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THE STRUCTURE OF THE POLISH NOBILITY IN THE  
16TH AND THE 17TH CENTURY  
SOME NEW FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS

Jerzy Topolski(+)

**Abstract:** The new findings in the field of quantification proper (consisting in grouping together scattered data) concerning the feudal property in Poland in the early modern period change substantially existing opinions giving thus new possibilities of the interpretation of political history. The quantitative analysis pertaining to the province of Kalisz shows that the earlier claim that in Western Poland in the structure of landed property was dominated by middle nobility (one noble being owner of one village) while any more numerous stratum of richer nobility was absent does not hold. For the province of Poznań the thesis on the large role of the middle nobility in the general structure of the class should be now formulated much less radically. At the same time the findings made so far concerning the number of the Polish nobility in modern times, show that the prevailing opinion that the nobility accounted for 10 or even more percent of the population is untenable. In Western Poland the nobility did not exceed some three percent of the population.

I

One of the principal methods of making traditional political history adopt a new course of development consists, on the one hand, in expanding the field of research and increasing the precision of results by reference to quantitative methods, and on the other, for the purpose of improving explanations, in linking political history to social history, also with the use of quantitative methods whenever possible. Quantification, by grouping together scattered data, brings out facts and processes that have been left unnoticed so far. Unlike the use of statistical methods to the quantitative data already available we shall term the grouping of individual quantification proper.

In order to explain political life in a given country it is necessary to study the structure of society which was the carrier of that political life, and above all to study those social groups which had the decisive influence upon the course of political events. It is my intention to discuss one of such problems in the political and social life of Poland in the 16th and the 17th century, namely the structure of the Polish nobility. Knowledge of the relevant facts is indispensable for the comprehension of peculiarities of political life in modern Poland.

It turns out that the said quantification proper makes it possible to revise quite essentially the opinions that have prevailed so far. Those opinions do not find any important support in quantitative data. It is not well known what was the global structure of the nobility even though we do

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know quite much about its various groups and strata; we have no satisfactory knowledge of the geographical distribution of those various groups and strata, and when it comes to the numerical size of the nobility we merely repeat the earlier opinions stating that the percentage share of the nobility in the Polish population was much greater than in other countries, and often mention numerical data which are hardly acceptable.

(Note that the rendering of the Polish term "szlachta" into English raises numerous problems. Unlike the titled nobility in Western Europe, the "szlachta" was much more numerous amounting to several percent of the entire population, and included large numbers of relatively poor people. Unlike the gentry, the "szlachta" had not only a special social status, but enjoyed legal privileges. While a member of the British gentry could be and often was, a commoner, a member of the "szlachta" was not.)

The 16th century was in Poland the period during which the so-called democracy of the nobility, which gave active and passive political rights to the very numerous nobility, took shape and started functioning. In this way the problem of the nobility as the political elite acquired a specific character in Poland in the early modern period. While in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where absolutism emerged in various forms, the nobility also was the social foundation of the political power, it did not exercise that power directly, but did so through the intermediary of an absolute ruler and the bureaucratic apparatus under his control. Hence, unlike the nobility in Poland, it did not belong in its totality to the political elite of society. It is only against this background that we have to analyse the inner differentiation of the nobility, that is the problem of elites within that social group.

It may be said that the form of political life in Poland in modern times depended on two factors: 1. the economic and political domination of the nobility as a whole, and 2. the social structure of the nobility. The first factor determined the general form of the political system of the country, whereas the second determined the functioning of that system as related to changes in the balance of power within the nobility as a whole. Our understanding of the first factor requires studies on the number of the nobility as compared with the other strata of society at that time and on the economic foundations of the activity of the nobility; the understanding of the second factor requires studies on the inner differentiation of the nobility and the dynamics of those processes. Such studies have been undertaken in both cases, but the results obtained so far are still not general in character.

My intention is to present the results of the studies related to my seminar and intended to reconstruct the state of, and changes in, the landed estates of the nobility in Great Poland. So far two labour absorbing studies pertaining to the 16th century have been completed and presented in two doctoral dissertations, that of Leon Polaszewski(1) and that of Urszula Piotrkowska.(2) The latter has been published in print in its part pertaining to the district of Kościan and the region of Wschowa(3), while the part pertaining to the districts of Poznań and Walcz is under press. Those studies make use of the concept of feudal property, because next to the landed estates owned by the nobility they also reconstruct the estates held by the king and the Church. Note that they are concerned with the districts which covered the then province of Great Poland (Western Poland) in its entirety.

From the point of view of quantitative analysis our studies were, at least in the Polish literature of the subject, an essential novelty. Following the example of J. Topolski, who suggested a special method of studying commerce in modern times in the case of a lack of direct source-based data (such as custom house records), a method consisting in constructing the statistical population on the basis of investigation of a large number of sources from which scattered single items of information are extracted (e.g., entries in municipal records pertaining to commercial transactions, made in connection with litigation between marchants), the authors mentioned above adopted a similar procedure. Unlike the previous studies, based mainly on fiscal sources, such as registers of land tax, their research covered above all transactions entered in court records, that is, sources of the notarial type; in doing so they did not, however, neglect a systematic study of fiscal sources. The number of the last-named category of sources amounted to 134. Among court records the most valuable ones were those which are called resignation registers, but numerous so-called inscription registers, relations, and decrees have been exploited, too. Use has also been made of numerous cartographical sources. L. Polaszewski, when studying the landed estates of the nobility in the province of Kalisz made use in all of 71 court registers (some 35.000 cards), and U. Piotrkowska, 60 such registers (some 30.000 cards). Those sources made it possible to grasp the size of the landed estates of the nobility much more precisely and comprehensively than any other sources had done. Those sources also made it possible to complete the previously known network of settlements in Great Poland in 16th century.

Leon Polaszewski thus increased the number of settlements in the province of Kalisz in the 16th century by 28 %, i.e., by 619 settlements. In all, both studies established the existence in Great Poland, in the second half of the 16th century, of 4622 settlements, which have been accordingly covered by the study. In the province of Kalisz 76.3 % (2267 complete settlements and 23 parts of settlements) were held by the nobility; the analogous figures for the province of Poznań, including the region of Wschowa and the district of Walcz, were 71.1 % (1119 complete settlements and seven parts of settlements).

It is worth pointing in this connection to a certain methodological difference between the said studies in the history of commerce based on the investigation of municipal records which include numerous but scattered items of information on the subject. Now in the study of the landed estates of the nobility an assumption was made which has in practice proved very fertile and which has to a large extent been verified. That assumption was that every (or almost every) landed estate held by the nobles would be mentioned in the notarial sources at least once during a single generation. Hence, the investigation of court records for the whole 16th century (they were more representative for the second half of the period) greatly increased such a probability. In the said studies in the history of commerce the general initial assumption was different, namely that the probability of an information about commercial transactions can be compared to the sampling used in the representation method. In this way it was assumed that the statistical population reconstructed on the basis of municipal registers would reflect the structure and the dynamics of commerce, even though it could provide incomplete information about its volume.

The data pertaining to the landed estates held by the nobles extracted from various sources were recorded on special cards that made it possible to obtain a card file of settlements and a card file of owners. As has been

said, the study covered not only the landed estates held by the nobles, but also those held by the Church and the State (the king) and also the quantitative relations among those categories of landed property. For that purpose it was necessary to establish the size of the estates, which is not described here.

## II

The most important result of the studies described here is the arrival at the global numerical data pertaining to the landed estates held by the nobility, and the number of such estates in their various categories. Like all previous studies, our research is region-oriented, but that is not a weak point. The peculiarities of the political system in Poland in early modern times make it imperative to regionalize research on the nobility and make one abstain from using averages for the entire country. Such global data are, of course, indispensable for synthetic studies, but political history requires precisely a regional differentiation. Why is that so? Now in the old Polish parliamentary system the deputies were not representatives of the state as a whole, but represented their respective regions (provinces, districts, etc.). For that reason the structure of the nobility and of the political life of a given region had its direct reflection in the central Diet ("Sejm"). The said principle of regional representation, which turned the Polish Diet into a "sui generis" chamber of regions underlay the notorious principle of the unanimity of decisions with the resulting principle of the "liberum veto". A deputy did not represent himself, but was a representative of his region and was bound by his instructions on which he had to take an oath. The principle of regional representation was not observed in the Diet at first, and thinking in terms of the entire state and the practice of majority vote was dominant for a long time. But when the magnates started dominating the nobility they saw in the "liberum veto" a convenient instrument of influencing political life. It sufficed to persuade one deputy (and his local mandators) to enter a protest ("liberum veto") against a given decision of the Diet. The magnates used for that purpose the petty nobility which had no landed estates at all or had holdings not exceeding those of the peasants. This is why the magnates penetrated politically primarily those areas which (like Masovia) abounded in the petty nobility, while they themselves used to settle mainly in the eastern region of the country where, following the political expansion there, they accumulated their latifunds.

To put it in most general terms, the period from the 16th to the 18th century witnessed, as the most characteristic process within the nobility, the aristocratization of that group, related to the concentration of landed property and the growth of latifunds in the Ukraine and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The mechanisms of their rise have been described in many monographs concerned with landed estates of the Radziwills, the Kiezcjlos, the Czartoryskis, etc. The said process of concentration in the 17th and the 18th century almost completely eliminated the so-called partial nobility (i.e., such that one family held only one part of a village), while less strong groups of petty nobility also disappeared in some regions.

The question arises of the causes of the said concentration of the landed estates of the nobility. Regardless of the ambitions of the more powerful families the pride of place goes to the economic factor, which started working when a certain threshold of property was exceeded. The marked fall of the efficiency of serf labour, and hence also of the income per the unit of land, placed less well-to-do groups of the nobility in a difficult position, especially if they did not decide to abandon the nobility's way of

life. Members of that group of the nobility often had to sell their land and took jobs of officials and clerks on larger estates, and also moved to towns. The owners of larger estates, who did not make economic calculations of the capitalist type, i.e., who matched their incomes not with the outlays but with their needs, and who had a sufficient amount of land and a sufficient number of serfs, did not feel the fall of the incomes per unit of land as much as the poorer nobility did.

In the 16th century, the so-called in the historical literature middle nobility (one family holding from one to four-five villages) became politically dominant after having gained the upper hand over the old aristocracy. The terms of trade at that time were advantageous to the grain producing and cattle raising nobility and gave it incomes that enabled it to participate in political life, and that in turn helped the upward nobility of many families which joined the group of the magnates. As a typical example one may mention the career of Chancellor (the rank comparable to prime minister today) Jan Zamoyski, at first called the tribune of the nobility and soon after one of the richest magnates in the country.

Naturally, the fact that most noblemen held from one to several villages each did not mean that those noblemen were equal from the economic point of view. That depended largely on the ways the villages were managed. The difference were still not remarkable in the 16th century, which was marked by the general prosperity of the nobility, but in the 18th century in particular it was a found that an average village in Great Poland brought its owner at least three times as much as did a similar village in Masovia and the Ukraine. This points to the necessity of linking the study of the estates of the nobles in the various regions with the study of methods of farming. But the study of ownership must serve as the starting point.

### III

Great Poland used so far to be treated as the land of lower middle nobility (one noble holding usually one village), which lacked any large number of both the richer nobility and the small landless nobility. We shall see whether, and how far, the recent studies aimed at a more comprehensive quantified approach confirm that claim with respect to the second half of the 16th century. Before analysing the results of those studies we have to note that the situation reflected in the sources from the second half of the 16th century, to be discussed later, was an effect of the fairly vehement first phase of the concentration of the property of the nobles, which started as early as in the late 15th century. That concentration took place mainly at the cost of the partial property typical of Great Poland in the early 16th century. The sources, such as the "Liber beneficiorum" from the Poznań diocese of 1510, published by J. Nowacki, state that quite plainly.<sup>(4)</sup> At that time it was normal that one village was shared by several owners, usually relatives, most often brothers. That process of the concentration of the property of the nobles at that time did not take place in Great Poland alone. I shall mention, by way of example, that the estate of Mikolaj Rej, one of the most eminent Polish writers and poets in the Renaissance period (whose history I have studied), was acquired by him mainly by buying out, over a long period of time, of the shares of partial owners, also by making them dependent by extending credit to them. Rej inherited only two whole villages and several parts of villages, but toward the close of his life he already owned 17 whole villages, two small towns, and six parts of villages, thus attaining the status of a well-to-do nobleman.<sup>(5)</sup>

Here are the results arrived at by L. Polaszewski with reference to the landed estates held by the nobles in the province of Kalisz (which then consisted of six districts). They are tabularized below (table 1).

Table 1

Number of settlement by the nobles in the province  
of Kalisz in the 16th century

| District         | Number of full settlement | Number of parts of settlements | Number of conventional units |
|------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Kalisz           | 512                       | 8                              | 520                          |
| Pyzdry           | 468                       | 5                              | 473                          |
| Konin            | 330                       | 2                              | 332                          |
| Gniezno          | 446                       | 5                              | 451                          |
| Kcynia           | 276                       | 1                              | 277                          |
| Nakło            | 235                       | 2                              | 237                          |
| <b>T O T A L</b> | <b>2 267</b>              | <b>23</b>                      | <b>2 290</b>                 |

Out of the said 2267 complete settlements and 23 parts, i.e., 2290 economic units, 78 were towns (some of the very small), 2107 were villages and parts of villages, and 105 were mills and smithies (treated as separate settlements). Out of those 2107 villages 1603 (76 %) were held by a single owner each (who could have several such villages), while 504 villages were shared by two or more owners, who usually held more such shares and whole villages as well.

It has thus turned out that in the province of Kalisz in the second half of the 16th century undivided villages owned by the nobles were clearly dominant. This is to say that the considerable fragmentation of the nobles' estates, observed at the turn of the 15th century, belonged to the past. One can speak about a "sui generis" revolution in the structure of the landed estates held by the nobles, which indirectly explains the greatly increased political activity of the nobles in the 16th century. The importance of those nobles who were comparatively rich increased within the sphere of the nobility. The studies pertaining to the province of Kalisz show that the above quoted opinion that Great Poland in the 16th century (and later) was a region inhabited by the nobility whose estates were, true, not so much fragmented as they had been at the turn of the 15th century, but by the nobility which was comparatively poor though treated as nobility, is no longer tenable. Table 2 shows the estates of those nobles who were richer than average.

Table 2

Large-sized estates of the nobles in the province  
of Kalisz in the 16th century

| Size of estates<br>(number of settlement) | Number of owners who held estates |                            | Number of estates involved     |                            |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
|                                           | in the province of Kalisz only    | also outside that province | in the province of Kalisz only | also outside that province |
| 5 - 9                                     | 104                               | 87                         | 702                            | 600                        |
| 10 - 14                                   | 23                                | 26                         | 272                            | 299                        |
| 15 - 19                                   | 14                                | 14                         | 238                            | 249                        |
| 20 - 24                                   | 5                                 | 7                          | 113                            | 155                        |
| 25 - 29                                   | 7                                 | 9                          | 184                            | 244                        |
| 30 - 34                                   | 3                                 | 4                          | 69                             | 130                        |
| 35 - 39                                   | 2                                 | 5                          | 76                             | 183                        |
| 40 - 44                                   | 3                                 | 3                          | 125                            | 125                        |
| 45 - 49                                   | 4                                 | 2                          | 184                            | 93                         |
| 50 - 54                                   | -                                 | 2                          | -                              | 105                        |
| 55 - 59                                   | -                                 | 3                          | -                              | 172                        |
| 60 +                                      | 1                                 | 4                          | 62                             | 393                        |
| <b>T O T A L</b>                          | <b>166</b>                        | <b>166</b>                 | <b>2 025</b>                   | <b>2 748</b>               |

This shows that well-to-do nobility (166 estate owners) held, in the province of Kalisz in the second half of the 16th century, as many as 2025 settlements, i.e., 88 % of all (out of 2290) the settlements held by the nobles in that region, and also 700 settlements outside the province of Kalisz. It is true that some 60 % of the owners held 5 to 9 settlements each, which amounted to some 35 % of all settlements, and 85 % of the owners held 5 to 19 settlements each, while only 15 % of the owners had larger estates (which accounted for some 60 % of all settlements), but that structure of landed property differs widely from what used to be assumed in the literature of the subject. It turns out that the middle nobles, who held from one to 5 settlements each, owned in all only some 12 % of the settlements. It is difficult to establish exactly the number of the middle nobles defined in this way, but it can be assumed by way of estimate that it did not exceed 150.

Thus the quantitative analysis pertaining to the province of Kalisz shows that the earlier claim that in Great Poland, in the structure of landed property, was dominated by middle nobility (one noble being owner of one village) while any more numerous stratum of richer nobility was absent does not hold. In any case it is not confirmed by the data pertaining to Kalisz province.



IV

Let us now see what was the situation in the province of Poznań, which covered the western part of Great Poland. There the landed estates of the nobility (806 in all) included 1087 villages and seven parts of villages, which accounted for 71.1 % of all settlements. The relevant data are given in the table 3 below.

Table 3

Landed property held by the nobles in the province  
of Poznań in the second half of the 16th century

| District         | Towns     | Other settlements | Part of settlements | Total of conventional units | Percentage of all settlements |
|------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Kościan          | 13        | 505               | 3                   | 521                         | 76.8                          |
| Poznań           | 16        | 498               | 2                   | 516                         | 66.6                          |
| Walcz            | 2         | 49                | 2                   | 53                          | 61.6                          |
| Wschowa          | 1         | 35                | -                   | 36                          | 81.8                          |
| <b>T O T A L</b> | <b>32</b> | <b>1 087</b>      | <b>7</b>            | <b>1 126</b>                | <b>71.7</b>                   |

Generally speaking, the fragmentation of the estates held by the nobles was greater in the province of Poznań than in that of Kalisz. The process of concentration was not so strong. It may be, however, that the province of Poznań inherited from the Middle Ages a somewhat different structure of landed property than that of Kalisz did. There were, in the province of Poznań, still fairly numerous nobles who held part of a village each; they held altogether some 400 parts of villages. Those nobles were most numerous in the district of Kościan (217 units, i.e., some 56 %) and in that of Poznań (153 units, i.e., some 40 %). In the district of Walcz and Wschowa they totalled only 13. There were in all 258 nobles who held from one to one and a half villages each, and 165 those who held more than one and a half villages each. Thus out of all the estates held by the nobles 47.5 % were held to those who held only a part of a village each, 32 % to those who held one village each; and 20.5 % to those who held one and a half or more villages each. Richer nobles, who owned more than five villages each, held in all 72 estates (i.e., 9 % of the total of 806), out of which only 22 estates included 10 or more settlements each. Those data, of course, do not inform us about the economic status of the various categories of nobles defined in terms of the number of conventional units held by one noble. For instance, the said 22 estates of ten or more settlements each totalled some 260 settlements and some 250 parts of settlements, which was much more than all the estates held by those nobles who owned only a part of a village each, and also much more than all the estates of those nobles who held one village each.

As we know, in Kalisz province the number of such estates was 79, and they were much larger. Further, middle nobility (one noble holding from one to four villages) in Poznań province held 341 (42 %) of all estates, which totalled some 380 settlements and 500 parts of settlements; of these one-village nobles (holding not more than one village and a half) owned 141 settlements and 318 parts of settlements. Finally, 86 petty nobles (whose holding resembled those of the peasants) owned 83 parts of settlements.

In order to obtain data that would make it possible to assign some 1087 settlements to richer, middle, and petty nobility, respectively, it proved necessary to make certain estimates that would allow us to treat parts of villages jointly from the statistical point of view. The calculations yielded the result that in the province of Poznań richer nobility owned some 33 % of all settlements, the analogous figures for the middle and petty nobility being 53 % and 14 %, respectively. One-village nobles held some 25 % of all settlements, that is about one half of the estates held by the middle nobility.

These estimates have been confirmed by calculations in terms of "lanei" (one laneus = ca. 15 hectares) assigned to the various groups of the nobility. The petty and partial nobility, as established by U. Piotrkowska owned 14.8 % of the land held by the nobles in general. The rest was owned by one-village and richer nobility. If that joint category were split, by estimation, into the middle and the richer nobility, the proportions would resemble those obtained from the calculations based on the number of villages.

It turns out that the thesis on the large role of the middle nobility in the general structure of the class is largely correct when applied to Poznań province. That thesis, however, should be formulated much less radically than it used to be so far: after all some one-third of the settlements were owned by the richer nobility, and only some 25 % by one-village nobility. If we exclude the nobles holding less than one-village each, then in the case of Kalisz province the average landed estates held by one noble would amount to some four villages, the analogous figure for the province of Poznań being about two villages.

## V

It follows from the studies described above that in Great Poland in the 16th century there were some 3000 landed estates. They were not latifunde like those in the eastern part of Poland, but in any cases the majority consisted of strong middle estates (if we assume that a really large estate, though not one of a magnate, had at least 20 to 30 settlements), and not of one-village estates, earlier believed to have been typical of Great Poland.

As has been mentioned at the beginning, the knowledge of the structure of the landed estates held by the nobles does not exhaust the most important problem in political history related to the nobility. The next important step is to establish the numerical strength of the various strata of the nobility and its sum total relative to the other classes and strata in the society of those times. This may give an idea of the numerical strength of the political elite in the broader and the narrower sense of the term.

When it comes to the percentage of the nobility in Polish society in the period from the 16th to the 18th century, the often repeated formulation is that the nobility was very numerous and amounted to some 10 % or even more of the total population. It is to be noted, however, that that formulations has never before been supported by any quantitative findings.<sup>(6)</sup> The first

doubts as to the validity of that claim have been raised by the present author who estimated (on the basis of the number of manors) the number of the nobility in Great Poland in the 18th century as amounting to about 3 %.(7)

He pointed to the possibility of making use for that purpose of the poll tax registers dating from the second half of the 17th century, when the taxes were reformed and covered persons, and not lands. The calculations he suggested pertained to Podlasie (in eastern Poland), that is a territory typical of the regions inhabited by petty nobility. That nobility tilled there some 70 % of all the land held by the nobles, and amounted, it may be assumed, to about 20 % of the total population of the region; its members economically resembled the peasants but had the sense of being distinct from the latter as an estate.(8)

The poll tax registers for 1673, 1674, and 1676 have been systematically analysed only by L. Polaszewski, who strove to establish the number of the nobility in Great Poland in that period.(9) His study is the only of its kind in the historical literature of the subject intended to investigate the problem with precision. It is a considerable achievement as a real step toward implementation of the idea of quantification of research and this is why it seems important to present its results in connection with the study of political elites.

Polaszewski analysed penetratingly the poll tax registers and come to the conclusion that the whole series of those registers must be treated jointly in order maximally to eliminate the gaps in the various registers. He demonstrated that the former calculations made by A. Pawinski(10), based on the assumption that there had been a nobleman's mansion in every village (i.e., on the assumption of the absolute domination of the one-village nobility) was not justified and yielded too high estimates. According to Pawinski in Great Poland in the 16th century the nobility amounted to some 20 000 persons (including the families), which yielded some 3 % of the population in the light of the latest estimates of the population in that region.(11)

Polaszewski found that the nobles resided in 56 % of the villages and totalled some 6000 persons in Kalisz province, and some 4000 persons in Poznań province, which gives some 10 000 for the whole of Great Poland, if younger children are disregarded. If we include the children, we arrive at some 13 000 persons, of whom some 6000 supposedly lived in mansions. Polaszewski did not relate his figures to the entire population, which was considerably reduced after the devastating wars in the mid-17th century and the following epidemic diseases. The population of Great Poland amounted at that time, according to the estimates of the present author, to some 400 000 (a decline of some 40 %). Thus the nobility amounted to some 3.4 % of the entire population. Thus the difference, if we consider that the calculations we are speaking about are estimates, between the results obtained by Pawinski and those arrived at by Polaszewski, is not too large. It must be noted, however, that the convergence is largely apparent rather than real. As it turned out, Pawinski adopted a too small average population per mansion (five persons), while Polaszewski, on the basis of more precise calculations, is inclined to adopt 7.4 persons per mansion. This yielded similar results despite different initial assumptions. In Pawinski's case the too large number of mansions was compensated for by the too small indicator of their population.

Polaszewski assumes that some 6000 members of the nobility lived in mansions, while the remaining 4000 had probably no land at all and hence was

not covered by calculations concerned with the landed estates of the nobles. That accounted for 40 % of the nobility, and hence very much. Those nobles participated in the political life, but they were on an increasing scale used by the magnates for their purposes. It is, therefore, not astonishing, that that part of the nobility was deprived of political rights by the Four-Year Diet (1788-1792), which introduced in Poland the modern constitutional monarchy. The point was to weaken the domination and the selfishness of the magnates.

The findings made so far concerning the number of the Polish nobility in modern times, fragmentary as they still are, show that the prevailing opinion that the nobility accounted for 10 or even more percent of the population is untenable. The higher percentage of the nobility in certain regions (up to 20 % of the total population) will not be able to bring the average to about 10 % in view of the fact that in Great Poland, traditionally treated as the region with a large fragmentation of the landed estates held by the nobles, the nobility did not exceed some 3 % of the population. The findings made so far should in any case inspire researchers to carry on their quantitative analyses based on sources of various kinds. The data obtained in this way suggest new interpretations in the sphere of political history and point to the importance of quantitative procedures.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Polaszewski, L., *Własność feudalna w województwie kaliskim w XVI wieku* (Feudal Property in Kalisz Province in the 16th Century), Poznań 1976.
- 2 Piotrkowska, U., *Rozmieszczenie własności feudalnej w województwie poznańskim w XVI wieku* (The Distribution of Feudal Property in Poznań Province in the 16th Century) (typescript).
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