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*In memory of
Professor Stanisław Salmonowicz
(1931–2022)*

Did lynchings occur during witch hunts in Poland between the 16th and 18th centuries?

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In 1952, Bohdan Baranowski's work was published on the subject of the witch trials (warlocks did not appear in the title) in Poland in the 17th and 18th centuries. It defined for several decades the state of the Polish reader's historical awareness of the course of events connected with witch-hunts in the early modern Poland (Polish Crown) (Baranowski did not mention Lithuania). The work was based on source material concerning only the so-called proper Greater Poland (Wielkopolska), comprising the voivodships of Poznań and Kalisz. This was its greatest weakness; Baranowski drew conclusions, frequently not reflected in the source material, on the basis of sources concerning trials conducted by municipal courts from these two provinces, with regard to the Polish Crown as a whole.¹

¹ See a critical review of this work: M. Piaszek, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVI–XVIII w. Nowe aspekty. Uwagi na marginesie pracy B. Baranowskiego*, "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce" 1998, Vol. 42, pp. 81–103.

Describing the witchcraft trials that were conducted by municipal courts (jury or council, sometimes jointly), Bohdan Baranowski noted, *inter alia*: “It should not be forgotten that various kinds of lynchings were a daily occurrence, when a village mob administered justice on its own to a person who was suspected of bringing about various misfortunes by witchcraft. Although these were unlawful acts, no one thought to hold those responsible for such lynchings accountable.”² In the French-language abstract provided at the end of the book, he concluded that in Poland “some 10,000 people accused of witchcraft, legally convicted, were burned or died tortured.”³ He added, in the next sentence, an unsupported statement to the effect that the rural population often took ‘justice’ into their own hands and carried out lynch executions on some 5,000 to 10,000 witches.⁴ Baranowski thus made the Poland into a country where 15,000 to 20,000 people were slaughtered as a result of witchcraft trials and in the course of lynchings. This placed us second in Europe, after the Reich (Holy Roman Empire), in whose territory roughly 25,000 women and men were burnt at the stake in early modern times.⁵ The information entered Western literature describing witch trials and witch hunts in early modern times.⁶ It was not until the turn of the 20th century that these figures began to be revised downwards, and significantly so, in some cases by around 90%.⁷ The exact number of people killed in witchcraft trials in Poland, however, still re-

² B. Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku*, Łódź 1952, p. 80.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 180: “environ 10 000 personnes accusées de sorcellerie, condamnées légalement, ont été brûlées ou sont mortes torturées.”

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ W. Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts. A Global History*, Cambridge 2002, p. 150, tab. 4.5., <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009640700111746>. Behringer lowered the number of executions in Poland to 4,000, putting it in third place, with France coming in second (5,000 executions).

⁶ M. Oestling, *Witchcraft in Poland: Milk and Malefice*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. B.P. Levack, Oxford 2013, p. 328, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.013.0019>.

⁷ W. Monter, *Witch Trials in Continental Europe 1560–1660*, in: *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, Vol. 2: *The Period of the Witch Trials*, eds. B. Ankarloo, S. Clark, Philadelphia 2002, pp. 12–13.

mains unknown, owing to the lack of baseline research on a micro-scale.

Bohdan Baranowski also claimed in his work that there were cases when a noble village owner would “on his own hand pass a death sentence on an alleged witch.”⁸ In order to support this thesis, he referred in a footnote to one of Oskar Kolberg’s works, in which the latter noted that often “the owner of the village himself pronounced and executed the sentence.”⁹ To prove his claim, Kolberg cited events that occurred in 1762 in an unspecified village in the Greater Poland region. One of the peasants accused an aged woman, Magda, in front of the heir of kidnapping and taking him to the Bald Mountain. The woman was wearing the gown of the heir’s wife at the time. The old woman’s gown, when “torn in the dance, was sewn together with black thread, lacking the white one.” The heir’s wife had this gown brought in and “found the accuser’s words true.” Magda, as well as several other women, was subjected to immersion, but she was the only one to stay afloat, which, according to the beliefs of the time, clearly proved that she was an accomplice of the devil and a witch.¹⁰ The woman was sent to the stake. However, Kolberg did not record, as Baranowski later claimed, that the sentence was handed down by the owner of the village. Nor did Kolberg report the name of the village, the name of its owner, or the source of his knowledge of the event described.¹¹ Therefore, the information given by him cannot be source-verified.

A quarter of a century later (in 1978), Janusz Tazbir, in an article summarising the state of knowledge of Polish historiography on witchcraft trials in the Polish-Lithuanian state in early modern times, also concluded that: “Half of the witches execut-

⁸ B. Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic*, p. 80.

⁹ O. Kolberg, *Dziela wszystkie*, Vol. 15: *W. Ks. Poznańskie*, P. 7, (photo-fset reissue), Wrocław-Poznań 1982, p. 248.

¹⁰ J. Wijaczka, *Próba zimnej wody (ptawienie) w oskarżeniach i procesach o czary w państwie polsko-litewskim w XVI-XVIII wieku*, “Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce” 2016, Vol. 60, pp. 73–110, <https://doi.org/10.12775/oirwp.2016.03>.

¹¹ O. Kolberg, *Dziela wszystkie*, Vol. 15, p. 248.

ed in Poland were burned as a result of lynching, without any investigation.”¹² He did not, however, refer to any sources or literature on the subject, although it can be assumed that he based his finding on a conjecture by Bohdan Baranowski.

The conviction that the rural population perpetrated lynchings based on fear of witches was shared by Stanisław Salmonowicz, who observed that, although: “Mentions in the sources of the number of victims of lynch killings are scarce, the phenomenon did exist.”¹³

Doubts concerning the very large number of lynchings reported by Bohdan Baranowski were raised by Małgorzata Pilaszek, author of the first comprehensive synthesis on witchcraft trials in Poland in the 15th–18th centuries, who stated that owing to the lack of sources “the number of potential lynchings is impossible to estimate.”¹⁴ She added that: “The greatest number of references to Old Polish lynch killings has survived from the second half of the 18th century.”¹⁵ The indication of the second half of the 18th century seems to be a mistake (‘1’ was replaced by ‘2,’ which was not noticed in the correction), because in the footnote Pilaszek gave a reference to two cases which occurred in the first half of that century. The first of these (Czerniewo, 1727) will be addressed later, while the second, on closer inspection, has nothing to do with a lynching.¹⁶

Although Małgorzata Pilaszek’s work was published in 2008, a few years later, Brian P. Levack (one of the best-known contemporary historians researching the hunt for witches and war-

¹² J. Tazbir, *Procesy o czary*, “Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce” 1978, Vol. 23, pp. 168–169.

¹³ S. Salmonowicz, *Procesy o czary w Polsce. Próba rozważań modelowych*, in: *Prawo wczoraj i dziś. Studia dedykowane profesor Katarzynie Sójce-Zielińskiej*, ed. G. Bałtruszajtys, Warszawa 2000, p. 317.

¹⁴ M. Pilaszek, *Procesy o czary w Polsce w wiekach XV–XVIII*, Kraków 2008, p. 268, <https://doi.org/10.15290/bth.2009.07.12>.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Małgorzata Pilaszek pointed to several trials conducted at the beginning of the 18th century near Płońsk in the Mazovia region; Z. Lasocki, *Szlachta płońska w walce z czartem*, “Miesięcznik Heraldyczny” A. 12, 1933, No. 2, pp. 18–20. The judgments rendered in their courts, however, were handed down by a jury, and there is not a word pointing to lynchings.

locks in early modern Europe, author of numerous works on the subject,¹⁷ including a synthesis, repeatedly reissued and translated into various languages, including Polish¹⁸), describing the lynchings of people accused of being witches and warlocks in ancient and modern times, stated unequivocally, based largely on a statement made in an article by Janusz Tazbir, that in early modern times their number in Poland was much higher than in any other European country.¹⁹

In a 1978 article, Janusz Tazbir also mentioned that in Poland too, as in western Europe, it occasionally happened “that after the release of the alleged witches an outraged mob sought to lynch the judges, as happened in 1690 in Gniezno.”²⁰ Brian P. Levack, relying on the German version of Tazbir’s article,²¹ reported that the inhabitants of Gniezno (of which, incidentally, he made a village) not only lynched several of the released witches, but also carried out a lynching of the judge who had freed them.²²

This statement, however, is not true. In Gniezno, as in other cities and towns of the Polish-Lithuanian state in the last decades of the 17th century, admittedly, there were quite a lot of trials connected with accusations of practising witchcraft,²³ but no lynching took place there either in 1690 or in any other year.

¹⁷ *Inter alia*: B.P. Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland, Law, politic and religion*, New York 2008.

¹⁸ B.P. Levack, *Polowanie na czarownice w Europie wczesnonowoczesnej*, transl. E. Rutkowski, with the addendum *Katalogu magii Mnicha Rudolfa zabytku z XIII w.*, transl. E. Karwot, Wrocław 1991; ed. 2, corrected and supplemented, Wrocław 2009.

¹⁹ B.P. Levack, *Witch lynching past and present*, in: *Swift to wrath: lynching in global historical perspective*, eds. W.D. Carrigan, Ch. Waldrep, Charlottesville 2013, p. 55: “In Poland, however, the number of lynched witches was significantly greater than in Scotland or in any other early modern European state.”

²⁰ J. Tazbir, *Procesy o czary*, p. 168, also failed to provide any bibliographical address.

²¹ J. Tazbir, *Hexenprozesse in Polen*, “Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte” 1980, Bd. 71, p. 299.

²² B. P. Levack, *Witch lynching past and present*, p. 56.

²³ See i.a.: S. Karwowski, *Gniezno*, Poznań 1892, pp. 123–129; W. Wyporska, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Poland, 1500–1800*, Basingstoke 2013, pp. 84–86; J. Wijaczka, *Jak się pozbyć matki, która bije? Dziecięcy proces*

It is therefore worth looking at the facts and establishing what was happening in 1690 in Gniezno in connection with the witchcraft trials held there. Belief in witches and the evil deeds they committed with the help of the devil, was widespread among the local inhabitants. They believed that witches brought them various misfortunes, above all illnesses and losses in possessions, in the cowshed, in the stables, and in the fields.

One of the victims of the alleged witches was Andreas (Andrzej) Meder, an executioner from Gniezno.²⁴ It is not known where he came from, when he was hired, until when he held his post,²⁵ or how old he was at the time of the trial. In the sources known to me, he appeared under this name only in 1690, specifically in connection with a witchcraft trial.

From the records of the court proceedings that commenced in the summer of 1690 with the indictment of the Gniezno Master of Justice, we learn that the executioner Meder was married at the time. Unfortunately, we know nothing about his wife, not even her name. What we do know, however, is that the couple had a twelve-year-old daughter, Rozyna (Rosina), who, according to her own testimony, was a witch. The executioner Meder found out by chance that his daughter was an accomplice of the devil and frequented the Bald Mountain. One July day in 1690, very late in the evening, another alleged accomplice of the devil, Dorota Majeranowiczowa, came for her to take her with her to the Bald Mountain. Because the girl did not want to go, the woman started shouting at her. The already sleeping executioner, hearing the child's screams, grabbed a cutlass and rushed to her daugh-

o czary w Gnieźnie w 1689 r., "Przegląd Historyczny" 2020, Vol. 111, J. 3, pp. 539–555, <https://doi.org/10.36693/202003p.539-555>.

²⁴ A. Warschauer, *Das Hexenkind, eine Erzählung aus alten Akten der Stadt Gnesen*, "Aus dem Posener Lande. Monatsblätter für Heimatkunde" 1911, Vol. 6, J. 4, pp. 171–180, he read the executioner's last name as Meler.

²⁵ We know little, if anything, about the functioning of the office of executioner and the office bearers in Gniezno.; M. Zwierzykowski, *Gniezno w XVI–XVIII wieku*, in: *Dzieje Gniezna pierwszej stolicy Polski*, ed. J. Dobosz, Gniezno 2016, p. 260.

ter's rescue.²⁶ Majeranowiczowa fled, and the executioner proceeded to question his daughter about the incident. Rozyna then told her father about her relationship with Majeranowiczowa, that she had a magic powder made of smeared worms, and that she had smeared herself with the powder to get to the Bald Mountain, where a young devil was assigned to her as a lover.²⁷ The executioner, having heard this confession, immediately went to the Majeranowicz house, where he berated Dorota. He also accused her of being a witch and frequenting the Bald Mountain: "I was scolded by Mr Andrzej as soon as he came to us that the girl was screaming. But I was surprised and he would not bear proof of it, we laughed at it, because I was not guilty of anything."²⁸

As a little earlier the executioner Meder had contracted an unknown illness, he now began to suspect that it had been brought on him by Dorota Majeranowiczowa. This was supposed to have happened on the day he was setting out on a journey (unfortunately, we do not know where to or for what purpose). He spent the night at the house of Majeranowiczowa, who then, as he later claimed before the court: "made me suddenly fall ill."²⁹ However, we do not know for what reason the executioner did not spend the night in his own house, but at the house of the Majeranowicz family. The woman accused by Meder claimed that during his stay at her house, the executioner picked up a small barrel with beer and holding it, fell onto a bench causing pain in his chest.³⁰ And this was the source of his illness, not witchcraft.

The first to appear before the court, however, was not Majeranowiczowa, but the widow Regina Węglewiczowa, whose trial began on 31 July 1690. The executioner's daughter told her father that it was she who had given her the bundle with two powders with which she was supposed to 'sprinkle' him. During the prelim-

²⁶ State Archive in Poznań, Records of the town of Gniezno 1587–1808, (further: AP Poznań, AmG), no. I 70: Acta advocatialis Gnesnensia resignatio-num, 1608–1699, p. 442.

²⁷ A. Warschauer, *Das Hexenkind*, p. 179.

²⁸ AP Poznań, AmG, sygn. I 70, p. 442.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 442–443.

inary hearing (1 August) held by the mayor's court, Węglewiczowa testified that one Thursday afternoon that year, widow Agnieszka Łukaszowa, who lived with her two children in the guesthouse behind the church of St. Lawrence, had come to her house. Agnieszka came to ask that Węglewiczowa summon the executioner's daughter, who at the time was coming to buy beer for her father at the shop opposite her house. She justified her request by saying that she would "come to you sooner than to me." When asked why she wanted to meet the girl, she replied that she had a row with the executioner and wanted to seek revenge on him, so she would give the girl a powder to 'sprinkle' on her father. She also asked that Węglewiczowa give the powder to the executioner's daughter. The latter agreed, called out to the girl when she came to get the beer, and gave her the two powders. She also asked her to put the white powder under her father's bed and to add the other, the glowing one, to his food. The girl said nothing, merely nodded and went home with the beer and the powders.

On the third of August 1690, Dorota Majeranowiczowa, who had admitted neither to bringing illness on the executioner, nor to being a witch, was brought before the court. Subsequently, both women were placed in the hands of the executioner Christian from Poznań, who had been brought in so that the local executioner, personally involved in the case as both victim and accuser, would not inflict torment on those he accused. I will not describe the exact course of this trial here; it will be discussed on another occasion. It must be added, however, that the two tortured women, when questioned about other witches known to them, began to mention more and more names. Majeranowiczowa testified that one of the local witches was Agnieszka Obruśniczka, the wife of Jan Obruśnik, a wealthy burgher from Gniezno, a linen manufacturer.³¹

Members of the magistrate's office, headed by Mayor Jakub Gnaciński³² became concerned about the increase in the number

³¹ AP Poznań, AmG, no. I 70, p. 446.

³² The magistrate consisted of 6 councillors and a mayor, the term of office was one year. They were elected in the week after St. Adalbert's day (23 April);

of women accused of witchcraft, all the more so as accusations also began to be levelled at the wives of wealthy and therefore influential burghers, such as Jan Obruśnik. In addition, the names of these women began to appear only because they were indicated as witches by the tortured women. On the other hand, there was no other evidence of their guilt, i.e. no accuser appearing to point to specific losses or harm suffered as a result of these women's activities. Therefore, the mayor and councillors began to wonder whether they could actually be declared witches and referred to a jury trial.³³ Thus, the magistrate members of the council decided to turn to those who should have the best knowledge of how to resolve the dilemma, namely the doctors of theology and the hierarchs concentrated in the local chapter. This was all the more warranted given that, as early as 1670, the Archbishop of Gniezno, Mikołaj Prażmowski (Archbishop 1666–1673), had urged people to proceed with caution in witchcraft cases, notably when confessions were made under torture.³⁴

The Archbishop of Gniezno in 1690 was Cardinal Michał Radziejowski (Archbishop 1688–1705), who was at that time on a journey to Rome. He was deputised for by the suffragan bishop Wojciech Stawowski (1675–1693), who at the same time held the post of officiate general of the Archbishopric of Gniezno, and was thus the most prominent clerical judge in the diocese. It was to him that a two-person messenger, Gniezno councillor Wiktoryn Żeromski and juror Wojciech Ostaffi, took a letter concerning several women accused of witchcraft who remained in prison. How-

J. Topolski (ed.), *Dzieje Gniezna*, Warszawa 1965, p. 316. The councillors in 1690 were: Wiktoryn Żeromski, Bartłomiej Łochocki, Mikołaj Kotkowski, Marcin Gryff, Marcin Bartochowicz; AP Poznań, AmG, no. I 36: *Acta spectabilis civitatis S. R. Mtis Gnesnensis*, 1689–1691, p. 122.

³³ In Gniezno, in the case of an accusation of witchcraft, the custom was that the case was first brought before the mayor's court and it decided whether or not to transfer the accused person to the jury court, which tried cases punishable by death. A similar custom can also be observed in some towns in Lesser Poland, cf: M. Mikołajczyk, *Proces kryminalny w miastach Małopolski XVI–XVIII wieku*, Katowice 2013, pp. 34–38.

³⁴ A. Warschauer, *Geschichte der Stadt Gnesen. Auf Anregung und mit Unterstützung der städtischen Behörden bearbeitet*, Posen 1918, pp. 179–180.

ever, they did not manage to appear before Stawowski himself, but handed over the letter to the doctor of theology, the Gniezno canon Paweł Kasper Chudzyński,³⁵ who promised to hand it over to the suffragan. Two days later, on 10 August 1690, Bishop Stawowski informed the council that he would reply the following day, after conferring with other prelates and doctors of theology. Indeed, on 11 August he met with the two aforementioned magisterial representatives. The meeting was very brief, and what they heard greatly surprised them. What the bishop announced was that he decided not to deal with the question of what to do with the imprisoned women. He stated that he did not wish to interfere with the municipal justice system. He gave the council representatives his blessing and left.³⁶ Bishop Stawowski thus waived all responsibility and did not undertake to take a stand against the official policy of the Roman Catholic Church.³⁷ The decision fell on the magistrate.

The verdict in the case of Regina Węglowiczowa and Dorota Majernowiczowa, accused by the executioner, was delivered a few days later, on 16 August 1690.³⁸ The jury sentenced both women to death by burning at the stake. Two other alleged witches, Agnieszka Obruśniczka and the widow Agnieszka Łukaszowa, who had been named during the trial brought by the executioner, were not sent to the stake. Concerning these two women who were already imprisoned, on 18 August 1690 a decision was taken by the mayor's court that one would be released on bail (Obruśniczka) and the other would be banished from the town (Łukaszowa).

³⁵ J. Korytkowski, *Prataci i kanonicy katedry metropolitalnej gnieźnieńskiej do roku 1000 aż do dni naszych. Podług źródeł archiwalnych*, Vol. 1, Gniezno 1883, pp. 133–134.

³⁶ AmG, no. I 70, p. 450 – an account of the messengers sent to the bishop and the chapter with regard to witches. Gniezno, 11 August 1690; A. Warschauer, *Das Hexenkind*, pp. 179–180.

³⁷ On the approach of the Roman Catholic Church and its representatives to witchcraft trials and the belief in witches, see: Jacek Wijaczka, *Kościół wobec czarów w Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku (na tle europejskim)*, Warszawa 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15762/zh.2017.40>.

³⁸ AP Poznań, AmG, no. I 70, pp. 456–457.

This decision was not welcomed by the local community. In fact, the crowd, which was outraged by the magistrate's verdict, and began to storm the town hall, was led by members of the jury court themselves.³⁹ They were protesting along with local residents against the dismissal of the women. However, no beating of the mayor and councillors took place, instead they were verbally insulted. The councillors, and the mayor, however, remained firm and did not alter their decision.⁴⁰ Thus, in no way is this a case of a lynching carried out by an agitated mob on alleged witches and magistrates, as claimed by Janusz Tazbir, and later repeated after him by Brian P. Levack.

Consequently, did the hunt for alleged witches and sorcerers in the Poland in the 16th–18th centuries involve any lynchings at all?

Let us start with the definition of a lynching. In the *Dictionary of the Polish Language*, published at the beginning of the twentieth century, commonly known as Karłowicz's dictionary, under the word 'samosąd' we find two definitions: 1) judging oneself, self-judgment, and 2) the judgment of a criminal by the people themselves, without a court, dealing with the villain in their own way.⁴¹ Often the word *samosąd* is replaced by the word *lincz* (English: lynch), as used in Brian P. Levack's article. It is derived from the name of the incumbent judge in the US state of Virginia, Charles Lynch (1736–1796), a planter, politician, revolutionary, and judge who tried, not always according to the applicable law, loyalist supporters of the British monarchy during the American War of Independence. According to the *Dictionary of Foreign Words*, the word 'lynch' means a type of self-judgment, the beating or killing of a person by an agitated mob, used in the south-

³⁹ Members of the jury court in 1690 were: brewer Wojciech Moron, locksmith Stanisław Rychałkiewicz, furrier Jakub Zgorzalik, brewer Franciszek Świątkowicz, Wojciech Ostaffi and Jerzy Białaszczyk(?); AP Poznań, AmG, no. I 36, p. 122.

⁴⁰ A. Warschauer, *Das Hexenkind*, p. 180.

⁴¹ *Słownik języka polskiego Jana Karłowicza, Adama Kryńskiego i Władysława Niedźwieckiego*, Vol. 6: S–Ś, compiled by W. Niedźwiecki with the participation of K. Król, Warszawa 1915, p. 23.

ern states of the USA as a means of terror, especially against African-Americans.⁴²

Taking both definitions into account, it must be concluded that during the hunt for witches and warlocks in the Polish Crown self-trials on a mass scale, as recorded by Baranowski and followed by Tazbir and Levack, did not occur. In fact, they were practically non-existent. I know of only two cases to which the classical definition of a lynching applies.

In 1720, an old woman, Kaplunka, was murdered in Krasilov, a town in Volyn Voivodeship at the time after being accused by village residents of bringing a drought and epidemic to the town. Her stepson, Fedir Melnik, expecting a lynch, had tried to take her out of town the night before, but they were caught. The woman was killed the next day. Melnik filed a complaint against the initiators of the lynch with the Dubna town court. However, due to a lack of sources, we do not know whether the complaint had any effect⁴³.

The second case took place on 13 March 1779 in the village of Osowo (Ossowo) in the Tuchola district. The fact that this was already several years after the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian state and the village was then on the territory of the Prussian state does not affect the situation. The mentality of the inhabitants had not changed in such a short time. The village was inhabited by representatives of petty nobility; it was divided into 12 parts.⁴⁴ One of them belonged to Andrzej Żabiński, who took Mathias Kopka in as a crofter on his farm. After a while, Żabiński's wife came to the conclusion that ever since the Kopka family moved into their farm, various misfortunes, admittedly small, but persistent, began to occur. She began to suspect that Kopka's wife was a witch who was using witchcraft to take revenge for minor squabbles between them. At the same time Agnieszka, the daughter of Żabiński, began to limp on her right leg,

⁴² J. Tokarski (ed.), *Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN*, Warszawa 1980, p. 430.

⁴³ K. Dysa, *Ukrainian Witchcraft Trials. Volhynia, Podolia, and Ruthenia 17th–18th Centuries*, Budapest – New York 2020, pp. 132–133.

⁴⁴ M. Bär, *Der Adel und der adlige Grundbesitz in Polnisch-Preussen zur Zeit der preussischen Besitzergreifung. Nach Auszügen aus den Vasallenlisten und Grundbüchern*, Leipzig 1911, No. 1239, p. 123.

experiencing very strong pain in her knee and thigh.⁴⁵ The doctor diagnosed the pain as being of arthritic origin, related to gout.⁴⁶ However, Agnieszka's mother believed that the doctor was mistaken and that the true cause of her illness was witchcraft inflicted on her daughter by Kopka's wife. Not only did she start spreading the word throughout the village that Kopka's wife was a witch, but she also led the village chief, Albrecht (Wojciech) Kowalewski, to subject the woman accused of witchcraft to immersion. The woman was seized by Andrzej Żabiński, his son Franciszek and several other men, who dragged her by force to a pond near the village. The woman had to strip down to her undershirt. Żabiński's wife sprinkled the pond with holy water, and her son tied Kopkova's hands and feet crosswise with ropes made from straw. Once she was thrown into the water, the ropes untied and the woman came ashore. She was again bound and thrown into the water, but this time too she got out on the shore. This left no one present in any doubt that the woman being thrown into the water was a witch.⁴⁷ However, her husband, who had spent 20 years in a relationship with her and did not believe she was a witch, saw no other way of proving her innocence than to conduct one more, third test in the water. Thus, he caught up with the participants and witnesses of the flotation who were returning to the village and began to persuade them to tie his wife up more solidly this time and throw her into the water in the middle of the pond. And so they did. Both Żabiński men took the woman under their arms and, standing on the bank, threw her into the water as far as they could. One of the

⁴⁵ H.L. Fischer, *Das Buch vom Aberglauben*, ed. 2, corrected, Vol. 1, Leipzig 1791, p. 303. Cf.: J. Wijaczka, *Próba zimnej wody (pławienie) w procesach o czary we wczesnonowożytnej Europie*, "Klio. Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym" 2020, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 59–60, <https://doi.org/10.12775/klio.2020.018>.

⁴⁶ *Ein Hexenproceß. Im Jahr 1779*, in: *Neuer und Alter Haus- und Geschichts=Calender, auf das Jahr nach Christi Geburth MDCCLXXXVII. Für die Stadt Dantzig und benachbarte Oerter berechnet*, hrsg. von J.G. Bartoldi, Dantzig [1787], c. E2. My sincere gratitude for Dr Piotr Paluchowski from Gdańsk for pointing me to this source and sending me the scans.

⁴⁷ *Ein Hexenproceß. Im Jahr 1779*, c. E3-4; H.L. Fischer, *Das Buch vom Aberglauben*, pp. 303–304.

men pushed her towards the middle of the pond with a long stick. For a while, the woman floated on her stomach in the water, and after some time she managed to free herself from the restraints. Members of the Żabiński family beat the woman again and demanded that she 'disenchant' Agnieszka. Finally, they stated that Kopka's wife was not allowed to appear in the village ever again. The battered woman begged the torturers for mercy and asked them to help her up from the ground. Instead, one of those present began to beat her again with a stick until it broke. The man with the remaining piece in his hand hit the woman in the face and said: "Get up beast and get dressed."⁴⁸ As a result of a vicious beating, Kopka's wife died. The husband went to the parish priest of Wielewska Kalwaria (Wiehle, Viele) to inform him of the incident and to seek consolation. The parish priest in turn notified the court in Chojnice (Konitz), which immediately initiated proceedings. In order to avoid punishment, the Żabiński family fled the village and were never found. The other participants involved in the murder were sentenced to labour in the fortress for several months to four years, depending on their involvement during the incident.⁴⁹

Thus, this case represents a classic lynching, where villagers murder a woman accused of witchcraft without handing her over to the court.

If, on the other hand, lynching were to refer to a judge (judges, court) that tried a case not quite in accordance with the applicable law, as Charles Lynch did, such an instance can be seen in the 'trial' that took place in 1727 in Royal Prussia in the village of Czerniewo (German: Scherniau). It was a village divided into parts. One part belonged to the Kistowski family.⁵⁰ Konstancja, widow of Mirosław, and her children, the second part to Andrzej

⁴⁸ H.L. Fischer, *Das Buch vom Aberglauben*, p. 305.

⁴⁹ *Ein Hexenproceß. Im Jahr 1779*, c. E5.

⁵⁰ The Kistowskis originated from the village of Kistowo, parish of Parchowo. In 1682, Kistowski, whose first name is unknown, paid a tax on a part of Czerniewo; this is the first information about the Kistowskis' presence in this village; P. Pragert, *Herbarz rodzin kaszubskich*, Vol. 2, Gdańsk 2001, p. 91.

Owidzki, and the third, to the burgher Eduard Heinrich von Giese from Gdańsk.

At the latest at the beginning of September 1727, three women from the village were accused of practising witchcraft: Marianna Sztreczka (Streeck), wife of the forest guard Jan, Pijawkowa, and Ertmuta.⁵¹ The initiators of their incarceration were members of the noble Kistowski family. They had suffered significant livestock losses during this time: horses, cows, pigs and sheep had died. As no explanation could be found as to why this happened, it was deemed that it must have been due to witchcraft, belief in which was still rife at the time among the rural population and petty nobility.

In any case, three women, who were not subjects of the Kistowskis, but lived in the part of Czerniewo that belonged to Giese, were kidnapped and imprisoned by the Kistowskis' servants. They were also subjected to a water test, being thrown into the local pond. The test was to answer the question of whether the women were witches. The women stayed afloat, which confirmed their guilt in the eyes of their accusers.

The Kistowskis, it seems, were looking for a court whose members would share their belief in witches and their conviction in the guilt of the women they had indicated. They were unlikely to find one in Czerniewo and so they turned to Stanisław Jaskowski, the village chief in Trąbki Małe. This was not formally forbidden, as people who neither lived in the village where the trial was taking place nor appeared before the court as claimants were allowed to appear before the village court. This could be done under the *prorogatio fori* clause, i.e. allowing a dispute to be submitted to the court for resolution regardless of its local or personal jurisdiction.⁵² However, the trial did not take place in Trąbki Małe, but in Czerniewo, which appears to have been a violation of the law.

⁵¹ I report on the events of the case and the course of the trial on the basis of the article: J. Wijaczka, *Samosąd w sprawie o czary w Czerniewie (dawny powiat tczewski)*, "Rocznik Gdański" 2009–2010, Vol. 69–70, pp. 37–45.

⁵² R. Łaszewski, *Wymiar sprawiedliwości we wsiach województwa chełmińskiego w XVII i XVIII wieku. Organizacja sądownictwa i postępowanie sądowe*, Toruń 1974, p. 25.

The Kistowskis, it appears, were trying to create the pretence of acting in accordance with the law, a pretence, for the village courts had not been allowed to try witchcraft cases for years.⁵³ The village chief Jaskowski and the innkeeper Czamański risked their own lives, at least in theory, by taking on the role of judges in the witchcraft case. Why? Well, in 1702, the mother of one of the canons from Wornia (Varniai) in Samogitia (today Lithuania) was accused of being a witch. The pleas of the canon, whose name we unfortunately do not know, for her release did not help; she was burnt at the stake by the “enraged nobility.”⁵⁴ In the course of the trial, the canon asked for support from King August II, but the letter was delayed in reaching the king’s hands owing to his absence in Warsaw. After the sentence had been carried out, the canon complained to the king about the attitude of the lay judges. As a result, August II issued a universal decree in Malbork on 5 May 1703, in which provisions were recorded stating that henceforth people accused of witchcraft were to be tried by clerical courts, and not by secular ones; the secular judges were forbidden by the sovereign to try such cases, while municipal judges were punished with a fine of 1000 red zlotys, and rural judges faced the death penalty by hanging.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the village chief from Trąbki Małe, together with the innkeeper from the village of Kłodawa, decided, for reasons

⁵³ In everyday practice, this was occasionally the case, although not very often. In addition, the sentences handed down by village courts were usually very lenient, as they “usually ordered suspects to take an oath of purification.” In addition, none of the witchcraft trials conducted by the village court resulted in the execution of a death sentence; R. Łaszewski, *Wiejskie prawo karne w Polsce XVII i XVIII wieku*, Toruń 1988, p. 138; T. Wiślicz, *Czary przed sądami wiejskimi w Polsce w XVI–XVIII w.*, “Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 1997, Vol. 49, J. 1–2, pp. 47–63, here p. 52.

⁵⁴ M. Wołoczewski, *Biskupstwo żmujdzkie*. Translated from the Samogitian into Polish and with some historical footnotes added by H. Hryszkiewicz. With a foreword by S. Smolka, Kraków 1898, p. 212.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 213. The literature on the subject also contains the opinion that this edict was issued thanks to the efforts of the Bishop of Kuyavia and Pomerania, Krzysztof Antoni Szembek; cf.: W. Smoleński, *Przewrót umysłowy w Polsce wieku XVIII*. *Studia historyczne*, ed. 3, Warszawa 1949, p. 54; J. Tazbir, *Szlachta i teologowie*. *Studia z dziejów polskiej kontrreformacji*, Warszawa 1987, p. 161.

unknown to us, to assume this risk. Presumably they believed in witches, and perhaps they too had suffered some sort of loss at the same time as the Kistowskis. In order to extract a confession from the slandered women, an executioner was brought in, probably from Tczew.⁵⁶ He tortured the accused women so cruelly that one of them, Pijawkowa, died as a result of the torments.

As Sztreczka was a subject of Eduard Heinrich Giese, out of concern for her salvation, knowing that the parish priest in Pragowo (to which Czerniewo belonged) was ill, he asked Andreas Reiß, pastor in Łęgowo (German: Langenau), to appear in Czerniewo with the Eucharist so that the woman would not leave this world without the sacraments. Giese was all the more anxious about this because another of his subjects, the aforementioned Pijawkowa, died without the sacrament as a result of torture. Konstancja Kistowska, however, did not allow Reiß to hear Sztreczka's confession and give her the last anointing. On the day of the execution, Reiß again appeared in Czerniewo; this time he managed to hear confession and administer the sacrament not only to Sztreczka, but also to the other woman going to the beheading and the stake, Ertmuta. It is important to add that Reiß protested three times against the unlawful behaviour of the Kistowskis towards women accused of witchcraft by members of this family. Also on the day of the execution, he went to the consistory in Danzig to lodge another protest.

The Kistowskis meanwhile seized the property which they had burned belonging to Marianna and her husband Jan Sztreczka. The Kistowskis took the two oxen, two heifers, two wethers and five geese belonging to them, as well as horses. On one of these, Kistowski (probably Jan) rode to Stargard (Gdański) for the deputy election. On top of that, the Kistowskis wanted Sztreczka to pay the executioner for his services, threatening to give him a beating if their demand was not met. Giese's attorney asked several nobles, including Andrzej Owidzki, who should pay the executioner. They all unanimously said that Jan Kistowski, for it was he

⁵⁶ O. Günther, *Ein Kontrakt mit dem Scharfrichter von Dirschau*, "Mitteilungen des Westpreußischen Geschichtsvereins" A. 1, 1902, pp. 58–60.

who had ordered the kidnapping and imprisonment of Marianna Sztreczka and, in addition, was himself the accuser and judge in one person.

Since the Kistowskis had kidnapped and ordered the trial of the women living in the part of Czerniewo belonging to Giese, the latter, supported by Andreas Reiß, pastor from Łęgowo, brought an accusation against them to the provincial court, for having condemned and executed the alleged witches, contrary to the bishop's decree not to punish any witchcraft practitioner without a prior theological examination of the case. Giese accused the senior of the family, Konstancja Kistowska, her sons Fryderyk and Jan, as well as her daughters Teresa, Anna, Barbara, Teofila, Aleksandra, and Konstancja. They were summoned before the governor's court.

The first hearing took place in Skarszewy on 13 December 1728 and was presided over by Piotr Jan Czapski, Pomeranian voivode and starost of Skarszewy. However, the proceedings were postponed as all defendants failed to appear before the court, above all the innkeeper Czamański and the village chief Jaskowski, who were directly responsible for sentencing the women. Kazimierz Niezwojowski, the leaseholder of Godziszewo, was obliged to ensure their appearance, as the defendants lived on his leased estate. Eventually, a hearing took place during which the Kistowskis, as well as Czamański and Jaskowski, were found guilty of an unlawful act. On 14 January 1729, the court sentenced Jan Kistowski to 12 weeks in the tower, as well as his mother Konstancja and one of his sisters, Teresa. They were also ordered to return the cattle they had taken. Of this sentence, Jan Kistowski only served 6 weeks in the tower, while his mother and sister each served 4 weeks. The innkeeper Czamański and the village administrator Jaskowski served 2 weeks each in the tower, and on their release they each received 50 lashes in the town square. As it seems, all the convicts were released from the tower because they appealed against the sentence to the Crown Tribunal in Piotrków.

This appeal, however, did not turn out well for either the Kistowskis or the village administrator and the innkeeper. On

4 April 1729, after hearing the case, the Crown Tribunal in Piotrków handed down a verdict in which it found the defendants guilty of unlawfulness and upheld the sentence of the provincial court. Members of the Kistowski family, Jan, Konstancja, and Teresa, were to serve 12 weeks in the tower and to return the cattle taken or pay compensation for them within 4 weeks. Czamański and Jaskowski, on the other hand, were sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment in the city prison and to 200 lashes upon leaving it. The Crown Court also reiterated in the sentence that village courts had no right to adjudicate in witchcraft cases.

It should therefore be unequivocally stated that Bohdan Baranowski's thesis, later uncritically repeated by other historians, that several thousand Polish alleged witches lost their lives as a result of lynchings, is not supported by source material and is thus untrue. In the villages where accusations of the crime of witchcraft were made, neighbours were not eager to incite lynchings. It is difficult to determine clearly for what reasons. Those accused of the offence of witchcraft were brought before a jury court from the nearest town, usually a court with the 'right of the sword.' This would usually come to the village in question and hear the case on site. This indicates that everything was done in accordance with the law of the time.

SUMMARY

Did lynchings occur during witch hunts in Poland
between the 16th and 18th centuries?

In his synthesis *Witch Hunts in Poland in the 17th and 18th century* Bohdan Baranowski formulated a thesis that about 5,000 women accused of witchcraft lost their lives as a result of lynching executions which occurred primarily in rural areas. However, he did not provide specific source examples to support this thesis. The hypothesis entered the source literature nonetheless, and subsequent historians considered it a certainty. The analysis of the subject related the literature to date and the archival research, including the investigation of trials held in Gniezno in 1690, shows that lynchings hardly ever occurred in Poland. There were only two such cases, the first in 1720 in the town of Krasylów, the

second in the village of Osowo near Tuchola in 1779. The 'trial' conducted in Czerniewo in 1727, however, can be considered as an extrajudicial lynching; the perpetrators and adjudicators were consequently punished. Bohdan Baranowski's 1952 thesis was therefore rather unsubstantiated.

Keywords: Poland; modern times; witch trials; lynch

STRESZCZENIE

Czy w Polsce w trakcie polowania na czarownice w XVI–XVIII wieku dochodziło do samosądów?

W syntezie polowania na czarownice w Polsce w XVII–XVIII w. Bohdan Baranowski sformułował tezę, że około 5000 kobiet oskarżonych o bycie czarownicami straciło życie w wyniku samosądów, do których dochodziło przede wszystkim na wsiach. Na poparcie tej tezy nie przedstawił jednak konkretnych przykładów źródłowych. Mimo to hipoteza ta weszła do literatury przedmiotu i przez kolejnych historyków była traktowana jako pewnik. Analiza dotychczasowej literatury przedmiotu oraz kwerenda archiwalna, w tym sprawdzenie procesów przeprowadzonych w Gnieźnie w 1690 r., ukazują, że w Polsce praktycznie nie dochodziło do samosądów. Miały miejsce jedynie dwa takie przypadki, pierwszy w 1720 r. w miasteczku Krasifów, drugi we wsi Osowo koło Tucholi w 1779 r. Za lincz sądowy można natomiast uznać „proces” przeprowadzony w Czerniewie w 1727 r., którego sprawcy i sędziowie zostali ukarani. Teza Bohdana Baranowskiego z 1952 r. była całkiem nieuzasadniona źródłowo.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska; czasy wczesnonowożytne; procesy o czary; samosąd

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