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## THE SPATIAL HORIZONS OF VARIOUS SOCIAL GROUPS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY POLAND

The question addressed to source material concerning sixteenth-century Poland asks: did the course of life compel the inhabitants of our country to constant mobility in space, and to what degree did this process affect various social groups?<sup>1</sup> The initial premise, certainly controversial, assumes that the satisfaction of cultural needs, such as voyages to universities, pilgrimages or scientific expeditions constituted (or rather, could constitute) accidental, one-time events which did not alter forms of everyday existence. Similarly, voyages which were connected with political undertakings — to attend seyms, and conventions or to act as envoys — did not comprise a necessity of life. Mobility which formed an indispensable condition for pursuing a profession, especially trade, presented quite another problem. It had to be constant, and demanded a knowledge of roads, people, economic relations and sometimes languages. After all, the trade routes from the Black Sea to the Baltic crossed Ruthenian, German, Polish, and sometimes Armenian, Jewish, Italian as well as Dutch, Walachian or even Scottish linguistic regions<sup>2</sup>. The route from Livonia and Lithuania to Silesia required familiarity with local customs and with elements of German, Lithuanian, Polish and Czech vocabularies. The number of languages used for noting down transactions in town registers is additional testimony. If we are dealing with mass-scale and not individual cases, then, fully aware of the uncertainty of our deductions, we could attempt to outline a group portrait of people engaged in constant travel, in other words, those who knew well a given region, the size of which it is possible to calculate. In order to facilitate our task it is necessary to make two reservations: we are concerned predominantly with those people

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<sup>1</sup> On this subject cf. J. Tazbir, *Ziemiańin — żeglarz — podróżnik morski. Kształtowanie się stereotypów w kulturze staropolskiej (Nobleman — Sailor — Sea traveller. The Formation of Stereotypes in Old Polish Culture)*, «Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce», XXII, 1977, p. 123; idem, *Polscy przyjaciele i wrogowie konkwistadorów (The Polish Friends or Foes of the Conquistadors)*, *ibid.*, XII, 1967, p. 117; idem, *Rzeczpospolita i świat. Studia z dziejów kultury XVII w. (The Polish Commonwealth and the World. Studies from the History of Seventeenth-Century Culture)*, Wrocław 1971; idem, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce (Gentry Culture in Poland)*, Warszawa 1983, p. 10. Cf. also A. Mączak, *Życie codzienne w podróżach po Europie w XVI i XVII w. (Everyday Life in Voyages around Europe during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)*, Warszawa 1978. For issues of social structure see: A. Wyczański, *Uwarstwienie społeczne w Polsce XVI w. (Social Stratification in Poland during the Sixteenth Century)*, Wrocław 1977.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bogucka, H. Samsonowicz, *Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce przedrozbiorowej (The History of Towns and Town-dwellers in Prepartition Poland)*, Wrocław 1986, p. 266, table 25.

who independently undertook decisions concerning travelling. The numerous royal servants or servants of magnates did not choose the routes which were followed by the courts; they will be omitted in our reflections. I also did not take into consideration academic, learned knowledge which constitutes a problem linked to elite culture, than, as always, not too closely associated with mass culture<sup>3</sup>.

The remarks proposed below will be based, above all, on information contained in *par excellence* economic sources, i.e. extant sixteenth-century customs registers<sup>4</sup>. These records noted data concerning persons carrying commodities, and often the place of their origin and destination. Despite the obvious fact that the range of contacts changed in the course of centuries, I shall try to draw conclusions regarding the state of things in Poland during the entire sixteenth century. With this purpose in mind, one could exploit data found in detailed registers of maritime customs paid in Gdańsk as well as in registers of land customs (the so-called old customs) paid in the Częstochowa customhouse<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately, the establishment of the social origin of persons who engaged in trade — not local trade but that one which crossed state and country borders — is not always feasible. The below proposed reflections, therefore, can only constitute a point of departure for further speculations based on more variegated data.

An analysis of persons noted in customs registers enables us to distinguish several groups of urban origin. Polish inland trade was still dominated by the burghers; overseas trade was, naturally, the domain of the residents of Gdańsk (followed by those from Elbląg). The trade involved most often town-dwellers of numerous urban centres from all over the country. The merchants of Warsaw travelled along the route between Grodno and Wrocław, the merchants from Częstochowa followed the route between the Radom region and Brzeg, while in all the customhouses we encounter the inhabitants of such towns as Łomża, Opoczno, Koniecpol, Sandomierz and Cracow. It seems that, simplifying matters, one could divide those tradesmen into three categories. The first would include petty travelling merchants who carried a small amount of goods in a single cart (or even travelled on foot). They lived in all the Polish towns and dominated small centres such as Lelów, Koniecpol, Radomsko, Skąta and Łomża. The second group were wealthy merchants of bigger towns that played a prime role in Poland: Cracow, Poznań, Warsaw, Lublin and Lvov. Finally, the third group was composed of big merchants who held a high rank in European trade; they came mostly from Gdańsk but some of them represented also Cracow, Lvov and Poznań.

<sup>3</sup> A. Mączak, *Życie codzienne*, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Rybarski, *Handel i polityka handlowa Polski w XVI w. (Trade and Trade Policies in Poland during the Sixteenth Century)*, vol. II, reprint, Warszawa 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw; paper documents (list of the old custom) 3736, 3737, 3739 from 1584, The Voivodship State Archive in Gdańsk, 300. 19. 7, 8, 9, 10, lists of the sixteenth-century customhouse.

In the sixteenth century Polish trade, however, was to a considerable degree based on the activity of the gentry. Once again, one should introduce a division at least into three groups. The first was comprised of the magnates, senators' families or, at worst, the starostas (who exploited the royal properties). Members of the second group included the middle or petty nobles who engaged in trade and personally transported goods through the customhouses. Finally, the third group was composed of the servants of the rich nobles. It was they who were personally involved in organizing the exchange conducted in the name of "the Ruthenian voivode", "the court marshal" or "the voivode of Rawa". It was they, alongside the Jewish agents, who managed the exchange of commodities belonging to high state officials or big landowners who "themselves did not travel in matters of trade".

Particularly noteworthy are indications of peasant participation in trade throughout the country. Persons who were described by their Christian names or nicknames or simply by their first name such as Wojciech, Jakub Piluda, or Wojciech Poros and who came from villages with a small amount of articles — a sack of groats for instance — should be regarded as members of the peasant estate. At any rate, they certainly did not come from towns. The fact that while carrying goods they were not exempt from customs confirms their non-gentry descent. There are also no terms used such as lord, *generosus*, *nobilis* or nobleman which would suggest that they could be included into the privileged estate. Indubitably, the peasants were often employed for the purpose of non-local trade. Cart drivers along the route from Brześć via Warsaw to Krzepice, then they were for instance either poor town residents, the Jews (who from the fifteenth century pursued that profession) or peasants<sup>6</sup>. The latter were also used for driving herds of several hundred oxen from the Ukraine to Silesia.

By locating the place of origin of a given merchant and his destination, we gain approximate data which indicate the mobility of various social groups. They seem to point to concurrences between the social (and thus the financial) position and the size of the region penetrated. These are by no means simple dependencies, which suggest that the higher the rank in social hierarchy the more distant the voyage. We have already mentioned plenipotentiaries. Poor Jews travelled half way across the continent, hiring themselves out as carriers. In the Sieradz voivodship peasants travelled several times a year from Radomsko to such Silesian towns as Głogówek, Namysłów, and Lubliniec as well as to Opawa in Moravia. As a rule they visited fairs, even those which were not the closest but also the more distant ones. The diameter of the circle within in which they travelled amounted to about 120 kilometers. The same situation existed in the eastern corners of the Polish lands where peasants, it appears, came to fairs held in Lublin from a distance of over 100 kilometers. This was

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<sup>6</sup> *Księga radzieckamiasta Starej Warszawy, 1447–1527 (The Council Registers of Old Warsaw, 1447–1527)*, vol. I, ed. A. Wolff, Wrocław 1963, nos 59, 247, 285, 382, 641, 1109, 1070, 1139, 1734.

also the case of the villages near Leżajsk or Biłgoraj, although in the overwhelming number of cases from this region the distances were much shorter.

The distances travelled by the townspeople were, of course, extremely diversified. One can say, however, that the inhabitants of Opoczno, Radomsk or Częstochowa moved within an area whose diameter totalled about 150–200 kilometers. This was more or less the distance between Radomsko and Opole, between Łomża and Warsaw or between Toruń and the Baltic ports. Large towns constituted destinations and the limits of the interests (or possibilities of reaching) for the inhabitants of small centres who travelled with their own or someone else's goods. The inhabitants of large towns travelled much further, at least twice as far. The merchants of Warsaw went to Poznań, Cracow, Gdańsk and Wrocław (300–360 kilometers), those from Cracow came to Košice and Olomouc, Wrocław and even Prague. Sometimes, although possibly more rarely than in the previous century, they reached the Baltic ports (500 kilometers) and in particular Gdańsk. The outreach of the Lublin merchants was delineated by the line running from Cracow (240 kilometers), Vilno (430 kilometers), Poznań (400 kilometers), and Gdańsk (450 kilometers) to Lvov (180 kilometers)<sup>7</sup>. Of course, often they reached much further but those were rather sporadic contacts. One could say more about their constant movement in the nearby regions: Opatów, Chełm, Jarosław, Bełz, Sandomierz and Radom (less than 100 kilometers).

Gdańsk was a unique phenomenon in Poland. Its merchants, regardless of sporadic contacts with Italy, Turkey, Portugal and Tver, maintained a permanent with the coastline of the Bay of Biscay (2,000 kilometers), English ports (1,200 kilometers) and the Low Countries (1,000 kilometers). They were also permanent guests at the markets of Lithuania, Livonia, Sweden and Denmark (400–600 kilometers), not to mention the Polish hinterland — Prussia, Mazovia, the Kujawy region and Great Poland (50–200 kilometers).

It is possible to examine also the mobility of the gentry. Data from the land customhouses enable us to conclude that petty landowners — the Witkowski family from Witków (in the Płock region), the Wierzchowski family from Wierzchów (the Rawa region) or the Rogowski family from Rogów (the Rawa region) — travelled with horses and oxen along a route from Mazovia to towns lying on the Odra river in Silesia, thus across a distance of some 200–300 kilometers. The residents of Mazovia journeyed to Ducal Prussia and the gentry from the Sieradz region — to Brandenburg, Silesia, and Great Poland. Goods from landed estates were transported by river all the way to Gdańsk, but upon the basis of Warsaw and Wrocław customs registers it appears that the owners, if they travelled at all, would accompany the loads at best to the place where they were taken over by the river barges. It is even more interesting to note that a considerable number of the petty nobles hired themselves out as plenipoten-

<sup>7</sup> The Voivodship State Archive in Lublin, *Acta advocatialis et scabinalia*, 1, 2, 3; *Acta consularia* 144, 429, 432.

tiaries of magnates. They drove oxen as far as to Silesia or Prussia or, more rarely, organised river transport to Gdańsk. The economic activity of the gentry, in contrast, for example, to that one pursued by the merchants of Gdańsk, involved usually a much smaller region. Transport of grain from the Kujawy region or the environs of Sandomierz to the Baltic ports, or oxen driven from the Ukraine to Silesia constituted essentially the greatest and most distant economic undertakings of the gentry. As a rule they did not exceed a distance greater than 500 kilometers. When sometimes oxen were driven from the regions of Braclaw across Hungary as far as to Styria or Carinthia — their transport went in stages and its organization no longer interested Polish exporters<sup>8</sup>.

It would be difficult to discuss at this point the range of the practical geographical knowledge of the Polish magnates, who themselves did not have to travel in matters of business personally. We do know, however, that they journeyed all over Europe, attending universities, visiting religious centres as pilgrims travelling to gain good manners at the courts of monarchs. Stockholm, London, Madrid, Rome, the Near East — all delineated their boundary of cognition, with a radius of 1,000–2,000 kilometers from place of residence<sup>9</sup>.

The above presented calculations, of course, call for a verification upon the basis of sources of different origin. It must be said that our sources pertain either to merchants or to people employed in transport such as sailors, drivers or herdsmen. The activity pursued by craftsmen who travelled more rarely was slightly different, although they too went from one place to another<sup>10</sup>. We have information about the voyages undertaken by inhabitants of Cracow to Meissen, Nürnberg, the Rhineland, and Prussia. Craftsmen from Warsaw and Sieradz were less mobile. Their contacts outreached primarily localities from which they originally came, some 100–150 kilometers away. But they too visited Cracow, Poznań and Gdańsk. The inhabitants of the latter could be found in many of the Hanseatic towns along the seacoast all the way up to Bremen. Artisans from small towns were just as mobile. A statement made by the Przemyśl court that: “The Ruthenians do not travel and thus know no craft”<sup>11</sup> confirms the observation that in towns organized according to the Magdeburg law, guild regulations concerning wandering craftsmen were respected.

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<sup>8</sup> *Regesta Theonoi aquatici Vladislaviensis saeculi XVI*, ed. S. Kutrzeba and F. Duda, Kraków 1915. Cf. also H. Obuchowska-Pysiova, *Handel wiślany w pierwszej połowie XVII w. (The Vistula Trade in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century)*, Wrocław 1964. S. Gierszewski, *Magnaci i szlachta jako zawodowi kupcy-przewoźnicy w XVI–XVIII w. (Magnates and the Gentry as Professional Merchants-carriers in the Sixteenth–Eighteenth Century)*, «Roczniki dziejów społecznych i gospodarczych», vol. 47, 1986, *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> A. Mączak, *Życie codzienne*, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Bogucka, *Gdańsk jako ośrodek produkcyjny w XIV–XVII w. (Gdańsk as a Production Centre in the Fourteenth–Seventeenth Century)*, Warszawa 1982, p. 313; M. Bogucka, H. Samsonowicz, *Dzieje*, p. 202.

<sup>11</sup> K. Arłamowski, *Dzieje przemysłowych cechów rzemieślniczych w dawnej Polsce (The History of the Przemyśl Artisan Guilds in Old Poland)*, Przemyśl 1931, p. 67.

Many representatives of the gentry who did not engage themselves in trade travelled “professionally” — a conclusion which can be testified by other sources, i.a. registers dealing with the army at the turn of the fifteenth century<sup>12</sup>. The army records provide information about people whose social affiliation could be described according to analogy with data from land and town registers. On this basis it is possible to assume that 52 per cent of the levied soldiers belonged to the petty gentry, about 14 per cent were peasant (or representatives of lower social groups), and about 22 per cent came from towns. The register was compiled near Cracow where the levy took place. The identification of soldier’s place of origin is not easy. In identifiable cases 33 per cent of the men came from a region no further than 80 kilometers, 50 per cent — from Kalisz and Ruthenian voivodship, and thus from a distance of about 200–250 kilometers, while about 16 per cent arrived from more distant regions: Poznań and Mazovia, thus 300–350 kilometers away. In accordance with the pertinent agreement, the soldiers were to depart for Hungary or Prussia, thus to travel some 200–300 kilometers more. At any rate, in this case the gentry as well as the burghers were familiar with distances which in both directions totalled to 600 kilometers.

The conclusions from these reflections should be drawn with caution. Of course, one could propose a list which illustrates the average distance covered by representatives of various social groups in the course of their work, and thus demonstrate their spatial horizon:

<b>social group</b>	<b>distance in kms</b>	<b>time needed in days</b>
peasants	120	4
inhabitants of small towns	150	5
inhabitants of medium towns	600	20
inhabitants of Gdańsk	1,000	33
gentry	600	20
magnates	1,000	33

The data proposed above reveal a slightly different dependence of mobility and hence a knowledge of the world, than it could have been assumed. Even more important is another assumption: Poland was a country of people who did not travel very far. The voluntarily crossed distances, which delineated the geographic and economic horizons of the people constituted the function of social status, a constatation probably not very innovative but based on sources not used before for such research. The more general reflection recalls that in the sixteenth century the Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch and Englishmen navigated around the Globe. The mercenary armies of those countries marched right across Europe and their peasants began colonizing other continents. In this domain of life we remained a society of slight mobility.

*(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)*

<sup>12</sup> Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw; the Archive of the Crown Treasury, dept. 85, vol. I. Registers of the Crown army, with lists of people, horses and arms.