Following Wolski, I have chosen to categorise the factors influencing noblemen's career paths into three groups: internal, external, and individual. The first group includes factors such as: 1) social and financial standing;

⁴⁶ Anna Filipczak-Kocur and Andrzej Korytko stress that the function of tax collector was neither 'honourable nor particularly rewarding'. On the other hand, according to Jolanta Choińska-Mika, only honest noblemen worthy of public trust could become tax collectors, Anna Filipczak-Kocur, 'Sejmik województwa sieradzkiego wobec problemów skarbowych Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1578-1648', in *Kultura, polityka, dyplomacja: Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Jaremi Maciszewskiemu w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę Jego urodzin*, ed. Andrzej Bartnicki et al., Warsaw, 1990, pp. 141-57 (p. 148); Korytko, 'Na których opiera się Rzeczypospolita', p. 327; Jolanta Choińska-Mika, *Sejmiki mazowieckie w dobie Wazów*, Warsaw, 1998, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Wolski, 'Drogi i bezdroża', pp. 13-29.

2) family connections through blood or marriage; 3) types and natures of positions held by family members (up to two to three generations back), including support from relatives who were part of the clergy; 4) the number of children; 5) marital relationships; 6) the life expectancy of one's father; and 7) responsibilities for minors, if applicable. When investigating genealogical matters, it is essential to rely not only on armorials but also land and castle court registers. Financial status can be analysed on the basis of tax registers. Information about the positions and titles held by blood relatives and relatives by marriage of the 'useful people' can be found in various publications listing officials in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, such as *Spisy urzędników dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, as well as in the Crown Metryka, the Chancery register in which appointments were registered.

The external factors that influence noblemen's careers include 1) the monarch's personal attitude towards the individual in question; 2) one-time support from a member of the political elite; 3) client or quasi-client relations; and 4) support from the local community. In this context, the principal sources include private correspondence and sejmik records, because instructions for envoys often featured requests for support for various individuals submitted by the sejmik to the king.

The last category of determinants is made up of: 1) education;⁴⁸ 2) religion; 3) experience in working for public institutions; 4) meritorious

⁴⁸ In an article describing the education of secular senators in Poland during the reign of Władysław IV, Marcin Broniarczyk makes a distinction between 'edukacja' and 'wykształcenie' (both Polish terms are usually translated into English as 'education'). According to the scholar, the first term encompasses school learning, foreign travel, service at the court and public activity practice. On the other hand the term 'wykształcenie' is used by him to refer to the body of knowledge acquired in educational institutions, primarily learning at various levels, Marcin Broniarczyk, 'Wykształcenie świeckich senatorów w Koronie za Władysława IV', *KH*, 119, 2012, 2, pp. 251–303 (pp. 253–55). Following his example I have decided to distinguish education as one of the individual factors determining career building, but to treat practice in public life as a separate factor.

Apart from Broniarczyk, the question of education of members of the elite and the impact of their education on their career development has been tackled by Marian Chachaj, 'Wykształcenie świeckich senatorów w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim za panowania Zygmunta III Wazy', in *Studia z dziejów Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej*, Wrocław, 1988 (Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, no. 945, Historia, no. 66), pp. 257–62; Marian Chachaj, 'Wykształcenie wyższe a kariera w szesnastowiecznej Rzeczypospolitej', in *Nauczanie w dawnych wiekach: Edukacja w średniowieczu i u progu ery nowożytnej: Polska na tle Europy*, ed. Wojciech Iwańczak and Krzysztof Bracha, Kielce, 1997, pp. 275–90; Anna Kamler, *Od szkoły do senatu: Wykształcenie senatorów w Koronie 1501–1586: Studia*, Warsaw, 2006; Dorota Żołądz-Strzelczyk, *Peregrinatio academica: Studia młodzieży polskiej z Korony i Litwy na akademiach i uniwersytetach niemieckich w XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku*, Poznań, 1996.

military service; 5) appearance and eloquence; and 6) health and life expectancy of a given individual. I believe that in research into individual factors the most important sources include lists of students of the various universities,⁴⁹ diaries of congresses of nobility of various denominations from the sixteenth century, as well as private correspondence, parliamentary reports, sejmik records and records of speeches delivered at sejmiks and in the Sejm, found in various manuscript collections. In addition to these three groups of determinants, any analysis should also encompass issues relating to the development of activist careers and the potential advancement of their families in terms of wealth (size of assets managed at the end of each activist's life, leased crown land), social affairs (marriages and family relations established by offspring) and politics (creation of their own clientele).⁵⁰

Such a broad categorization of the determinants of noble careers and the extensive source base will allow for an individualized perspective, despite the large size of the community under analysis. However, it limits the application of the prosopographic method, which has been successfully used by Polish scholars. Quantitative methods can only be applied to 'measurable' factors such as wealth, education level, religious denomination or frequency of holding various public offices, especially in cases involving a larger number of members of the noble community. Therefore, I believe that examination of noblemen's careers in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth should be formulated descriptively utilizing the 'history from below' method. However, this approach differs from the classic version adopted by Eric Hobsbawm, which examined history from the perspective of underprivileged groups. Instead, it involves analysing processes from the perspective of individuals ('from the cellar to the attic'), and relies on ego-documents such as letters, speeches and private notes.

Over thirty years ago, in his article 'Klientela — więzi społeczne — grupa nacisku', Wojciech Tygielski outlined a vision for historians, stating: 'We see the future of research into early modern Poland's internal history

⁴⁹ Marian Chachaj, 'Metryki zagranicznych uniwersytetów i akademii jako źródło do dziejów kultury polskiej (XVI–XVII w.)', in *Studia z dziejów epoki renesansu*, ed. Henryk Zins, Warsaw, 1979, pp. 37–56; *Archiwum nacji polskiej w Uniwersytecie Padewskim*, 2 vols, ed. Henryk Barycz and Karolina Targosz, Wrocław, 1971–72, vol. 1: *Metryka nacji polskiej w Uniwersytecie Padewskim (1592–1745)*, 1971; *Uczniowie — sodalisci gimnazjum jezuitów w Brunsberdze (Braniewie) 1579–1623*, ed. Marek Inglot and Ludwik Grzebień, Cracow, 1998; Dorota Żołądz, 'Polacy z Korony i Litwy na studiach w Dilingen (1564–1624)', *Studia Historica Slavo-Germanica*, 17, 1988–1990, pp. 3–21. A list of other registers can be found in Broniarczyk, 'Wykształcenie świeckich senatorów', p. 261.

⁵⁰ Opaliński, *Rodziny wielkosenatorskie*, p. 18.

primarily in organizing our knowledge of such magnate pressure groups [in this case in Jan Zamoyski's milieu — A.K.] and analysing their impact of the latter on the country's political centre and, indirectly, on the fate of the state'.⁵¹ In my opinion, after several decades, Tygielski's suggestions have already been partially realised. Today, we should aim to analyse the political activity of those noblemen who were not part of the power elite, but distinguished themselves through their significant involvement in the public life of Commonwealth. As I have mentioned earlier, traditional historiography tended to focus on central power elite activists rather than local ones. I propose the term 'useful man', because I believe that the 'usefulness' of noble activists to the king, central elite representatives and local communities was a defining characteristic of nobles seeking political advancement. This approach allows us to shift the current perspective and examine the relationships between noble activists and representatives from the standpoint of these activists.

Furthermore the research pattern I have suggested aims to provide a comprehensive characterisation of the noble activists, considering not only the families and wealth of these 'useful people', but also their social and individual standing.⁵² Consequently, this proposed research will enhance our understanding of the role of the wider nobility in the Vasa period and provide a deeper insight into the dynamics of the political development in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

(Translated by Anna Kijak)
(Proofreading James Hartzell)

Summary

In this article I point out the need for conducting research into the career building of activists from the lesser nobility, whose families were not part of the power elite. In contemporary historiography the functioning of the elite has been rather extensively examined, while lesser nobility activists have attracted the attention of historians only to a limited extent. Yet in the early modern *monarchia mixta* institutions that constituted public forums, the Sejm (parliament), sejmiks (local assemblies)

⁵¹ Wojciech Tygielski, 'Klientela — więzi społeczne — grupa nacisku', in *Władza i społeczeństwo w XVI i XVII w.: Prace ofiarowane Antoniemu Mączakowi w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Marcin Kamler et al., Warsaw, 1989, pp. 261–282 (p. 282).

⁵² The approach I have proposed has been used in the following articles: Kwiatek, 'Przyczynek do biografii', pp. 95–116; Agata Kwiatek, 'Listy Wazów do pisarza i sędziego ziemskiego zatorskiego Jana Pisarzowskiego (1599–1679)', *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne*, 149, 2021, 2, pp. 391–404, and in the monograph *Kariera prowincjonalnego szlachcica*, which is currently under preparation.

and Crown Tribunal were of major significance and in these institutions lesser noble activists led the way. That is why I propose in the article to examine the spheres in which lesser noble activists operated and to discuss the careers of parliamentary envoys, sejmik marshals and deputies to the Crown Tribunal. My analysis will be based on a detailed questionnaire encompassing various determinants influencing noblemen's advancement, which are divided into groups of internal factors (family- and wealth-related); external factors (support of the local community, clientage relations and support granted by the king); as well as individual factors (education, religion, individual experience). Such broad research has been made possible by the development of historiography as well as the accessibility of sources, particularly well-preserved with regard to the core palatinates of Małopolska (Kraków, Sandomierz and Lublin).

(Translated by Anna Kijak)
(Proofreading James Hartzell)

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Biography: Agata Kwiatek — doctoral student at the Doctoral School in the Humanities, Jagiellonian University. Her research interests focus on topics relating to noble careers, seventeenth-century parliamentarism and the clientage system. Contact: agata.kwiatek@doctoral.uj.edu.pl.