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## THE LITTERATI BURGHERS IN POLISH LATE MEDIEVAL TOWNS\*

Questions concerning literacy are of fundamental significance in research on social and cultural history for it is impossible to analyse the mentality or consciousness of people in a given period without defining the knowledge possessed by them and the ways and forms in which they acquired it<sup>1</sup>. A dichotomous division into literates and illiterates is neither possible nor purposeful, for the group of literates includes those who can only sign their name as well as authors of historiographic or theological works<sup>2</sup>. The present study is an attempt to characterise the secular *litterati* (the term will be used to denote people capable of reading and

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<sup>1</sup> A. Wyczański, *Oświata a pozycja społeczna w Polsce XVI stulecia. Próba oceny umiejętności pisanja szlachty województwa krakowskiego w drugiej połowie XVI wieku (Education and Social Position in 16th Century Poland. A Tentative Evaluation of the Nobility's Literacy in Cracow Voivodship in the Second Half of the 16th Century)*, in: *Spoločzeństwo staropolskie*, vol. 1, ed. A. Wyczański, Warszawa 1976, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. Samsonowicz, *Środowiska społeczne piszące w Polsce u schyłku średniowiecza (The Writing Social Milieux in Poland at the End of the Middle Ages)*, in: *Pogranicza i konteksty literatury polskiego średniowiecza*, ed. T. Michałowska, Wrocław 1989, pp. 97-98; K. Skupieński, *O współudziale dyplomatyki w badaniu piśmiennej warstwy społeczeństwa średniowiecznego (The Use of Diplomatics in Studies on the Writing Strata of Medieval Society)*, in: *Venerabiles, nobiles et honesti*, Toruń 1997, pp. 529-530.

writing in Latin<sup>3</sup>) living in small towns, which dominated in medieval Poland, about 90 per cent of the urban population and some 10 per cent of the whole population of Poland living in localities inhabited by from 500 to 2,500 people<sup>4</sup>.

The oldest list of secular persons, including townspeople, who knew Latin is in the protocol of witnesses' evidence in Poland's legal action against the Teutonic Knights, held in 1339. Eighty-five lay persons (including 30 burghers and 52 knights) were then heard, of whom 11 were "educated" (7 burghers, 2 knights and 2 Piast dukes). This means that as early as the first half of the 14th century Latin was not unknown to Polish townsmen<sup>5</sup>. For obvious reasons literacy must have increased in the 15th century, a period of the greatest development of Polish towns. Since the law in force in towns was statute law, knowledge of Latin was advantageous and ensured respect and social prestige.

Polish historiography can boast a large number of studies concerning the intellectual level of society in the 16th century, but interest in the literacy of Polish medieval society has been relatively small. Research has been conducted into the level of education as well as the number and organisation of schools<sup>6</sup>, and attempts have been made to evaluate literacy on the basis of

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Bieniak, "Litterati" świeccy w procesie warszawskim z 1339 r. (*Secular "Litterati" in the Warsaw Legal Action of 1339*), in: "Cultus et cognito". Studia z dziejów średniowiecznej kultury, Warszawa 1976, pp. 97–106; I d e m, Środowisko świadków procesu polsko-krzyżackiego z 1339 r. (*The Milieu of the Witnesses in Poland's 1339 Legal Action against the Teutonic Knights*), in: *Genealogia, kręgi zawodowe i grupy interesu w Polsce średniowiecznej na tle porównawczym*, ed. J. Wroniszewski, Toruń 1989, p. 5; Z. Morawski, *Notariusze ziemscy w końcu XIV i XV stulecia (Country Notaries in the Late 14th and 15th Centuries)*, in: *Genealogia*, pp. 161–177.

<sup>4</sup> H. Samsonowicz, *Małe miasto w środkowej Europie późnego średniowiecza (Small Town in Late Medieval Central Europe)*, "Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych" 50, 1989, pp. 34–35.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bieniak, "Litterati" świeccy, pp. 97 ff.

<sup>6</sup> S. Kot, *Szkolnictwo parafialne w Małopolsce XVI–XVIII w. (Parish Schools in Little Poland in the 16th–18th Centuries)*, Lwów 1912; S. Tynec, *Szkolnictwo i wychowanie w Polsce XVI w. (Education and Upbringing in 16th Century Poland)*, in: *Kultura staropolska*, Kraków 1932; H. Barycz, *Dzieje nauki w epoce Odrodzenia (A History of Education during the Renaissance)*, Warszawa 1957; E. Wiśniewski, *Sieć szkół parafialnych w Wielkopolsce i Małopolsce w początkach XVI w. (The Network of Parish Schools in Great Poland and Little Poland in the Early 16th Century)*, "Roczniki Humanistyczne" 15, 1967, 2, pp. 85–127.

signatures on various documents<sup>7</sup>. The research conducted by Wacław Urban has shown that in the second half of the 16th century about 80 per cent of the townsmen and more than 30 per cent of the townswomen could write. However, this applies to the inhabitants of the Cracow urban conglomeration (Cracow, Kazimierz, Kleparz). The level of literacy was probably lower in localities distant from such a centre of intellectual culture as Cracow undoubtedly was, although research into the network of parish schools in Poland has shown that at the beginning of the 16th century some 90 per cent of the parishes had a school (Gniezno and Cracow archdioceses). Of course, we do not know anything about the connection between these figures and the results achieved. Scholars concerned with this question point out that school teaching did not always yield permanent results; moreover, schools were not the only institution in which the ability to read and write could be acquired<sup>8</sup>.

The main obstacle in research into literacy in Polish towns in the 15th century is the lack of sources. The only vast source material concerns parish schools. These are records, including printed ones, of ecclesiastical courts and 16th century records of bishops' inspections, as well as fiscal (taxation) documents. In analysing other questions we are restricted to single notices scattered in acts and documents, mainly in the books of aldermen and magistrates, municipal account books, records of brotherhoods and guilds. However, since the question is of great importance, it is worth undertaking such research.

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<sup>7</sup> A. Wyczański evaluated the nobility's ability to write on the basis of signatures on fiscal receipts, A. Wyczański, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Wacław Urban evaluated the nobility's and burghers' ability to write on the basis of draft records in town books, W. Urban, *Umiejętność pisania w Małopolsce w drugiej połowie XVI wieku (The Ability to Write in Little Poland in the Second Half of the 16th Century)*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 68, 1977, 2, pp. 231–257.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Ryś, *Szkołnictwo parafialne w miastach Małopolski w XV wieku (Parish Schools in the Towns of Little Poland in the 15th Century)*, Warszawa 1995, p. 50. In W. Urban's lists illustrating the history of parish schools there are frequent references to private lessons taken by burghers (children and adults); W. Urban, *Regesty do dziejów szkolnictwa parafialnego w pierwszej połowie XVI wieku. Z archiwum Kurii Metropolitarnej w Krakowie (Lists Illustrating the History of Parish Schools in the first Half of the 16th Century. From the Archives of the Metropolitan Curia in Cracow)*, "Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne" 66, 1996, Nos. 278, 420, 423, 481, 533, 580, 687, 796, 800.

My essay is based on the documentary legacy of towns described by the fiscal sources of that period as *civitates et oppida secundi ordinis* and *oppida habenti(a) fora annualia et septemalia* (second and third taxation categories)<sup>9</sup>. I have also made use of documents in possession of the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw which include municipal books of Sieradz, Szadek and Warta in Great Poland, Lanckorona and Ciężkowice in Little Poland, Mogielnica in Mazovia, Kowal and Przedeć in Kujawy<sup>10</sup>, as well as printed municipal books of Old and New Warsaw, Płock and of Wąwolnica in Lublin voievodship<sup>11</sup>. Most of these sources are books of law courts, of aldermen and magistrates, but it is worth drawing attention to fragments of the aldermen's account books from Szadek and Przedeć and to the books of the parish brotherhood of the Holy Virig in Warta and the magistrates' brotherhood of Old Warsaw<sup>12</sup>. My research has also encompassed documents issued by the municipal authorities, published and unpublished, as well as printed consistorial documents<sup>13</sup>.

In all probability parish schools existed in all towns in Poland in the second half of the 15th century. They were not only a place where education could be acquired, they were the most important place even in towns numbering 2,000–3,000 inhabitants, to say nothing of smaller localities<sup>14</sup>. It was not only burghers' sons who

<sup>9</sup> M. Bugucka, H. Samsonowicz, *Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce przedrozbiorowej (The History of Towns and Burghers in Pre-Partition Poland)*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1986, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> AGAD — Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (henceforward referred to as CAHR), Municipal Court Books, call numbers: Sieradz 1–2; Szadek 1; Warta 1; Kowal 1; Przedeć; CAHR, The Baworowski Library, call number 253 (Lanckorona); 263 (Mogielnica), 275 (Ciężkowice).

<sup>11</sup> *Księga radziecka miasta Starej Warszawy (The Aldermen's Book of the Town of Old Warsaw)*, vol. 1: 1447–1527, ed. A. Wolff, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1963; *Księga tawnicza miasta Nowej Warszawy (The Magistrates' Book of the Town of New Warsaw)*, vol. 1 (1416–1485), ed. A. Wolff, Wrocław 1960; *Księga ławnicza miasta Płocka 1489–1517 (The Magistrates' Book of the Town of Płock 1489–1517)*, ed. D. Poppe, Warszawa 1995; *Księgi sądowe miasta Wąwolnicy z lat 1476–1500 (Court Records of the Town of Wąwolnica from the Years 1476–1500)*, ed. G. Jawor, A. Sochacka, Lublin 1998.

<sup>12</sup> CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Warta 63; CAHR, Warta, call number 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Acta capitulorum Cracoviensis et Plocensis*, ed. B. Ulanowski, "Archiwum Komisji Historycznej", vol. 6, Kraków 1891; *Acta capitulorum nec non iudiciorum ecclesiarum selecta*, ed. B. Ulanowski, Monumenta Aevi Historica, vols 13, 16, 18, Kraków 1894–1908.

attended urban parish schools. Since each urban parish included at least several villages, the social or estate structure of a parish population was heterogeneous. A parish school was for the parishioners a place of their first, and frequently also their last, contact with the world of books and scholars<sup>15</sup>. The level of education differed, but at least in some schools the pupils were taught how to write letters, copy them and perhaps also how to edit official documents<sup>16</sup>. Scholars have frequently drawn attention to the large proportion of townsmen among the students of Cracow University. In the 15th century towns belonging to the second taxation category in Little Poland sent many students to Cracow: 57 students were from Bochnia, 41 from Biecz, 50 from Olkusz, 41 from Opatów and 39 from Szydłów. Towns of the third taxation category also sent a large number of students to Cracow: 10 were from Będzin, 4 from Częstochowa, only one from Chrzanów, 4 from Słomniki, 7 from Tuchów, 12 from Urzędów, as many as 60 from Tarnów and 5 from Lanckorona. Students from towns of the fourth taxation category were also in *alba studiosorum*. Sometimes the figures are quite impressive: 14 students were from Czchów, 51 from Wieliczka, but only 2 from Czeladź, 4 from Wadowice<sup>17</sup>. This means that the size of the town was not the decisive factor. The figures for the Sieradz region are slightly lower: 18 students were from Sieradz, 32 from Szadek, 26 from Warta, and as regards towns of the third taxation category, 17 came from Staw, 14 from Widawa, 10 from Uniejów and 8 from Dobra<sup>18</sup>. As regards small towns in Mazovia, Wyszogród and

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<sup>14</sup> According to Jan Ryś's latest calculations (for Little Poland) for towns with an average of 2,000 inhabitants, 40–50 boys attended parish school in towns of second taxation category, 20–30 in towns of third category, and up to 20 in towns of fourth category. J. Ryś, *op. cit.*, p. 50. These calculations seem however to be too optimistic, all the more so as the author has based them on research into the collegiate school at Sandomierz and on comparisons with attendance in Bohemian and French towns.

<sup>15</sup> J. Wiesiołowski, *Spoleczeństwo a książka w mieście polskim (Society and the Book in Polish Towns)*, "Studia Źródłoznawcze" 23, 1978, pp. 65–81.

<sup>16</sup> A. Karbowiak, *Szkoły parafialne w Polsce w XIII i XIV w. (Parish Schools in Poland in the 13th and 14th Centuries)*, "Rozprawy i sprawozdania Akademii Umiejętności, Wydział Filologiczny", vol. 25, 1897, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> For full lists of students from Little Poland's towns in 1400–1500 see J. Ryś, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–114.

<sup>18</sup> *Indeks studentów Uniwersytetu Krakowskiego w latach 1400–1500 (List of Students at Cracow University in 1400–1500)*, ed. J. Zathey, J. Relchan, Warszawa–Kraków–Wrocław–Gdańsk 1974, *passim*.

Czersk sent 13 persons each to Cracow, Gostynin 12, Mogielnica and Zakroczym sent 11 each, Liw sent 10<sup>19</sup>. The high level of parish schools is testified to not only by a large number of students from towns at Cracow University but also by a high proportion of notaries public from the burgher estate. According to Antoni Gąsiorowski, 45 per cent of all notaries active in the Gniezno archdiocese and Poznań diocese were from towns. They were born in 126 small and large towns in Poland, Mazovia and Silesia<sup>20</sup>.

The overwhelming majority of school pupils did not continue their education. Some of them fell back into illiteracy, others could read and write until the end of their lives. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine how big the latter group was. The ability to write was maintained by merchants, for they had to keep accounts, but they were not a large group in small towns, and also by municipal officials, the elders of guilds, magistrates, aldermen, administrators of churches and hospitals. This was quite a large group. In addition to municipal officials (as a rule five aldermen and seven magistrates), the municipal élite included guild elders (Sieradz had 10 at the end of the 15th century, for there were five guilds there; Warta had the same number)<sup>21</sup>.

In examining the question of secular *litterati* in towns, it is impossible to ignore the role played by municipal chancelleries and the books and documents produced by them. In towns, irrespective of their size, the work of chancelleries was linked to self-government, which was introduced when towns were founded on the basis of German law. The organisation of a chancellery was a necessity in order to deal with the problems of the inhabitants and to preserve municipal rights and privileges. The beginnings of municipal chancelleries have not been adequately researched for lack of sources. The oldest town books have survived in fragmentary form (e.g. the oldest fragments of the

<sup>19</sup> S. Pazyra, *Najstarszy opis Mazowsza Jędrzeja Święcickiego (Jędrzej Święcicki's Oldest Description of Mazovia)*, Warszawa 1974, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> A. Gąsiorowski, *Mieszczanie w notariacie publicznym późnośredniowiecznej Polski (Burghers in the Notarial Offices of Late Medieval Poland)*, in: *Czas, przestrzeń, praca w dawnych miastach. Studia ofiarowane Henrykowi Samsonowiczowi w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 343–344.

<sup>21</sup> CAHR, *Municipal Court Books*, call number Sieradz 2, l. 33; A. Bartoszewicz, *Warta — społeczeństwo miasta w II połowie XV i na początku XVI w. (Warta — The Town's Community in the Late 15th and Early 16th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 107–110.

Szadek aldermen's book are from 1401); it can however be assumed that chancelleries which issued sealed documents functioned from the incorporation of towns. Traces of the work of the municipal chancellery in Poznań go back to the second half of the 13th century. The oldest document issued by municipal authorities comes from 1288 and is authenticated by two seals, a seal of the hereditary bailiff and one of the municipal council. The oldest chancellery forms also come from the 13th century. In the second half of the 13th century Kalisz too had a municipal chancellery. The municipal scribe of Kalisz is mentioned in a document issued by Przemysł II in 1280. As regards smaller towns in Great Poland, Słupca, Pyzdry and Inowrocław had their own scribes from the beginning of the 14th century<sup>22</sup>. In the 14th century municipal chancelleries in Konin, Bochnia, Wieluń, Olkusz and Brzeźnica issued documents authenticated by seals<sup>23</sup>. There is not a shadow of a doubt that the towns founded on the basis of German law in the 15th and 16th centuries organised their own chancelleries as soon as they were incorporated<sup>24</sup>. Since parchment was very expensive at that time, it was used only for important documents and the most important books. The use of paper began to spread slowly from the middle of the 14th century, but paper was imported until the end of the 15th century. Wax tablets were widely used but very few notes and accounts recorded on them have survived<sup>25</sup>. In smaller towns the chancellery was, alongside the parish school, a centre of intellectual culture. If therefore we want to determine the intellectual level and education of burghers, we must know who the municipal scribes were and what role they played in their community.

<sup>22</sup> I. Radke, *Kancelaria miasta Poznania do roku 1570 (The Chancellery of the Town of Poznań up to 1570)*, Warszawa 1967, pp. 20–23; *Kodeks Dyplomatyczny Wielkopolski (Great Poland's Diplomatic Code)*, ed. I. Zakrzewski, Poznań 1877 (henceforward referred to as *GPDC*), vol. 1, N° 498; *GPDC*, vol. 2, Nos. 836, 844, 957, 1006, 1200, 1281.

<sup>23</sup> CAHR, Parchment Documents, Nos. 3340, 3389, 4989, 6499; *Zbiór dokumentów małopolskich (Collected Documents from Little Poland)*, ed. S. Kuraś, vol. 1, Wrocław 1962, Nos. 162, 180.

<sup>24</sup> I. Radke, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 ff.

<sup>25</sup> For the use of wax tablets in municipal chancelleries see: T. Jasiński, *Tabliczki woskowe w kancelariach miast Pomorza Nadwiślańskiego (Wax Tablets in the Chancelleries of Towns in Vistula Pomerania)*, Poznań 1991, pp. 44–69 and 265–319; cf. also *Tabliczki woskowe miasta Torunia, ok. 1350–I połowa XVI w. (Wax Tablets in the Town of Toruń, ca. 1350–First Half of the 16th Century)*, ed. K. Górski, W. Szczuczko, Toruń 1980.

A chancellor (consisting of one person in smaller towns) kept records of the work of the council headed by the mayor, and of the magistrates' bench, headed by the bailiff. Both the magistrates' bench and the council performed the role of a law court, and their competence was not divided in practice<sup>26</sup>. The council also performed administrative functions, for instance, control over financial matters, admission of new burghers, care of widows and orphans, and representation of the town before the monarch, the bishop and ecclesiastical court, as well as basic archival functions (safekeeping of municipal documents). Thus, the chancellor and the scribe who ran it played an important role. It has been generally assumed in literature that the entries in municipal books were made only by scribes who participated in court proceedings, during which they made notes which served them as a basis for entries in municipal books. Municipal scribes also drew up various documents (e.g. last wills) and contracts which were registered in respective books. Moreover, they wrote out extracts and documents of a testimonial character. The scribes also kept municipal accounts. A 16th century source mentions that scribes read materials concerning the case to the sides<sup>27</sup>. Scribes also took part in legations sent by municipal authorities to rulers and to other towns. They also represented municipal authorities on other occasions. *Magister Petrus notarius civitatis Gneznensis* represented the aldermen, the mayor and the administrators of the church of the Holy Trinity before the Gniezno consistorial court<sup>28</sup>. On behalf of the authorities of Kościan alderman Urban and *notarius civitatis* Stanisław made statements before the Poznań ecclesiastical court in the case of a clergyman accused of arson<sup>29</sup>.

However, were all entries in municipal books really written by scribes? The shape of letters provides information about the general stylistic traits of a scribe's writing<sup>30</sup>. On the basis of such

<sup>26</sup> This subject has been recently discussed by J. Łosowski, *Kancelarie miast szlacheckich województwa lubelskiego od XV do XVIII wieku (Chancelleries of Noblemen's Towns in Lublin Voivodship from the 15th to the 18th Century)*, Lublin 1997, pp. 30–38.

<sup>27</sup> J. Łosowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 47–55.

<sup>28</sup> *Acta capitulorum nec non iudiciorum*, vol. 16, № 526 (for the year 1455).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, № 1583.

<sup>30</sup> K. Bobowski, *O metodach identyfikacji rąk pisarskich w rękopisach średnio-wiecznych (The Methods of Identifying Handwriting in Medieval Manuscripts)*,



graphic properties as line quality, slant of letters (a greater slant denotes quicker writing), their size and legibility we can approximately determine the level of education of scribes. A scribe's skill can also be evaluated by an analysis of the form of the entries, their orthography and his knowledge of brachygraphy. Such an analysis can yield interesting results. In the municipal books of New Warsaw Adam Wolff has distinguished a large number of occasional scribes, alongside the municipal ones. In the space of 70 years 140 persons made entries in the book. Most of them were inept scribes who used incorrect Latin, formulated their notes wrongly and made linguistic, stylistic and orthographic errors<sup>31</sup>. According to Henryk Samsonowicz, the book of the bailiff of Sieradz from 1432 contains entries made by at least five different persons and the book from 1444 has entries made by nine persons<sup>32</sup>. The presence of such occasional hands can be found in all municipal books. Some books were kept by persons who changed a few or even a dozen times in a year. The aldemens' book of the town of Kowal for the years 1429–1430 contains 37 entries made by four persons. One of them made 23 entries, another eight, the third five, and the fourth only one. The same book for the years 1460–1466 has 94 entries. An analysis of the handwriting has distinguished 25 hands, only one of them making entries, a total of 19, throughout that period. The handwriting of one scribe occurs 12 times, of another 10 times. The other 22 handwritings seem to have been accidental<sup>33</sup>. Among the scribes who kept the council book of Kowal were persons who used the pen skilfully as well as some who had little to do with chancellery work. One of the entries, consisting of but one sentence, contains obvious grammatical errors and is written in large unconnected letters (a long "s" is 9 mm long)<sup>34</sup>. Some scribes found it difficult to note the day of the month, some noted only the year, and one scribe noted only the day of the week without any additional qualification. The fact that many persons wrote

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"Studia Źródłoznawcze" 29, 1985, pp. 1–4.

<sup>31</sup> *Księga ławnicza miasta Nowej Warszawy (The Magistrates' Book of the Town of New Warsaw)*, vol. 1416–1485, ed. A. Wolff, Wrocław 1960, p. XVI.

<sup>32</sup> H. Samsonowicz, *Z badań nad kancelarią małych miast w Polsce XV wieku (Research on the Chancelleries of Small Towns in 15th Century Poland)*, "Miscellanea Historico-Archivistica", vol. 1, 1985, pp. 243–259.

<sup>33</sup> CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Kowal 1, l. 1–6, 145–178.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, l. 166.

entries in municipal books is understandable, for the municipal authorities employed scribes for a relatively short time. A contract signed by a scribe of Bielsko in Mazovia in 1504 has survived. The bailiff of Bielsko, Jakub Ospa, concluded it with Stanisław of Dąbrówka, a teacher of the parish school at Zakroczym, for a period of one year; the contract is entered in the Zakroczym country books<sup>35</sup>. This explanation is however inadequate for in many court books several hands can be distinguished within the space of one year and sometimes (as in the case of Ciężkowice) 2–3 persons made notes during the same sitting of the court. Small towns certainly did not have a large chancellery staff. H. Samsonowicz has suggested that all members of the municipal authorities may have been able to write and may have written records in turn<sup>36</sup>. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that a well preserved Sieradz council book from the mid-15th century (written by constantly changing persons), a book containing the accounts of the municipal council, does not mention any payment to the municipal scribe, even though the book contains accounts with the local shepherd. Łódź, a small town in the 15th century, may have had no permanent scribe; it only had a combined court consisting of the mayor, the bailiff, the aldermen and the magistrates, who examined no more than 10 cases a year<sup>37</sup>.

Entires made by occasional hands can also be found in books kept by professional scribes. At the end of the 15th century Wąwolnica had a scribe, Wojciech, called Wojtaś, described as *notarius* or *notarius de civitate*, but in addition to the entries written by him, the book contains notes by other hands. They were probably made by municipal officials; besides, Wojtaś was not only a scribe but also a magistrate<sup>38</sup>. It can be assumed that aldermen or magistrates frequently made draft notes on the basis of which the entries were made later. The book of persons granted the citizenship of Old Warsaw, which was a fair copy kept as a rule by scribes employed by the municipal authorities, features the following note next to the first name and surname of a newly admitted citizen: *in absentia mei [notarii] Petrus aromatarius*

<sup>35</sup> *Księga ławnicza miasta Nowej Warszawy*, p. XVII.

<sup>36</sup> H. Samsonowicz, *Z badań nad kancelarią*, pp. 243–259.

<sup>37</sup> CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Łódź 1. For more details about combined courts see J. Łosowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–29.

<sup>38</sup> *Księgi sądowe miasta Wąwolnicy*, p. 13.

*fideiussores non notavit*<sup>39</sup>. A normal form for persons granted citizenship included such data as the first name and surname of the new burgher, the Christian names of his parents and the surnames of the burghers standing surety for him. The Warsaw alderman Piotr *aromatarius* who substituted for the absent scribe obviously did not pay attention to these rules.

However, the role of municipal scribes should not be underestimated. In the 15th and 16th centuries most of them were lay persons, but there were exceptions to this rule, e.g. in the second half of the 15th century the Poznań council employed only clergymen as scribes<sup>40</sup>. Clergymen who taught in parish schools were also employed. The scribes in royal towns were elected by the town's council, in private towns they were nominated by the owner or his representative<sup>41</sup>. The majority of 15th and early 16th century municipal scribes are unfortunately unknown. Research on chancellery staffs in larger towns has shown that some of the scribes belonged to the intellectual élite of those days. In Cracow the office of municipal scribe was a prestigious position; this function was performed, among others, by a doctor of the liberal arts of Paris University, Walerian Pernus. In Lublin the post was held by the poet Sebastian Klonowic and by Jerzy Lemka<sup>42</sup>, doctor of laws. In Kazimierz near Cracow the function was performed by Mikołaj, Master of Arts, and after him by Jan, also a Master of Arts, who is identified with Jan Orient, dean of the *artium* faculty of Cracow University in 1427–1430, a graduate of Charles IV's University in Prague. The most eminent scribe in Kazimierz in the third decade of the 15th century was Jan de Ludziczko, rector of the parish school at the church of Corpus Christi, most probably identical with Jan of Ludzisko, a precursor of Polish humanism. He was succeeded by Kacper, who had the

<sup>39</sup> *Album civium Civitatis Antiquae Varsoviae. Księga przyjęć do prawa miejskiego Starej Warszawy 1506–1586*, ed. A. Bartoszewicz, Warszawa 2000, N<sup>o</sup> 472.

<sup>40</sup> I. Radke, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 ff.

<sup>41</sup> S. Pazyra, *Geneza i rozwój miast mazowieckich (The Genesis and Development of Mazovian Towns)*, Warszawa 1959, p. 289; J. Łosowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 191–192.

<sup>42</sup> M. Friedberg, *Kancelaria miasta Krakowa do połowy XVIII wieku (The Chancellery of the Town of Cracow up to the Middle of the 18th Century)*, "Archeion" 24, 1955, p. 290; J. Łosowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 200–201.

title of bachelor of *artium*<sup>43</sup>. Small towns could not afford to have such highly educated scribes, but some of the persons they employed had a university education, eg. Jan Warta, a scribe at Koło, active in the first half of the 16th century, was a bachelor of the liberal arts<sup>44</sup>. Educated persons recruited from among notaries public can also be found among 15th century municipal scribes in smaller towns. The majority of notaries public linked their career to large chancelleries and the Church. Krzysztof Skupieński's recent studies show, however, that notaries were also employed as teachers in parish schools, not only in large towns (Cracow, Lwów, Lublin) but also in very small localities, such as Śmigiel in Great Poland<sup>45</sup>. The role of notaries public in municipal chancelleries in small localities has not yet been researched, but their presence has been confirmed by peremptory research. For instance, two scribes who kept the magistrates' book of Płock at the end of the 15th century, Jan, son of Franciszek from Proszowice, and Wojciech, son of Jakub from Gorzkowice, were notaries public *sacra et imperialis auctoritate*. It can be assumed that the notaries public employed as municipal scribes came from the group of *clerici conjugati*, that is, notaries who did not take orders but set up a family and, consequently, had no access to an ecclesiastical career. The Płock magistrates' book contains some details concerning the life of the municipal scribe, Jan of Proszowice, a notary. The notes made by him go down to 5.12.1497. He died soon afterwards, for he is mentioned as dead on 10.2.1498, when the father of his first wife, Wojciech Białykoń, a burgher from Łęczyca, demanded that Jan's second wife, Dorota, turn over a part of the property left by Jan to Jan's son by his first marriage<sup>46</sup>.

The municipal authorities and the whole community were interested in having a competent, educated scribe. One of the tasks of a municipal chancellery was to supply the authorities with legal texts normalising life in the town. It was the scribe's duty to

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<sup>43</sup> W. Korta, *Rola kulturalna średniowiecznej kancelarii (The Cultural Role of Medieval Chancelleries)*, in: *Studia z dziejów kultury i ideologii*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1968, pp. 67-68.

<sup>44</sup> CAHR, *Municipal Court Books*, Koło, 1. 20.

<sup>45</sup> K. Skupieński, *Notariat publiczny w średniowiecznej Polsce (Notaries Public in Medieval Poland)*, Lublin 1997, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> *Księga ławnicza miasta Płocka (The Magistrates' Book of the Town of Płock)*, № 91.

popularise the norms of German Law. As early as the middle of the 14th century, Konrad, a scribe of Sandomierz, translated a collection of Magdeburg laws from German into Latin at the request of a Sandomierz burgher, Mikołaj, who was bailiff at Pacanów<sup>47</sup>. We know that the scribes of Toruń and Cracow worked out compilations of legal codes and instructions which were very popular with burghers.

A municipal scribe's level of education depended not only on the size of the town in which he worked. The books of very small towns which were situated near important centres of cultural and intellectual life were decidedly kept with greater care than the books of towns remote from Cracow and from episcopal sees which attracted educated people and provided a solid education in cathedral and parish schools. The books of Lanckorona, Olkusz and Bochnia were well kept. The situation was a little worse in Mazovia. The work of Old Warsaw's chancellery was on a good level. Of over a dozen scribes who kept the Płock magistrates' book for a longer period of time, only one had low qualifications; he notoriously formulated the notes ineptly and could not write properly<sup>48</sup>. The books of smaller towns in Mazovia (Różan, Mogielnica, New Warsaw) were as a rule kept by rather inexperienced hands, as a result of which the forms of entries are rather primitive. The same can be said about Warta, Szadek and Sieradz, where very few of the many entries display a good technique of writing and where the form is as a rule simple, confined to basic information about a case.

The municipal authorities did not pay large sums to the scribes. The payment depended, of course, on the size of the town. In Cracow a municipal scribe was paid 6 marks for three months, in Poznań 4 marks<sup>49</sup>. In Przedecz a scribe received from 1 to 3 groschen per three months, a sum that *domini in pretorio* spent on beer. The Przedecz accounts have unfortunately survived from only two years (1472–1473); in that time 2 groschen were spent on parchment (at Michaelmas 1472)<sup>50</sup>. The municipal council of Szadek paid a little more to its scribe; on Ascension Day he was

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<sup>47</sup> W. Korta, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> *Księga ławnicza miasta Płocka*, p. VIII.

<sup>49</sup> I. Radke, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> CAHR, call number Przedecz.

given half a mark (24 groschen)<sup>51</sup>. The salary of the scribe in Bielsko (Mazovia) was very high. In 1504 he is said to have received 240 groschen, accommodation and maintenance for himself and his horse for a year's work<sup>52</sup>. The scribes also received payment from the sides in court proceedings and, in large towns, gifts from guilds<sup>53</sup>. The income of scribes was modest but in small towns they did not have many duties. In Mogielnica a session of the law court (made up of aldermen and magistrates) was held about a dozen times a year, and during these sessions the scribe seldom made more than one or two entries<sup>54</sup>. The situation in larger towns was different. In the books of Szadek magistrates 30 to 80 entries were made every year (in 1430–1436 and 1449–1452)<sup>55</sup>; in Sieradz 60–70 entries a year (1437–1450)<sup>56</sup>. In Warta, a slightly smaller town, 20–30 cases a year were described in the magistrates' book (in the 1490s)<sup>57</sup>. All these towns also had aldermen's books with notes about the cases examined by the council.

The salary paid by the municipal authorities was not the only income of the scribes. Some of them taught in parish schools. They also earned money by copying books, legal manuscripts, schoolbooks and theological works. There was a demand for this type of work not only in large towns. In 1415 Stanisław, Jakub's son, a municipal scribe at Busko, copied a codex with sermons by Łukasz of Koźmin for a canon; Falisław, a municipal scribe at Łomża, was to copy the whole Bible for a vicar from Ostrołęka and was to receive a stack of rye and 25 groschen for this work; Paweł, a municipal scribe of New Town in the Płock diocese, promised to copy the Bible for a vicar in Pałuki<sup>58</sup>. Many municipal

<sup>51</sup> CAHR, call number Szadek 1, l. 167–168 (Szadek aldermen's accounts from the years 1476–1480).

<sup>52</sup> *Księga lawnicza miasta Nowej Warszawy (Magistrates' Book of the Town of New Warsaw)*, pp. XVII–XVIII.

<sup>53</sup> In Poznań the council's scribe received a fruit and nut loaf from the bakers' guild on New Year's Day, half a calf from the butchers at Easter, a gallon of wine from the barkeepers at Whitsun, I. Radke, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> CAHR, Baworowski Library, call number 253, l. 1–7.

<sup>55</sup> CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Szadek 1, *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Sieradz 1, *passim*.

<sup>57</sup> CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Warta 1, *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> E. Potkowski, *Książka w mieście polskim XV w. (The Book in Polish Towns in the 15th Century)*, in: *Czas, przestrzeń, praca*, pp. 269–270.

clerks had more prosaic sources of income: tillage, handicrafts, usury. *Nicolaus aurifaber notarius civitatis* is mentioned in the accounts of the magistrates' brotherhood of Old Warsaw in the years 1453–1462<sup>59</sup>. Cyryl, another scribe in Old Warsaw at the turn of the 15th century, who had previously been municipal scribe in Wilno, owned several houses and squares in the town<sup>60</sup>. Piotr Brzunimski, a scribe at Mogielnica, had a garden in the town<sup>61</sup>. References to the financial status of municipal scribes, though not very numerous, indicate that they were well-to-do people and frequently belonged to the financial and power élite. The daughter of Warsaw's scribe Cyryl married alderman Mikołaj Gocz; Cyril's son took orders. Warsaw's well known aldermen, Jerzy Baryczka and Jan Szeliga, were executors of Cyril's last will<sup>62</sup>. Marusza, the wife of another scribe of Old Warsaw, Andrzej Zaleski, was rich enough to bequeath 6,480 groschen to her daughters<sup>63</sup>. Let us add that small towns frequently employed descendants and nearest relatives of municipal officials or former municipal officials as scribes<sup>64</sup>.

Historiography and chronicle writing was a field of the scribes' activity that has been seldom referred to. Municipal authorities sometimes entrusted scribes with this task. This is how the chronicle of Poznań came to be written in the city's aldermen's book. The first note, made in 1417 by Bernard of Pyzdry, concerned the foundation of the city in 1253; Bernard's successors at first confined themselves to recording their accession to the office. The notes made in the 16th century concern the fires, epidemics and floods which ravaged the city and also events in the royal family (weddings, coronations, births, deaths), changes in the post of starost general and in the Poznań episcopal see<sup>65</sup>. The descriptions of uncommon events were usually not made from a sense of duty but from the scribe's need to convey

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<sup>59</sup> CAHR, *Rachunki bractwa ławniczego Starej Warszawy* (*Accounts of the Magistrates' Brotherhood of Old Warsaw*), *Varia*, call number 26, *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> *Księga radziecka miasta Starej Warszawy* (*The Aldermen's Book of the Town of Old Warsaw*), Nos. 1234, 805, 927, 635, 437, 405, 348, 1230.

<sup>61</sup> CAHR, Baworowski Library, call number 263, l. 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Księga radziecka miasta Starej Warszawy*, N<sup>o</sup> 1224.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, N<sup>o</sup> 1012.

<sup>64</sup> J. Łosowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–197.

<sup>65</sup> W. Korta, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

information about important events to posterity. Since, as a rule, the scribes wrote about contemporary events, their notes are of great documentary value. There are several notes inside the front cover of the oldest extant Warsaw aldermen's book. The first concerns the birth of Duke Konrad of Mazovia on the Monday before *Rogationum* Sunday 1501 (May 10); the second speaks of the death of Duke Stanisław in 1524. Inside the back cover are notes about fires in the city in 1480, 1515, 1544 and 1607, and yet another note about the death of Duke Stanisław<sup>66</sup>. In Łekno the council or the municipal clerk had a codex with legal and medical texts at the end of which are notes from the city's history; they concern mainly epidemics and the resulting deaths<sup>67</sup>.

The ability to read and write was a necessity if one lived and worked in a city. German law was a statute law. In the collective life of urban societies an important role was played by texts received from the outside and by all texts produced by the municipal authorities. A city's life was regulated by privileges set down in writing. The burghers' vocational and family matters, purchases and sales, loans and pledges, marriage portions and dowries, property division and care of orphans, were all put down in municipal books. From the second half of the 15th century it was an increasingly frequent practice among burghers to write their last wills. In 1485–1512 nearly 400 persons appeared before the Warta court, composed of the bailiff and magistrates, mostly as sides in various cases<sup>68</sup>. The town had then 1200–1500 inhabitants. This means that nearly every adult burgher had at least one contact with the court. The more active, richer burghers had more frequent contacts with writing. Some of them bought, sold, borrowed or lent something several times a year, which means that they had contact with court records. The burghers who changed their place of residence, a frequent occurrence, received a written certificate of their descent from the municipal council. Only a person who presented a *littera bonis originis* to the council and the guild authorities could be granted freedom of the city (or be admitted to a guild). Documents of this kind have

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<sup>66</sup> *Księga radziecka miasta Starej Warszawy*, p. VII.

<sup>67</sup> E. Potkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 271; J. Zathey, *Katalog rękopisów średnio-wiecznych Biblioteki Kórnickiej (Catalogue of Medieval Manuscripts of the Kórnik Library)*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1963, p. 442.

<sup>68</sup> A. Bartoszewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26; 73–89, 113–116.



survived mainly, but not solely, in guild records. The aldermen's book of Lanckorona contains a document issued by the mayor and council of the town of Frysztak for Maciej, a shoemaker, confirming his legitimacy and membership of the guild of shoemakers<sup>69</sup>. The aldermen's book of Old Warsaw from the first half of the 16th century contains notes about documents obtained by burghers, among them a certificate *magistorum frenifit-cum civitatis Kralove Grody* in Bohemia issued for Mikołaj Gocz (1528). Documents confirming burghers' citizenship were issued by the authorities, whenever the town was granted some privileges<sup>70</sup>. The documents exempted travelling merchants from custom duties. It was worth while for burghers to learn to read, write and, above all, to count. This was an essential ability, as is proved by the rapid replacement of Roman numerals, difficult in even simple calculations, by Arabic ones<sup>71</sup>. Many notes in documents indicate that the burghers realised the importance of writing and the role of court records. For instance, in Ciężkowice the brothers Stanisław and Wojciech sued their relative Dominik in 1455 because he had not given them their rightful part of a bequest, *quod stat in libro seu in inscripttone*<sup>72</sup>. In 1457, Tomasz, a burgher of New Warsaw, sued another burgher, Paweł, *pro rebus, quos (!) habet in libro civitatis*<sup>73</sup>.

The second half of the 15th century seems to have been a period in which the number of literate burghers rose very quickly. Edward Potkowski's research has shown that radical religious writings were popular in small Polish towns in the 15th century<sup>74</sup>. They were read, copied and circulated, as we know from cases held before ecclesiastical courts. A notice about books of magic in possession of a burgher from Ciechanów has survived<sup>75</sup>. As a result of the development of parish schools and the

<sup>69</sup> CAHR, Baworowski Library, call number 253, l. 138v-139.

<sup>70</sup> CAHR, Old Warsaw, call number 2, l. 9-9v, similar entries: *ibidem*, l. 17v (1529), l. 32 (1530); I. Radke, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>71</sup> H. Samsonowicz, *Nowe wartości w kulturze średniowiecznej miast polskich (New Values in Polish Towns' Medieval Culture)*, "Zeszyty Historyczne" 39, 1974, 2, p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> CAHR, Baworowski Library, call number 275, l. 104v.

<sup>73</sup> *The Magistrates' Book of the Town of New Warsaw*, № 414.

<sup>74</sup> Texts of this kind were possessed by, among others, Mikołaj Grunberg, mayor of Zbąszyń (1453), and Jan, a burgher from Bolimów. E. Potkowski, *Książka rękopiśmienna w kulturze Polski średniowiecznej (The Handwritten Book in the Culture of Medieval Poland)*, Warszawa 1984, pp. 210-211.

growing demand for persons able to read and write, the percentage of literate burghers was very high a hundred years later.

The records entitled *Regestrum confratrum Beatissime Virginis Marie* are an interesting testimony to the role and presence of secular *litterati* in small towns. This is a small fragment of a book of accounts of the parish brotherhood from the town of Warta from the years 1496–1502<sup>76</sup>. Brotherhoods of this type functioned in nearly all urban parishes in the late Middle Ages<sup>77</sup>. Their form was not restricted by any rules or statutes. Their task was to embrace the largest possible number of the faithful. Everybody, whatever his age, gender, social descent or estate, could join a parish brotherhood. He had only to pay an entrance fee<sup>78</sup>. The Warta brotherhood was of a specific character for in addition to the town, the parish also included 17 villages; the result was that not only burghers but also peasants and representatives of the nobility belonged to the brotherhood. Among the 142 members mentioned in the source nearly a half (69) were women, which was also a typical feature. The strong position of women can be seen in the statistics of all brotherhoods.

Particularly interesting in the surviving fragment of the register are the entries from the years 1500–1502 in which the brotherhood members are divided into *litterati* and *seculares*, but there are also lay persons among the *litterati*. A comparison of data from the brotherhood's register with the magistrates' and bailiff's book from the same period will tell us more about Warta's secular *litterati*. The entry from 1500 concerns 65 persons, nine of them belonged to the group of *litterati* and they were all lay persons. A year later the brotherhood had 79 members, of whom 15 knew Latin, 11 of them being lay persons. A fragment of an

<sup>75</sup> E. Potkowski, *Książka w mieście polskim*, pp. 274–275.

<sup>76</sup> CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Warta 63.

<sup>77</sup> H. Zaremska, *Bractwa w średniowiecznym Krakowie. Studium form społecznych życia religijnego (Brotherhoods in Medieval Cracow. A Study in the Social Forms of Religious Life)*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1977, pp. 44–45. Late 15th century references to analogous brotherhoods in Szadek and Sieradz, towns in the vicinity of Warta, have survived; CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Szadek 1, l. 556–557 (1488); Sieradz 2, l. 14 (1483); the oldest reference to a parish brotherhood in Warta is from 1484. CAHR, Municipal Court Books, call number Warta 1, l. 33–34.

<sup>78</sup> I. Czarciniński, *Bractwa w wielkich miastach państwa krzyżackiego w średniowieczu (Brotherhoods in Large Towns of the Teutonic Knights' State in the Middle Ages)*, Toruń 1993, p. 72; H. Zaremska, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

entry for 1502 provides information on nine *litterati*. This means that about 15 per cent of the members of the Warta parish brotherhood knew Latin. The proportions will however be different if we consider only the group of literates, that is noblemen and burghers, and leave out women, domestic servants and people from the social fringe (beggars). As has been mentioned above, the brotherhood had nine secular *litterati* in 1500. With the exception of the bailiff, they were all burghers of Warta. Some of them are mentioned in the book of the bailiff and magistrates. Among them are town officials, an elder of the butcher's guild, Jakub, son of the bailiff of Warta, the town's alderman Józef from Szadek, the merchant Mikołaj Wrząsk, the magistrate and alderman Urban *pellifex*. Marcin (*carnifex*), Jan (*balneator*) and Szymek (*carpentarius*) also knew Latin. The group of *seculares* included 15 burghers. A noble *litteratus*, the already mentioned bailiff Paweł, belonged to the brotherhood in 1500. The other *nobiles* were included in the group of *seculares*. A year later the group of *litterati* had 11 lay persons, Jan Bykata, a magistrate, and Mikołaj Rydułtowski, a nobleman, having joined the group. The group of *seculares* had 19 burghers and 8 noblemen. This means that about 30 per cent of the burghers who belonged to the brotherhood knew Latin. They were all well-to-do burghers; some of them were municipal officials. However, the same source shows that some of the Warta aldermen and magistrates could neither read nor write, in any case not in Latin. The group of *seculares* had 4 magistrates (Tomasz Pieczko, Jakub Kępiński, Maciej Mella and Maciej Królik, a blacksmith), one alderman (Maciej Placha) and the alderman who was mayor and owned a part of the Warta region, Maciej Warzymięso.

We do not know if the Warta data are representative of other towns. It seems, however, that there were no essential differences in education between burghers. In the 15th and early 16th centuries the inhabitants of small towns, especially their élites, were extremely mobile<sup>79</sup>. The Warta register must present a fairly typical situation. Latin was known by about a dozen burghers, the bailiff, a nobleman from the environs of a given town, and by clergymen, of course. These people formed a small town élite which consisted of petty noblemen, the clergy, well-to-do bur-

<sup>79</sup> H. Samsonowicz, *Środowiska społeczne pisałące w Polsce*, pp. 102–103.

ghers and sometimes also the richest peasants. They had property in the countryside and in town. They cannot be identified with any social group. Historical sources frequently provide information on families whose members belonged to different estates: a burgher could, for instance, have a brother who was a priest, his wife could be a noblewoman and his sister a peasant woman. There were inquisitive readers even in small towns. There are many references in literature to a burgher of Łomża, Żołądek, who accused the local vicar of not knowing the *Scriptures*<sup>80</sup>.

Another question is how many literates in Polish towns did not know Latin and thus do not fall under our definition of *litterati*. A law of 1543 recognised the Polish language as equal to Latin in all chancelleries<sup>81</sup>. In the middle of the 16th century the Polish language began to dominate in the books and documents of all chancelleries in small towns. Notes in Polish were made there earlier and the Polish language was more widely used than in the chancelleries of large towns<sup>82</sup>. Polish words can be found in court records much earlier. The words of oaths taken in courts were recorded in Polish and so were the words concerning land and farming (*frumentis inseminatis alias y sz oszymią, vaccam alias krową yalową, in meta alias na myedzy*)<sup>83</sup>, money translations (*na zaszhavye*)<sup>84</sup>, family relations (*levrum alias dzyevyera*)<sup>85</sup>, court proceedings (*inculpaverat alias obvynyl*)<sup>86</sup>, feasts (*festum Trium Regum alias Szczodrego dnya, a festo Purificationis Mariae alias od gromnych do gromnych*)<sup>87</sup>, and also first names if their Latin version differed from the one used daily ("Clemens alias Clysz", "Margaretha alias Machna")<sup>88</sup>. 15th century municipal books also contain notes written fully in Polish, but these are rare. Most probably a scribe's knowledge of Latin was so poor that

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 103.

<sup>81</sup> *Volumina Legum*, vol. 1, Petersburg 1860; cf. also J. Słowiński, *Rozwój pisma łacińskiego w Polsce XVI–XVIII wieku (The Development of Latin Script in Poland from the 16th to the 18th Century)*, Lublin 1992, p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. J. Słowiński's studies on Lublin and towns in the Lublin region, J. Słowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 20, fn 5.

<sup>83</sup> Court records of the town of Wąwolnica, Nos. 222, 225, 104.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, N° 225.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, N° 243.

<sup>86</sup> CAHR, Baworowski Library, call number 275, l. 118v.

<sup>87</sup> Court records of the town of Wąwolnica, Nos. 165, 167, 168, 201.

<sup>88</sup> CAHR, Baworowski Library, call number 275, l. 103.

he had to write in Polish. The magistrates' book of New Warsaw contains one note from 1430 written fully in Polish and two notes from 1432 in which Polish predominates<sup>89</sup>. Two notes in Polish in the magistrates' book of Lanckorona come from 1504<sup>90</sup>.

Some surviving notes prove convincingly that various writings in Polish had quite a large number of readers among the inhabitants of even small towns. Among them are records of a trial held before the Gniezno consistory in 1455 against Stanisław, teacher of a parish school at Pakość. He was accused of possessing *epistolae dominicales et Ewangelia in vulgari scripta* and texts concerning indulgences. The investigation revealed that these books had been copied by pupils of the parish school and then kept and borrowed (this means that they must have been read) by neighbouring nobles and bueghers. In addition to clergymen, evidence was given in the court by "Johannes *pellifex*", "domina Myelenska", "Paszkowa de Pakost", "Andreas *molendinator*" and "domina Opporowska"<sup>91</sup>.

In addition to the Bible and apocryphal texts, people must have also read other Polish texts, from the best known prayers (let us recall that the first printed copies of Hail Mary, Our Father and Confiteor in Polish date from 1475) to useful writings, such as Latin-Polish dictionaries of German law, court judgements and mnemonic systems of reckoning dates called *ctzjojans*<sup>92</sup>.

It is extremely difficult to say whether the group of secular *litterati* in late medieval Polish towns included women. As Andrzej Wydziański has shown, about 25 per cent of patrician women and 12 per cent of women belonging to the group of commoners could at least sign their name in the second half of the 16th century. There must have been literate townswomen even earlier. This is testified to by the presence of women in the trial concerning heretical books at Pakość: women, too, were among the borrowers there.

Knowledge of other languages than Polish and Latin is a question which requires further research. Whereas small towns

<sup>89</sup> *The Magistrates' Book of the Town of New Warsaw*, p. XVIII.

<sup>90</sup> CAHR, Baworowski Library, call number 253, l. 43.

<sup>91</sup> *Acta capitulorum nec non iudictorum*, vol. 16, № 524.

<sup>92</sup> S. Vrtel-Wierczyński, *Wybór tekstów staropolskich. Czasy najdawniejsze do roku 1543 (Selected Old Polish Texts. From the Earliest Times to 1543)*, Warszawa 1977, pp. 49-51 (daily prayers), pp. 116-122 (Magdeburg judgments and articles of Magdeburg law), pp. 215-216 (*ctzjonan*).

had a rather homogeneous, Polish national structure<sup>93</sup>, larger towns had settlers from Silesia, Prussia, Bohemia, Germany, Lithuania and Ruthenia and, to a smaller extent, also from Italy, France and Greece<sup>94</sup>. At least several of the scribes of Old Warsaw known to us came from Germany or Bohemia<sup>95</sup>. Although the municipal books of Old Warsaw do not contain many entries in German (about a dozen out of more than 1,700 published notes), the technique of writing shows that some scribes must have been able to write in Polish, German and Latin<sup>96</sup>.

There is not a shadow of a doubt that writing was less developed in medieval Poland than in Silesian towns, where as early as the 14th century all persons given freedom of a city had to be able to read and write<sup>97</sup>. However, in the 15th century the burghers found that the ability to write was required in ever more fields of life, and the ability to read met not only various needs and aspirations but may have also begun to satisfy the growing thirst of knowledge.

(Translated by Jantna Dorosz)

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<sup>93</sup> A. Bartoszewicz, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>94</sup> CAHR, Old Warsaw, call number 526, *passim*; cf. M. Dygo, *Pochodzenie mieszczaństwa M. Starej Warszawy w latach 1508–1528 (The Genesis of Old Warsaw's Burgher Estate in 1508–1528)*, "Rocznik Warszawski" 16, 1981, pp. 59–80.

<sup>95</sup> *The aldermen's book of the town of Old Warsaw*, pp. XXV ff.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXVI.

<sup>97</sup> *Historia Śląska (A History of Silesia)*, ed. K. Maleczyński, vol. 1, part 2, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1961, p. 406.