FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

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MARRIED TO A FOREIGNER. WIVES AND DAUGHTERS OF GERMAN KNIGHTS IN SILESIA DURING THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Rarely do we enjoy an opportunity to take a closer look behind the scenes of medieval arranged marriages. In 1331, comes Henryk Kietlicz hoped to win the hand of the daughter of Mikołaj of Bogoria, the voivode of Cracow, for Wit of Smogorzów, his nephew or grandson (nepos). Consequently, both men were compelled to sign a pledge guaranteeing that in the course of the next two years they would provide Wit with land purchased in the province of Cracow or Sandomierz for the sizable sum of 600 marcs. The pledge was secured with 100 marcs to be paid to the father-in-law, the voivode\(^1\). The conception concealed by this curious act is obvious. The candidate for the husband of a daughter of the voivode was a Silesian, and his wealthy kinsman and protector — a Silesian of German birth. Obviously, the family of the bride-to-be — the recipient of the pledge was not only the voivode himself but also his relatives — wished the future son-in-law to become a Little Poland terrigena as soon as possible. Such an attitude may appear justified by the moods prevailing at the time among the Polish lords: the reign of Ladislaus the Short was not conducive for building sympathy towards Silesians and Germans. The anonymous author of *Pieśń o wójcie Albercie* (*The Song about Mayor Albert*) complained that the Germans deviously

\(^{1}\) *Codex diplomaticus Maioris Poloniae*, vol. II, Poznań 1878, n° 1118.
win the favours of the Poles by marrying the daughters of the latter or offering daughters of their own, always with deplorable effects. A slightly similar pre-marital obligation, formulated half a century later, comes from Silesia, where Johann von Löben, who in 1383 proposed marriage to a daughter of the prosperous burgher Grolock family of Nysa, not only promised to bequeath 200 marcs as a dowry, but also to use all his funds for purchasing property in the duchy of Nysa, and to reside there permanently.

Although the family estates of the bridegroom were situated near Wrocław and Ścinawa, and he was by no means an arrival from a distant land, his future father-in-law demanded that he move closer to Nysa. The cited documents reveal a more universal idea: it was deemed preferable to have the son-in-law nearby, and to treat foreign candidates suspiciously.

The functioning of those principles is illustrated by marriages among the late medieval Polish gentry. The decisive majority of such unions did not exceed the narrow range of a county. Marriages between families from different regions were rare, and basically occurred within the highest circles, whose life, by its very nature, transcended the county or provincial horizon, and whose natural environment was the royal court. Our interest, however, will be focused on tracing opposite examples, i.e., marriages with foreigners. An excellent sample of a community composed of foreigners and ensconced within the Polish environment is provided by the German knights, who settled down in Silesia during the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Whom did they marry and to whom did they marry off their daughters — those are the questions to which we should seek answers.

2 H. Kowalewicz, Pieśń o wójcie krakowskim Albercie (The Song about Albert, the Mayor of Cracow), "Pamiętnik Literacki" 56, 1965, p. 135: Ilos habent ipsi [sc. Teutonici] mores / Per quos aquirent favores: / Primo se humiliant / Mox eorum ducunt natas / Suas ipsis prius datas / Et sic se conciliant.

3 Quellen zur Geschichte des Neisser Bistumslandes auf Grund der drei ältesten Neisser Lagerbücher, publ. K. Engelbert, Würzburg 1964, n° 1275.

4 A colourful example of the conflicting influence of the court and traditional family policy is found in the case of Jadwiga, daughter of Tomislav from Miłosław, who accepted the marriage proposal made by Dobieslaw of Szczekociny (Little Poland) whom she undoubtedly met at the court; ultimately, Jadwiga was forced by her father to marry Świdwa of Szamotuly, an inhabitant of Great Poland (Bullarium Poloniae, publ. I. Sulikowska-Kuraś, S. Kuraś, vol. IV, Rome-Lublin 1992, n° 2368; cf. S. Kuraś, Supliki papierskie jako źródło do historii społecznej Polski średniowiecznej (Papal Petitions as a Source for the Social History of Medieval Poland), in: Ojczyzna bliższa i dalsza (The Closer and More Distant Fatherland), Kraków 1993, p. 51 sqq.
Large numbers of foreign knights began arriving in Silesia from the mid-thirteenth century on. Up to the middle of the fourteenth century, some 150 knight families of foreign origin settled down here; representatives of many others appeared fleetingly, and subsequently returned to their native lands. This considerable number of immigrants, combined with the outstanding role played by them at ducal courts and, quite possibly, with their demographic prowess was the reason why they rapidly became an important element in the social structure. In the mid-fourteenth century, foreigners and their descendants among knights as a whole can be estimated as 25-40% on the average, and in certain regions — as even two-thirds. At the same time, it remains indubitable that the settlers retained distinctness as regards their tongue, culture and customs. Only the oldest examples from the beginning of the thirteenth century can give rise to certain doubts. The first individual arrivals blended into the local environment. Nonetheless, there must have existed a difference between a knight coming straight from Germany or Bohemia and his son or grandson, born and brought up in Silesia. This is the reason why in my further reflections I shall use the category of a generation, which describes the place of the given individual in the history of the immigrant family (the first generation denotes the arrivals, the second generation — their sons, and the third — the grandsons).

An examination of the history and genealogy of foreign knight families makes it possible to capture the relatively extensive range of information about marriages. Nevertheless, certain reservations must be made at the very outset. Not all the marriages are confirmed by reliable source material, and some have been ascertained according to indirect directives. I based myself especially on the criterion of names: Polish names found in the first

5For a thorough discussion see: T. Jurek, Obce rycerstwo na Śląsku do polowy XIV wieku (Foreign Knights in Silesia to the Middle of the Fourteenth Century), Poznań 1996.

6The whole material used in this article was collected in my work: Obce rycerstwo, esp. pp. 106-110 (on marriages). Here, I refrain from citing the documentation of genealogical facts, all of which are taken from miniature monographic studies on particular families of foreign knights, contained in the above mentioned book. See also: T. Jurek, Wędrowni rycerze i ich damy. Małżeństwa obcych rycerzy na Śląsku w XIII i XIV wieku (Wandering Knights and Their Ladies. Marriages of Foreign Knights in Silesia during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century), in: Kobieta w kulturze średniowiecznej Europy (Woman in the Culture of Medieval Europe), Poznań 1995, pp. 61-70 (pertains only to the first generation, and in places is no longer up-to-date).
generation of foreign families should be interpreted as cognatic; thus, we should seek in them traces of the existence of a Polish mother. This highly likely presupposition does not have to be absolutely certain. Naturally, we are not familiar with all the wives and daughters of the foreign knights of interest to us. In our particular instance, the blank sphere, normal in all genealogical studies, is particularly extensive — despite their relative numerosity, sources for the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century still remain fragmentary. My list is based on a genealogical study of the incoming families. We lack exhaustive research into the genealogy of Polish knight families and especially their burgher counterparts. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that it is easier to find data concerning a woman while studying the family of her husband than that of her father. Hence, we should take into consideration the possibility that the greatest number of omissions concerns foreign maidens married to Polish knights or burghers.

I present the outcome of my research with all the above mentioned reservations. The data at our disposal (even if most general) pertain to about 115 wives of foreign knights living in Silesia, as well as 73 girls from foreign families who married in Silesia. Let us begin with a closer look at the group of the wives. There were 27 marriages in the first generation, which arrived directly from Bohemia or Germany. Certain (6) wives married already in the country of origin. As a rule, however, the settlers were young and single, and thus entered into wedlock in Silesia. The decisively dominating number of marriages (14) involves Polish women, while the number of marriages to the daughters of other arrivals (4) or girls living in towns (3) was much smaller. This is an entirely natural proportion. Owing to the fact that the largest tide of knight immigration took place within the lifespan of a single generation (about 1280–1320), the direct settlers found it difficult to discover a single girl from a German knight family living in Silesia. This generation was compelled to marry Polish girls, while in the consecutive generations the differences became quickly levelled. We encounter 34 marriages in the second generation: 16 to Polish girls, 14 to German brides, and 4 to burgher maidens. In summarily treated successive generations we have 54 marriages to 20 Polish brides, 26 to German women and 8 to townswomen.
The statistical image of marriages made by the daughters of the knights–settlers is rather similar. The sole difference is the absence of the specificity disclosed by the first generation. It was extremely rare for the wandering knights to be accompanied by their sisters. Only two such cases are known — both girls wed representatives of Polish families. The marriages of the settlers’ daughters already resembled those made by the daughters of their descendants, i.e. they did not demonstrate any distinct preferences. Among the 74 young women known to us, 41 married German knights, 29 — Poles, and 4 — local burghers. We should keep in mind the above indicated deformation of the overall picture, which entails an unquestionable lowering of the number of the daughters of the arrivals married to local residents and burghers.

This noticeable lack of preferences as regards the choice of both wives and sons–in–law, is an extremely characteristic feature. Apparently, the arriving knights were not rejected by the local community, nor did they separate themselves from the latter. We find no traces of the suspicions harboured by the Bogoria family during the courtship of Wit of Smogorzów. Local Silesian families married their daughters off not only to Germans settling down in their region, but even to those who had no intentions to stay. In certain cases, girls from the best families married knights who made but brief appearances at the Silesian courts. Heinrich von Dohna, who served Duke Boleslaus Rogatka for a short period of time, probably married a Polish girl from the Pogorzel family; how, otherwise, would the typically Grzymalite name of Jarosław appear among the Dohnas? The young Tymo von Colditz, who was educated at the ducal court in Brzeg (1314–1318), married Agnieszka Samborowicówna. Those unions were, in all likelihood, surrounded by the aura of a romantic adventure. The very fact of leaving their family homes offered the wandering knights an opportunity for affairs of the heart, while the future Polish fathers–in–law envisaged such knights as the embodiment of supreme chivalric ideals, even more so considering that the two above mentioned bridegrooms were extremely wealthy. On the other hand, Wilhelm, the mayor of Widnawa, must have been inspired by purely idealistic motives when he consented to a marriage between his daughter and Friedrich
Kiesling, a humble arrival from Thuringia; but then Wilhelm was a known admirer and patron of chivalric poetry.

The dominating interests of both sides were much more down-to-earth. We know of instances when relatively undistinguished arrivals married into prosperous Silesian families. The most distinct example is that of the rather unprepossessing Bohemian named Mladata, who, thanks to his marriage to Betka, daughter of Franz Schwabe (a German), became the owner of a large group of landed estates near Ścinawa Polska. We cannot surmise what inclined Franz to offer the hand of one of his daughters to the unassuming suitor. It is easier to understand the motivation of the poor landowners from Czesławice near Henryków, who approved of Herbord von Meinhausen, probably an equally penniless Saxon, as their brother-on-law, considering that they could not rely on more profitable connections.

Another striking feature is the particularly large number of associations between foreign knights and the best families of Silesian lords. Here too it seems worth resorting to a generation-based interpretation. The first generation of the migrants still chose wives predominantly among the middle-knight families: there were 6 such cases as compared to 4 wealthy- and 2 petty-knight families. In the second generation, marriages to women from prosperous homes (7) dominated over brides from middle- (5) and petty-knight families (1); a similar pattern occurred in the consecutive generation (9, 8 and 1, respectively). Obviously, members of the first generation felt less self-assured than their successors. This tendency is well illustrated by the genealogy of the Bart family, whose forefather (his name remains unknown) married very modestly — a Walloon girl from Wrocław. The wife of his son, Albrecht (the Bearded), was already a daughter of the palatinus of Wrocław and a cousin of a bishop. Alltold, however, almost half of the identifiable wives of foreign knights originated from among the families of lords. In addition, they were the most eminent old families, such as the Pogorzels, Samborowics or Jeleńczyks.

In the opposite direction, the same phenomenon was already less distinct: daughters of foreigners usually wed representatives of the local middle knights, and the lords were dominated by new families, of recently acquired wealth. Naturally, it was the arrivals who were more concerned about marrying into good Polish
families. Among the Germans, this drive towards brilliant matches could be interpreted as a symptom of a certain inferiority complex vis à vis the traditional local aristocracy. On the other hand, it is understandable that their marriage offers were not refused, since the arrivals played a great role at the side of the local dukes, inimical towards the Polish lords. For the latter, connections with German families comprised a way for salvaging their impact and political position. An opposite dependence could be discovered only among the oldest cases, prior to the mid-thirteenth century, when it was the arrivals who, via marriages, sought the protection of influential local families. Finally, it is worth noticing that probably not all permitted such family unions with foreigners. The great Pogorzel, Jeleńczyk, Samborowic of Schildberg or Pakosz of Twardogóra families wed numerous Germans, but the genealogies of the such thirteenth-century families as the Lis of Wierzbno or the Drzemlik of Strzelin make no mention of marriages to foreigners. This could have been the outcome of chance or an intentional policy pursued by certain families, which had nothing in common with nationalistic prejudices, since the same Wierzbno family was served by a squad (drużyna) composed of German knights. It seems that it was precisely those families which married the arriviste foreigners that were capable of better protecting their social position.

The marriages of foreign knights were made most probably in two environments. The first was the ducal court. It was here, after all, that the majority of the first generation of the arrivals spent most of their lives. Here they met other foreigners and the local knights, and took part in the rivalry between factions and coteries, which today cannot be reconstructed and in which alliances were reinforced by the bonds of wedlock, similarly as in great politics. The other environment was composed of neighbours. The arrivals rapidly purchased landed property, to which they became attached, although usually this occurred after a certain time, and became part of the local community. The impact

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7This is the interpretation proposed by M. Cetwiński, Rycerstwo śląskie do końca XIII wieku (Silesian Knights to the End of the Thirteenth Century), part 1, Wrocław 1980, p. 30 sqq.
8Not until the beginning of the fourteenth century did a daughter of Piotr of Wierzbno marry Werner von Der, but this is the Głogów side line of the Wierzbno family.
9T. Jurek, Obce rycerstwo, p. 73.
of neighbourly ties on marital connections should be situated in the slightly later stay of a given family in Silesia.

Marriages with representatives of the burgher estate continued to play a merely marginal role. In the course of successive generations, the growth of this phenomenon remained slight. Nonetheless, several tendencies are to be noticed. In the first generation, marriages to townspeople were a great rarity, and were made only by humble knights (the above mentioned Bart and Friedrich Kiesling) or those who themselves were of burgher origin (a certain Eckelmann, a burgher from Meissen, who in Świdnica already played the role of a knight but wedded a wealthy widow, a citizen of this town). Only in the second generation do we come across marriages involving townspeople. They occurred, however, primarily among the wealthiest strata: the mayors and the patriciate (especially the Mühlheim, Baumgarten and Kölner families in Wrocław), i.e. those groups whose lifestyle, as was the case in all large German towns, was typically knightly. Such persons were situated along the borderland of the estates: they included owners of feudal landed property and the bearers of coats of arms and knightly belts. Intent on crossing barriers traditionally dividing them from those of noble birth, they certainly married the daughters of knights and married off their own daughters to knights. The matrimonial policy of the knights themselves, however, clearly shied from the towns. This approach was a symptom of traditional prejudices, brought from Germany, against the burghers, whom the Sachsenspiegel denied feudal status on par with the clergy, women, peasants, outcasts and illegitimate offspring.

Some of the daughters of the knights entered convents. Highly insufficient monastic prosopography renders definite results unobtainable. Traditionally, Cistercian nunneries (gentlewomen) are contrasted with the mendicant convents (burgher women)\textsuperscript{10}. An observation of the rather limited group of daughters of foreign knights, entrusted to monastic orders indicates, however, that the majority joined the Poor Clares convent. There are no available data about even a single Cistercian nun, although a number of maidens was found among the Benedictines in Strze-

The latter example — this was the only convent in the duchy of Świdnica — shows that the chosen nunnery could have been simply the closest in the vicinity. After all, we should take into consideration the existence of other types of bonds between the knight families and the convents, which brought up also daughters unintended for monastic life. Naturally, identification with the nearest convent was the strongest, and vows were taken according to the principle of neighbourly proximity.

Finally, note should be made of the more general significance of marriages between German and Polish knight families in Silesia. Such matrimony produced the furthest reaching bonds between the related families. A German brother-in-law or son-in-law became a member of a Polish family. There are no recorded situations when foreign origin proved to be an obstacle. The destitute Herbold von Meinhausen participated in the sale of family property on par with his brothers-in-law. Among the more prosperous, German relatives acted as witnesses in private documents, appearing as fully fledged members of the given family, and attended family gatherings. Furthermore, in case of need, they rendered assistance in all domains of family life. Günter von Biberstein, related to the Jeleńczyk family, assumed the role of an adviser and guardian of Sobiesław Przybymilowic, his son-in-law, and pledged his word for Boguszka of Przerzeczyn, his distant sister-in-law embroiled in a dispute with a bishop. Each time, the document mentioned family ties with Günter. On the other hand, we can indicate contrary situations, when Poles supported their German brothers-in-law. In a complicated dispute with the monastery in Henryków (1282) the Bart family was aided by the pledge of Pakosław Zdzieszyc, the son-in-law of one of its members. The emotional identification of the strangers with the families whose members they became as a result of affinity, was reflected in the acceptance of the names of fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, and probably in the inclusion into coats of arms. Examples of the adoption of names are multiple (to mention only Ulrich Schwabe, who, having married the sister of Franciszek of Tyniec, gave his own son the name of

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11 T. Jurek, Obce rycerstwo, p. 113 sqq.
12 See ibid., p. 110 sqq.
Franciszek). There is no evidence as regards the coats of arms, but the well-known phenomenon of foreigners changing their coats of arms presumably reflects family impact. Such cases, however, remained sporadic. Mixed marriages blurred distinctness, but did not liquidate it. Apparently, there existed certain issues to which even brothers-in-law were deprived of all access. In 1284, the property dispute between Bishop Tomasz II and his niece Elżbieta was resolved by a large group of related arbitrators — all of whom were Poles. Several score years later, a dispute conducted in 1348 by Hanke von Eichelborn and his sister Manka was also examined by a large number of arbitrators, who, this time, were almost all Germans (with the single exception of Stefan of Prochowice, who enjoyed authority in the whole of Silesia). This fact is even more surprising considering that Manka had a Polish husband. Presumably, both instances reflect the principle that family contentions should not involve relatives of foreign descent. Mixed marriages were one of the most important mechanisms in the great process of the embedment of foreigners into the local environment. They composed a foundation upon which all other bonds between the arrivals and the local inhabitants developed. This phenomenon was perceived already by its contemporaries as shown by the example of the fourteenth-century poet quoted on the page 38.

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16 *Schlesisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. V, n° 86.
17 *Wrocław, State Archive, rep. 16, 2A*, pp. 10-11 (Hanke presented Højger von Prittwitz and Kunad Mulich von Reideburg, and Manka — Stefan of Prochowice and Heinrich von Biberstein [son-in-law of Stefan]; mention is made of the fact that previously the same Stefan, Otto von Glaubitz, Henrich von Haugwitz, Wolfram von Pannewitz and Konrad von Borschnitz attempted to resolve the issue).
Appendix I
Wives of foreign knights in Silesia
(arranged according to generations, each divided into marriages with brides from Polish, foreign and burgher families)


Hermann von Borschnitz × Herburge from the family of the mayors of Nysa, Friedrich Schaff × N. from the family of the mayors of Ziębice (Münsterberg), Johann von Sommerfeld × Jadwiga from the family of the mayors of Środa, Lutek von Waldau × N. von Baumgarten.


Ottokar von Glaubitz × Elisabeth von Mühlheim, Günter von Muschen × Agnes Pokeler of Nysa, Hermann von Peschen × N., widow of Hertel of Brzeg, Herbold von Quas × Margarete von Aue
of Wrocław, Simon von Quas × Katherine Reicheninn, Jasiek von Quas × Margarete Engelger.

**IV generation:** Reinhard von Gaußig × Małgorzata (Pole), Rüdiger the Younger von Haugwitz × N. Samborowicówna, Lutold von Löben × Elżbieta Rymbabówna.


**Appendix II**

Marriages of the daughters of foreign knights in Silesia

**To foreigners:**

see above in the list of wives (column of wives of foreign knights); additionally: Gertrude Wustehube (II generation of the family) × Kunczko von Reichenbach, Jutta von Pannewitz (III) × Hermann von Reichenbach, N. Bart (V) × Johann Seckil von Reichenbach (the Reichenbach family were of burgher origin, but at the time were already regarded as knights).

**To poles:**

**I generation:** N. von Kamenz × Dzierslaw of Byczeń, N. von Pannewitz × Racibor of Wolów.

**II generation:** Elisabeth of Rodov × Gunter of Adelungsbach (Struga), Jutta of Rodov × Jan of Budow, Margaret von Eichelborn × Mikołaj Samborowic, N. von Landeskrone × Mikołaj Olow, Elisabeth von Prittwitz × Hojger of Komorów, Alena von Prittwitz × Piotr Zalisz of Zabor, Katherine von Quas × Stefan of Schwenckenfeld, N. von Werde × Sander of Ciernia.


**TO BURGHERS:**

**III generation:** Formose von Eichelborn × Ryszard of Gubin (from Wrocław), N. von Haugwitz × N. Banz (from Wrocław), Anne von Schwabsdorf × Janek near Gate (from Brzeg).

**IV generation:** Anne von Waldau × Nikolaus of Cracow (from Wrocław).

*(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)*