

Reviews / Рецензії

Ukrainian Historical Review /
Український історичний огляд
Issue 1 / Вип. 1 (2022) 179-185.
DOI: 10.47632/2786-717X-2022-1-179-185
ORCID ID 0000-0002-6896-3677

Yurii Zazuliak
candidate of historical sciences,
associate professor
Ukrainian Catholic university
zazuliak@ucu.edu.ua

Tomasz Wiślicz. *Zelman Wolfowicz i jego rządy w starostwie Drohobyckim w połowie XVIII w.* Kraków: Universitas 2020. 260 s., il.

According to the common historiographic knowledge, historical sources, far from being the neutral and objective reflection of the past events, are always conditioned on the cultural views, intentions, judgements, and biases of those, who produce them. As a result, the historians are permanently facing, and sometimes surrendering to the temptation of accepting the images and interpretations of the past constructed by the sources as the true and the only possible, limiting thus their own research perspective on the past. Zelman Wolfowicz, whose biography has become a subject of the recent book of the historian from Warsaw Tomasz Wiślicz, confirms well this observation. As Wiślicz has noticed, the interest of historians to the person of Zelman Wolfowicz as well as the historical explanations of his activities at the territory of the Drohobych captainship during the first half and middle of the 18th century have been shaped to the great extent by the one such unique document, namely the record of his trial and death sentence passed against him in 1755.

Like other historians, Wiślicz first came across the person of Zelman through the discovery of the verdict from 1755. The record has drawn the extensive attention of historians primarily due to the long list of the numerous and detailed charges brought against Zelman and his allies. It contains the accusations of exploiting the dependent peasants, terrorizing the citizens of Drohobych, corruption, counterfeiting, falsifying the debt bills, and witchcraft. The death sentence, passed jointly by the town and castle magistrates, marked the culmination of the lasting and bitter conflict between Zelman on the one hand, and the town authorities and community on the other. The enmity manifested itself in the numerous litigations and involved in various degree the local Jewish community, the captains' officials, royal court. It reflected the unprecedented level of political and economic influence that Zelman had acquired as a main holder of the incomes from the Drohobych captainship during 1729–1754.

The verdict gave rise to the “black legend” of Zelman which in its turn laid ground for the negative historical images of Zelman, especially in context of the historiographic representations of the Jewish tenants as the moneylenders and mediators between the noblemen and the dependent peasants as well as their role in the structure of the lordship, power, and economy in early modern Poland-Lithuania. During the 19th and 20th centuries the “black legend” of Zelman was further enriched and transformed by various folkloric stories and the new antisemitic political propaganda.

In contrast to the existing historiographic tradition, the Wiślicz's book is not a biography in the usual sense of the word. The investigation, perhaps contrary to the intentions of its author, shows the limits of the biographic method and impossibility to discern the history and myth, the biography and memory in the historical accounts of Zelman. It is remarkable that the available historiography on Zelman is considered in the Wiślicz' analysis as the essential element in the construction of the specific historical tradition which was of the crucial importance for circulating and reproducing numerous mystifications about Zelman. The book also offers the exemplary case of the microhistory analysis. Wiślicz has adopted the approaches of microhistory to explain the story of Zelman in various social and cultural contexts, to address the questions about the criteria of the supra-ethnic solidarity in the local communities, and to discuss some new methodological perspective on the society of early modern Poland-Lithuania.

The book consists of three chapters, each of which addresses one of the main research issues raised in the introduction – biography, memory, and local solidarity. The title of each chapter corresponds to one of the names under which Zelman was known in the sources. The first chapter has a title “Zelman Ben Zeev (that was a full Jewish name of Zelman), or the attempt at biography”. It pursues the aim of establishing the main events and facts of Zelman's life and discusses the degree of their probability. In addition, the chapter also provides an introduction into the history of the Jews of Drohobych by outlining the beginnings and the growth of the community as well as the spatial extension and topography of the Jewish settlements in the town¹. Wiślicz has also touched upon some other problems of the social and economic situation of the Drohobych captainship during the first half of the 18th century. He highlights, for example, the role of the sault production in the local economy, discusses the devastating economic and demographic consequences of the last Tatar raid from 1699, provides the illuminating details into the history of the Chomętowskis, the family of noblemen who were holders of the captainship of Drohobych during the first half of the 18th century.

The key episode of the familial history of the Chomętowskis was the sudden death of the Drohobych captain and the field hetman of the Crown Stanislaw

¹ *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West* / ed. J. Bossy. Cambridge 1983.

Chomętowski in 1728. Zelman was held liable for the death of the captain. Apparently, such charges circulated first as the local gossip to acquire in 1751 the status of the judicial facts when one of the Zelman's main enemies, the former administrator of the Sambir economy Stefan Winnicki lodged the formal accusation in the Peremyshl castle court. Winnicki alleged that Zelman had been even punished by the banishment from the town for conspiring against the life of the captain.

Following the death of Stanisław Chomętowski his widow Dorota Tarłowa came into possession of the captainship and held it during the next twenty years, almost until her death in 1756. It was exactly the protection and support of Tarłowa which played a decisive role in the rapid social and political advance of Zelman. During the 30ties of the 18th century Zelman became the tenant of the salt mines in Kotiv and Drohobych as well as the head of the local Jewish kahal. Wiślicz describes the ways Zelman had reached the immense influence and wealth as the merciless and multiform exploitation. In fact, this kind of the plunder economy adopted by Zelman was the widespread pattern of renting the royal and private domains in the contemporary Poland-Lithuania which aimed at the maximizing incomes during the limited duration of the tenancy. The growth of Zelman's power met the serious opposition from other members of the Jewish community who competed with him for the accesses to the captain's incomes as well as for the communal Jewish offices. The intensity of the struggle is attested well by the several unsuccessful plots to murder Zelman as well as the use of the dependent peasants by Zelman to enforce the outcome of the kahal's elections.

The 1750s marked the intensification of the conflict. The town's magistrate and the Jewish community launched the lawsuit against Zelman at the royal court. It seems that the outcome of the enmity was determined by the new possessor of the captainship, the palatine of Podillia and the field hetman of the Crown Waclaw Rzewuski, who came to substitute Dorota Tarłowa in the tenancy in 1755. The new vice-captain Józef Lopuski, appointed by Rzewuski, initiated the keeping of the new register of the Drohobych castle to which the complaints and accusations against Zelman started to be brought in mass.

The trial and verdict of 1755 did not end the story of Zelman. Despite the deep and bitter disagreements, the Jewish community supported Zelman and saved his life by redeeming him from the death sentence. The death verdict was replaced by the eternal imprisonment, from which Zelman sought the unsuccessful escape. Condemned for the second time to death, Zelman avoided the death once again by converting to Christianity and accepting a new name of Jędrzej Obaczyński. Being imprisoned in the local Carmelite monastery, Zelman died not long after the described events, in 1757.

The new Christian name of Zelman Jędrzej Obaczyński gave the title name to the second chapter which focuses on the formation of the postmortem legend and tradition about Zelman. The masterful analysis of the several dimensions of that

tradition casts unexpected light on the important role of the person and historical image of Zelman in constructing the local historical memory of the Ukrainians and Poles of Drohobych. Wiślicz has emphasized that the interest to the personality of Zelman emerged in Galicia during the second half of the 19th century together with the development of the new academic disciplines of history and ethnography, the expansion of the local history and mass local newspapers which provided the circulation and reception of the scholarly and popular historical texts among the extended reading audiences.

Through the detailed investigation of the scholarly and popular historical texts about Zelman, Wiślicz has demonstrated their important role in shaping and spreading the historical myths which often took a form of the folklore tradition and were the source of the new antisemitic stereotypes. The one of the most popular folkloric materials about Zelman, widespread among the Ukrainian and partly Polish population, was the Easter song "*Ide, ide Zelman*". Most of the survived versions of the song depict Zelman as a tenant of the church whose arrival the local peasants awaited to beg him to open the church and to permit to celebrate the Easter mess. It is known that the lease of the Orthodox churches by Jewish tenants figures repeatedly in the historiographic explanations of the causes of the Cossack violence against the Jews during the wars of the 17th century. Wiślicz has offered the critical reconsideration of the traditional identification of the historical Zelman with the folkloric character of the song. He has rightly pointed to the fact that the leases of churches had been never mentioned among the numerous accusations advanced against Zelman in the conflicts of the mid-18th century. The traces of the social strife and tensions that the Zelman's politics aroused among the local peasants are rare evidence and can be found only in the one of the earliest recorded versions of the song.

The postmortem life of Zelman as a local vampire comprises still another legendary tradition that existed in Galicia during the 19th century. The popular accounts recorded in the 19th century offers the very detailed description of the topography where, according to the established ritual, the body of Zelman was drawn or buried after his death. The exact details of the landscape that those folkloric evidence provided could bear witness to the persistence of the memory about Zelman in the locality. On the other hand, however, no written source from the mid-18th century survived to suggest the ways and mechanisms of the formation of this local vampire tradition about Zelman. It cannot be excluded that they reflected the postmortem transformation of the accusations of the magic practices and communication with witches which had turned up during the trial in 1751. Wiślicz situates this legend in the context of the popular beliefs in vampires which were widespread in Galicia still during the 19th century. Another key context highlighted by the author is the far-reaching interests of the Habsburg bureaucrats and representatives of the new natural sciences, mostly medicine, in

the critical investigation and control of the beliefs in vampires which generated the new knowledge discourses and institutional practices aimed at the social and medical disciplining of the local population. Those new critical scholarly, bureaucratic, and literary discourses about vampires, forged around the cultural categories of barbarism, backwardness and superstitions, became important elements of the specific cultural imagery of the imperial metropolises of Central Europe about their own eastern peripheries.

According to Wiślicz, the Jewish community of Drohobych did not preserve the historical tradition of their own about Zelman. The Jewish historians, who started to write about his personality at the end of the 19th century, based their historical narratives mainly on the sources which had been already discovered by their Polish and Ukrainian colleagues. It seems that the only Jewish tradition about Zelman was the historiographic myth about the love affair between Zelman and Dorota Tarłowa created in the 19th century by the professional historians. The study of Wiślicz is also a significant contribution to the uses of the historical images of Zelman in the making of the modern Polish and Ukrainian antisemitism in Galicia.

The third chapter which has a title “Zelman Wolfowicz” takes up the case of Zelman to offer the insights into the main trends of the social life of the 18th century Drohobych captainship including the incomes and rent of the salt mines, domanial jurisdiction of the Jewish tenants over dependent peasants, religious and confessional relationships between Jews and Christians in Drohobych². In his examination of the last question, Wiślicz has followed the interpretation of David Frick³ who emphasized the dynamical and interconnected configurations of the religious and ethnic violence, conflicts, and tolerance.

Considering the question of the sources and basis of the vast power competences of Zelman, Wiślicz put an emphasis on his role of mediator and adviser of the local administrators and vice-captains as well as his skillful uses of corruption, complemented by the violence and exploitation of the dependent peasants. One of the accusations against Zelman also mentions that he intentionally promoted drunkards to be appointed as the local officials which apparently helped him controlling their behavior. The reference to the uses of alcohol in Zelman's scheming suggests the more detailed examination of the meaning of alcohol as an important social resource in the contemporary political culture.

Wiślicz also has touched upon the role of debt in relations of power while discussing the growing indebtedness of the local kahals and its influence on

² В. Інкін. *Сільське суспільство Галицького Прикарпаття у XVI–XVIII століттях: Історичні нариси*. Львів 2004.

³ D. Frick. *Kith, Kin and Neighbors. Communities and Confessions in Seventeenth-Century Wilno*. Ithaca (New York) – London 2013.

the relationships within the Jewish communities. One can assume that under conditions of the protracted indebtedness and the weak monetization of the local economy, the access to some key economic and tax monopolies like the alcohol production and consumption, salt mines, customs, etc., became key elements of the economic and political power. That kind of political influence was determined not only by the individual competences and skills to manage those enterprises and exert taxes for captains, but also by the uses of available fiscal and financial resources of the captainship for the extension of the personal power. The unpaid loans and taxes as converted into the debts reinforced the ties of dependency and created opportunities for the legitimate and numerous blackmailing, abuses, and enforcement.

The chapter ends up with the two essays which took the case of Zelman as a starting point to discuss the new methodological perspectives and new analytical categories in the study of Poland-Lithuania. First, Wiślicz ponders upon the intersectional analysis as a new way of investigating the social and cultural history. As the approach elaborated within the contemporary feminist theory, the intersectionality puts the strong emphasis on the interrelations between the basic social categories such as race, gender, ethnicity. The investigation of the intersections of those categories permits to overcome the traditional dichotomy of social structure and individual experience and offers the opportunity to analyze the configurations of power and individual identity in the given moment of the social interaction. At the same time the author has admitted that the intersectional method betrays the similarity to the existing approaches of the microhistory which have concentrated on the dynamics of the social behavior, and the ability of the social actors to construct and interpret themselves the norms and notions of the social worlds.

The last part of the book considers the notion of the pre-modern local cohesion as a key category in the author's search for the new modes of interpreting the "dynamic persistence" of the local structures in Poland-Lithuania, marked by the considerable degree of the social and cultural diversity. Based on the several groups of criteria, Wiślicz has proposed to describe the locality as a foundation of the social order of Poland-Lithuania. He has singled out the permanent (kinship, estate solidarities and geographical origin), changing (wars, raiding, epidemics, and natural disasters), external (governability, economic organization, dependency and clientism) criteria. According to the author, the application of all those criteria to the case of the Drohobych captainship suggests the relatively low level of the social cohesion of the given local community.

To this range of the criteria of social cohesion one can also add the notion of the conflict, provided its key role in functioning and reproducing the forms of social interaction at the local level. It is a conflict which provides the author with the main research perspective and offers him the opportunity to highlight the bal-

ance between the typical and unique in the case of Zelman, to indicate the horizon of the political and social ambitions of the Jewish mediators in the system of the magnate power, to show the mechanisms of building informal networks of power and support in the local context. In addition, the conflict was a main social process of constructing the changing boundaries of the tolerance and intolerance in relationships between Christians and Jews. If one shifts the focus of the analysis from the ideas of Emile Durkheim to the approaches of the processual social anthropology, then it was exactly the conflict which was a fundamental structure of the premodern local communities which determined their agonistic nature and social dynamics. The conflict operated as a process of the permanent undermining, negotiating, and re-confirming the existing social hierarchies, cultural differences, and forms of interactions between different groups; it helped to articulate the normative basis of the political order as well as the individual and collective aspirations to the social recognition and power.

References

- Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West* / eds. John Bossy. Cambridge 1983.
- Frick David. *Kith, Kin and Neighbors. Communities and Confessions in Seventeenth-Century Wilno*. Ithaca (New York) – London 2013.
- Inkin Vasył. *Sil'ske suspil'stvo Halytskoho Prykarpattia u XVI–XVIII stolittiakh: istorychni narysy*. Lviv 2004. [In Ukrainian.]