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Marriage Strategies in Poland: Social and Spatial Differences (16th-18th Centuries)

*Cezary Kuklo / Małgorzata Kamecka**

Abstract: In recent years Polish historiography has observed an increasing interest in the functioning of the family in the past. Nevertheless, present knowledge of the issue still seems relatively insufficient. This paper is an attempt to present the circumstances of family creation rather than its functioning and failure. We aim to emphasise some social, religious and territorial differences concerning families between 16th-18th centuries in the kingdom of Poland, which was the 5th biggest country in Europe before the partitions (1772-1795). Doing this, we want to approach our ancestors' marriage strategies, their material status and other factors influencing them. On the basis of parish and judicial registers are presented the age of newly-married couples, their previous marital status and their social and territorial background. The analysis of the last mentioned aspects over those 300 years should give us an idea of the extent to which parish borders were crossed when choosing a partner.

Despite a significant advancement in studies on Old Polish society many of its aspects remain underresearched, including work on the Old Polish family. There has been research that shed some light on the creation, lasting and decomposition of the family, mainly from Andrzej Wyczański, the team of Jerzy Topolski and Zbigniew Kwaśny's school¹. But contrary to their western col-

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¹ M. Bogucka, *Rodzina w polskim mieście. Wprowadzenie w problematykę, Przegląd Historyczny*, t. LXXIV, 1983, z. 3, p. 495-507; M. Górny, *Peasant family and its farm in Wielkopolska in the second part of the 18th century*, [in] *Les modèles familiaux en Europe aux XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, ed. C. Kuklo, Białystok 1992, p. 49-56; A. Izydorezyk, *Rodzina chłopska w Małopolsce w XV-XVI wieku*, [in] *Społeczeństwo staropolskie*, ed. A. Wyczański, t. III, Warszawa 1983, p. 7-27; M. Kędelski, *Rozwój demograficzny Poznania*

leagues, whose research is often sponsored by governmental institutions, Polish historians usually have to manage on their own. Therefore it is often a task of single researchers to discover facts about the Old Polish family and consequently their work tends to be limited only to regional studies. The lack of sources, or the scarcity of the existing ones does not make those studies easier.

The aim of this paper is to present the background of family formation in the social (town – village), spatial and religious context in the 16th - 18th centuries Poland. The study considers our ancestors' matrimonial strategies, their economic background as well as other conditioning factors. Therefore, the ages of the bride and the groom are presented, along with their previous marital status, and the choice of the partner from the social and territorial point of view. We also focus on the frequency of crossing parish borders when choosing the spouse.

In our research we concentrate on the cities of great political and economic significance, such as Gdańsk and Warsaw, as well as on smaller towns enjoying a stable increase in the number of inhabitants between the 16th and the 18th centuries, like Toruń, or even very small towns, like Brzeżany in the Red Russia province. As far as peasant families are concerned, we present them on the basis of some of the most complete works about the family situation in Great Poland, Little Poland and Upper Silesia.

Polish parish marriage registers have been explored to little extent. They contain numerous mistakes, which lower their value as historical sources, even if a very detailed demographic analysis is applied. It should not be forgotten that the process of demographic changes in Poland took place in various social, economic, cultural and legal systems: for example, in the 19th century the so-far monolithic Polish population of the 18th century underwent a different evolution process in each of the three partition states of Poland.

Historians have many book collections at their disposal; however, it is hard to assess their actual number. We must remember that during world wars many

w XVIII i na początku XIX wieku, Poznań 1992; M. Kędelski, *Struktura i dynamika ludności Poznania w latach 1793-1816*, *Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza*, t. XVIII, 1990, z. 1, p. 31-54; Z. Kwaśny, *Rodzina chłopska na Śląsku w XVIII i w pierwszej połowie XIX w.*, [in] *Pamiętnik XV Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich*, t.II: *Przemiany społeczne a model rodziny*, ed. A. Żarnowska, Gdańsk - Toruń 1995, p. 23-32; J. Topolski, *Gospodarstwo wiejskie w dobrach arcybiskupa gnieźnieńskiego od XVI do XVIII wieku*, Poznań 1958; J. Topolski, *Położenie i walka klasowa chłopów w XVIII w. w dobrach arcybiskupstwa gnieźnieńskiego*, Warszawa 1956; S. Waszak, *Dzietność rodziny mieszczańskiej i ruch naturalny ludności Poznania w końcu XVI i w XVII wieku*, *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych*, t. 16, 1954, p. 316-348; A. Wyczański, *Rodzina w Europie w XVI-XVIII wieku*, [in] *Europa i świat w początkach epoki nowożytnej*, ed. A. Mączak, Warszawa 1991, p. 10-38; A. Wyczański, *Polska Rzeczą Pospolitą Szlachecką*, Warszawa 1991; A. Wyczański, A. Wyrobisz, *La famille et la vie économique*, *Studia Historiae-Oeconomicae*, t. 18, 1983 (1985), p. 56-68; A. Wyrobisz, *Rodzina w mieście w dobie przedprzemysłowej a życie gospodarcze*, *Przegląd badań i problemów*, *Przegląd Historyczny*, t. LXXVII, 1986, z. 2, p. 305-330.

precious book collections were lost. Sometimes the whole set of sources is situated in one place, or the registers of one parish can be found in different locations. The majority of books dated before 1887 are still either in parishes, or in Church archives, but some of them are kept in other archives or libraries (usually among the sources which have not been catalogued) and sometimes they are in private collections. For example, the population analysis of Pępowo parish in Great Poland was carried out on the basis of the *status animarum* books (the parish comprised 16 villages), parish registers of country folk and some merchant deeds². Other sources of information about the family include judicial registers. Modern computer techniques made it possible for some research workers, such as Cezary Kukło or Krzysztof Mikulski to carry out studies on larger populations and to reconstruct families (thanks to the parish registers of baptisms and marriages) of townfolk³. Unfortunately, even if we analyse the sources which are in the best condition (for example: parish registers of marriages) we can have many problems with the proper interpretation. It is so because of the circumstances in which they were written, and of course the people who created them. We discuss it in detail in the further part of our presentation.

It is essential to devise a method of establishing the marrying couples' ages. The ages of the bride and bridegroom were conditioned by the socio-economic relations and the biological condition of the population (puberty marking the beginning of the reproductive abilities). On the example of parish marriage registers in the village of Bejsce, Edmund Piasecki points out several problems that often arise:

Until the end of the 19th century, the ages of the bride and the groom were recorded on the basis of their declarations (or those of the person who registered the marriage). In Bejsce parish the ages noted down in the registers did

² M. Górný, *Status animarum parafii Szaradowo z 1766 roku, Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski*, t. XVI, 1984, p. 163-174; eadem, *Wartość źródłowa status animarum parafii Szaradowo z 1766 roku, Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski*, t. XVII, 1986, p. 165-184; eadem, *Status animarum parafii w Sławie z 1776 r., Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza*, t. XVII, 1989, z. 1, p. 169-185; eadem, *Status animarum parafii w Sławie z 1777 r., Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza*, t. XVIII, 1990, z. 1, p. 153-177; eadem, *Mieszkańcy parafii pępowskiej w 1777 roku. Analiza księgi status animarum*, Wrocław 1994.

³ W. Gruszecki, C. Kukło, *Informatyczny system rekonstrukcji rodzin, gospodarstw domowych i społeczności lokalnych w Polsce przedrozbiorowej*, Białystok 1994; C. Kukło, *Rodzina w osiemnastowiecznej Warszawie*, Białystok 1991; eadem, *Techniki komputerowe w demografii historycznej, Kwartalnik Historyczny*, t. CI, 1994, nr 1, p. 135-152; eadem, *Z problematyki badań nad feminizacją gospodarstw domowych w miastach polskich u schyłku XVIII w. przy użyciu komputera*, [in] *Pamiętnik XV Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich*, t. II: *Przemiany społeczne a model rodziny*, ed. A. Żarnowska., Gdańsk – Toruń 1995, p. 77-83 ; eadem, *Kobieta samotna w społeczeństwie miejskim u schyłku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej. Studium demograficzno-społeczne*, Białystok 1998; K. Mikulski, *Przestrzeń i społeczeństwo Torunia od końca XIV do początku XVIII wieku*, Toruń 1999.

not usually vary from the real ones more than a few years – in some periods there was a tendency to understate, in others to overstate the actual age.

The average ages of the bride and the groom were a consequence of the age structure of both sexes in a given area. Unfortunately, it is impossible to reconstruct these structures.

The marital status given in marriage registers is often untrue. The age structures of marriages vary depending on which marriage it was for both parties. Piasecki, basing on the data from Bejsce parish, thinks that the most common mistake in registers was to put down widowers as bachelors and widows as unmarried women.

Analysing the age of newly married couples in individual periods only on the basis of the records in parish marriage registers may lead to imprecise conclusions. If the tendencies to state the ages of the bride and groom as younger or older closely followed one another, we obtain an unclear picture, and its proper interpretation is impossible.

It should not be forgotten that the ages of the bride and the groom also change due to alterations in the model of matrimonial selection – the combination of ages of the man and the woman. The relations (age difference) between the partners can be different in the marriages contracted at a younger age from those contracted at later ones. Therefore, the analysis of the averages (age of men and women and the age difference between them) is indeed only a prelude to a more profound analysis⁴.

We should also consider the age difference in marriages contracted within the parish and those contracted with partners from different parishes. The marriages within one parish are strongly conditioned by the age structure of the local population. This situation is to some extent similar in marriages between distant relatives. In the face of the above the change in the number of such marriages could be the reason for the observed differences in the ages in the total of marriages⁵.

Marriage was a very important moment in the life of town and country dwellers – it was an introduction into the world of mature, responsible and independent people. It was identified with maturity and social respect. In order to become a citizen of a certain city, a member of a guild, a craft or municipal authorities, one had to be married⁶. Superior authorities, also in Gdańsk, were suspicious of both men and women, who were unmarried, regarding them as an unstable, even a dangerous element, threatening the social order in some way. Therefore, a marriage ceremony, as an important stage in achieving a higher

⁴ E. Piasecki, *Ludność parafii bejskiej (woj.kieleckie) w świetle ksiąg metrykalnych z XVIII-XIX w.*, Warszawa – Wrocław 1990, p. 146.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶ J. Zdrenka, *Główne, Stare i Młode miasto Gdańsk i ich patrycjat w latach 1325-1525*, Toruń 1992, p. 138.

social status and the moment which substantially changed the lives of both parties, was accompanied by numerous ceremonial rituals⁷.

Reflections on the urban family should begin by quoting some data for Warsaw, the capital and the biggest city of Poland. Cezary Kukło, after a very thorough examination of sources dated from 1740 to 1779 (almost 5 thousand deeds) points out the role played by the St. Cross parish church, in which almost 98% of all marriages were entered into. Only 84 marriage ceremonies (1.7%) were performed elsewhere. The majority took place in the 1740s and the 1760s. From the beginning of the 1780s marriages outside the parish church were very rare⁸.

The eighteenth century Warsaw, besides Cracow, was the biggest monastic clergy center⁹. Marriages that took place in monastic churches constitute a proof of monastic vitality in the Polish capital city. Almost half of the marriages outside parish churches in the years 1740 - 1779 were entered into at monastic churches. On the basis of the known social status of 29 out of the total number of 41 newly married couples, we could state that three fourths of the brides and bridegrooms belonged to the rich clerical gentry. Basing on the available sources it is difficult to state clearly why such a great number of marriage ceremonies were performed outside parish churches. A monastic venue for the wedding may have satisfied the bride's and the bridegroom's (but also their parents' and relatives') ambitions. However, there might have been other, obscure factors influencing the choice of the church. Varsovian town-folk, on the other hand, celebrated their marriages in the appropriate parish churches¹⁰.

The reigns of August the Second and his son were certainly favourable to an influx of foreign immigrants, especially Germans, into the capital. The social and professional structure of this foreign community was very diverse. For example, in 1792, the majority of almost six thousand Evangelical Church members lived in St. Cross parish, in Bielino jurisdiction¹¹. The literature on the subject indicates that there were some conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants. However, as they lived in one city and their mutual contacts were becoming deeper, mixed marriages were inevitable – although the Catholic Church officially forbid them. Mixed marriages entered into in the parish of St. Cross were more frequent in the seventeen forties and fifties (3.0-3.1% of all marriages), with a decreasing tendency in the following decades. It was usually the husband who was a Protestant. The public marriage registers at St. Cross parish also mentioned a few marriages between neophytes and neophytes

⁷ M. Bogucka, *Życie w dawnym Gdańsku*, Warszawa 1997, p. 141-143.

⁸ C. Kukło, *Rodzina w osiemnastowiecznej...*, p. 96.

⁹ J. Kłoczowski, *Zakony męskie w Polsce XVI-XVIII w.*, [in] *Kościół w Polsce*, ed. J. Kłoczowski, t. 2: *Wiek XVI-XVIII*, Kraków 1969, p. 605.

¹⁰ C. Kukło, *Rodzina w osiemnastowiecznej...*, p. 97.

¹¹ J. Waszkiewicz, *Jurydyka Bielino*, [in] *Studia Warszawskie*, t. 12, Warszawa XVIII wieku, z. 1, Warszawa 1972, p. 126-130.

and Catholics. The invaluable work of J. Goldberg about Jewish converts in Old Polish society shows a difficult and complicated process of social and cultural integration of neophytes at that time¹².

Territorial mobility of the feudal society has been drawing historians' attention for a long time. The main sources for the studies were town law registers. However, the numerous imperfections in Old Polish registers make the results of these studies rather unsatisfying, which created the need to use church registers of marriages, births and baptisms in investigating the migration processes. Parish marriage registers do not always include information about the origins or place of residence of the bride and the groom before the marriage. As it was common to organize the wedding in the parish of the bride, the data provided by C. Kukło concern only the men who married women from St. Cross parish. We know little about the origin of women from outside the parish in question¹³. The statistical analysis results prove that in the last fifteen years of the 18th century over 80% of the bridegrooms lived (were born?) in the parish of the future bride. It means that the marriages were made up within the local community. There was a surprisingly small number of marriages between women from the capital and men from outside the city. Within fifteen years only 61 bachelors and 25 widowers, fewer than 90 altogether, out of the total number of 2.5 thousand came from outside Warsaw. Unfortunately, the sources used in this study do not make it possible to estimate the real size of migration into Warsaw at the end of the 18th century. In the analysed group of newly married couples coming from the Varsovian parish there were both those who were born there and those who had only recently come to the capital.

The next issue is the age at which marriage was entered into. In Warsaw, both at the end of Saxon dynasty's reign in Poland and during Stanisław Ponia-towski's times, men contracted their first marriage at the age of almost 29, like in Western Europe. But the women in Warsaw, contrary to those living in Lyon, Marseille, Rouen or Geneva got married very early: during the rule of August the Second at the age of 23, and during the Enlightenment period even earlier¹⁴. The high average age of contracting marriage in the West was reflected in preindustrial Warsaw only among males. It resulted mainly from the similar economic situation of townsmen in the whole of late feudal Europe. A man – the future head of a family – started to be economically independent comparatively late. From the point of view of demographic structures, the low average age of brides was even more important. Throughout the whole the 18th century we can find isolated cases of girls aged 13, and some others aged be-

¹² J. Goldberg, *Żydowski konwertycy w społeczeństwie staropolskim*, [in] *Spółeczeństwo staropolskie*, ed. A. Lzydorczyk, A. Wyczański, t. 4, 1986, p. 195-248.

¹³ C. Kukło, *Rodzina w osiemnastowiecznej...*, p. 100.

¹⁴ C. Kukło, *Rodzina w osiemnastowiecznej...*, p. 174; A. Fauve-Chamoux, R. Wall, *Nuptialité et famille*, [in] *Histoire des populations de l'Europe*, vol. I: *Des origines aux prémices de la révolution démographique*, eds. J. –P. Bardet, J. Dupâquier, Paris 1997, p. 360-362.

tween 14 and 15, among Warsaw brides. The upper age limit for women was 47 - 48 years, but almost all of them got married before the age of 38 - 40. Between 1740 and 1769 the biggest group were brides aged 19, and in the following thirty years – aged 19 to 20¹⁵. The youngest grooms were 16 years old, i.e. two years older than the requirement set by the canonical law – but such cases were very rare. Between 1740 and 1769 three age peaks were observed: 21-22, 24-25, 29-30. During the Enlightenment period there were only two: 22 and 26 years¹⁶.

The Enlightenment period, between 1770 and 1799, does not bring any great changes in the number of marriages in the respective age groups of men. However, a very clear tendency to marry earlier is visible in the female population. If at the end of the reign of the Saxon dynasty 43.4% of women got married before the age of 20, during the following thirty years this number increased to 50.7%. At the same time we can observe a slight decrease in the number of single women who got married after the 30th year of life.

Between 1740 and 1769 the percentage of widowers among bridegrooms increased regularly along with their age, while the number of widows – only to the age of 40. The number of women entering into a second marriage was much higher in all the under 40 age groups.

Considerable changes in the age-structure were brought by the age of the Enlightenment. It was no longer widows under 40 who remarried more often than the widowers, but those under 35. The number of widows remarrying between the ages of 21 and 30 also increased.

We do not have any studies on the age at which people got married for the first time in the early modern Gdańsk. In his very precious studies on the demography of the city of Gdańsk, Jan Banaszowski ignores this crucial issue, even though it could be helpful – for example in the explanation of the birth rate fluctuation¹⁷. Only Joachim Zdrenka has done research in this area, but exclusively for male upper class city dwellers, setting the average at the age of 30, which is relatively high¹⁸. On the basis of data from different sources, Maria Bogucka makes an assumption that also in the middle and lower classes of the society the average age of contracting a marriage was rather high, probably over the 20th year of life for the men. This was caused by economic reasons – in order to contract a marriage a man had to gain economic independence and create material basis for supporting his future family. As far as women are concerned, the age of contracting a marriage could have been significantly lower, probably between the 15th and 20th year of life. Often, the marriage was entered into by people of considerable age difference. Teenage girls married

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁷ J. Baszanowski, *Przemiany demograficzne w Gdańsku w latach 1601-1846 w świetle tabel ruchu naturalnego*, Gdańsk 1995, p. 188-203.

¹⁸ J. Zdrenka, *op. cit.*, p. 139-140.

men over fifty, while young boys married elderly women – mostly widows. The reasons were usually economic – for example to overtake a workshop or a trade company and in this way secure the economic interests of the family¹⁹.

As Maria Bogucka points out, a marriage was in most cases the result of negotiations carried out by the relatives and friends rather than the most interested parties. The selection of the partner was based on the following principles: an equal social position, economic benefits and the advantages resulting from uniting the families. Beauty, individual preferences or feelings did not play an important role²⁰. It was not only economic matters, but also familial bonds, sentiments of the members of the older generation as well as the political and economic competition among clans that influenced the decision about a marriage, even if it was against the feelings of the prospective partners. Only among the poorest members of the society could one choose a partner more freely and often according to individual feelings. It resulted from the lack of possessions, familial bonds and ambitions or expectations of mutual profits. The significance of the social character of a marriage was stressed by the fact that it had to be approved not only by the family, but also by the social group the family belonged to (in the sources it is described as “friends” or “society”). “Friends” were people linked with the family by various interests or social position. They formed a social group called “the society” – and in such an economically crucial issue as marriage their voice counted far more than the voice of the future partners.

The prospective marriage was negotiated with the aid of mediators, which was to prevent the risk of a wrong, too personal a choice. According to Maria Bogucka, this was to keep the young people away from the contracting process and the decision-making, which were reserved only for older, more experienced persons²¹. In the upper classes they were usually family members or other close relatives, along with the members of “the society” (business partners, neighbours). In the middle classes this role was played by contracted, professional mediators. These were most often respected women who had vast knowledge of relations among families in a certain neighbourhood or in the whole city. So far historians have not conducted any studies on this important professional group who had great influence on the way marriages were contracted in the city of Gdańsk, especially among the less affluent merchants and craftsmen.

The situation in Gdańsk and the religious background of marriages there resulted from the domination of the Lutheran and Calvinist churches. We know that these denominations put marriage first and opposed celibacy. The major

¹⁹ M. Bogucka, Społeczne i religijne konteksty zawarcia małżeństwa w Gdańsku w XVI-XVIII wieku, [in] *Wesela, chrzciny i pogrzeby w XVI-XVIII wieku. Kultura życia i śmierci*, ed. H. Suchojad, Warszawa 2001, p. 114.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²¹ M. Bogucka, *Społeczne i religijne...*, p. 117.

aim of the marriage was to produce offspring (the future successors of the family's fortune). The marriage itself was based on the patriarchal model, where the husband was the decision-maker and the guide to his wife in both the secular and the spiritual matters. The rule of joint property of spouses was adopted and the husband was authorised to manage the wife's property without any restrictions. It strengthened the role of marriage in the economic life of the city. A wise management of the estate and a good life of the spouses led them to God and salvation. This is the image of a good marriage found in the sermons and occasional pieces in Gdańsk in the 16th - 18th centuries²².

In demographic studies, the age at which representatives of both sexes contract their first marriages, plays an important role in assessing the situation of the family (both demographic and social). In his study on the urban family in Toruń in the 16th and 17th centuries Krzysztof Mikulski draws our attention to this important factor²³. In the community studied by this author, the average age of contracting the first marriage by women, after some fluctuations between 19 and 23 in the period before 1625, started to increase and reached the level of 25 years in 1715. Previously, in 1695 - 1700, this average even exceeded 26 years. As far as men were concerned, few examples from the late 16th and early 17th centuries indicate that they contracted their first marriage rather late (around the age of 30). It might have resulted from the guild law, which obliged a man to learn the trade away from his hometown. However, just after 1605 this average decreased even to 23 years of age. It is worth noting that the high average age of contracting the first marriage in case of men at the end of the 17th century clearly coincides with the period of high mortality of women at the reproductive age. In Mikulski's opinion this caused the change in the sex proportions at the time of contracting the first marriage, which resulted in the increase in the average age for bridegrooms. The rivalry for the hand of the bride was made more intense by comparatively more frequent remarriages of still young widowers²⁴.

Low mobility constitutes a very characteristic feature of the analysed population of Toruń. Marriages with either of the spouses coming from outside the town were rare. Migration from the country was also very small. With time, it resulted in an increase in the number of marriages between distant relatives. It could be the cause of genetic impoverishment of successive generations and in consequence a significantly lower resistance to diseases²⁵.

²² Ibid., p. 118.

²³ K. Mikulski, Kondycja demograficzna rodziny mieszczańskiej w Toruniu z XVI-XVII wieku (na przykładzie genealogii Neisserów), [in] *Kobieta i rodzina w średniowieczu i na progu czasów nowożytnych*, ed. Z. H. Nowak, A. Radziwiński, Toruń 1998, p. 115-143.

²⁴ K. Mikulski, op. cit., p. 132.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

A small town named Brzeżany, located in Red Russia, became the subject of intensive and very interesting research carried out by Bohdan Puczyński²⁶. According to his studies, in the years 1641 - 1800 the weddings were traditionally celebrated in the bride's parish. It is especially apparent in Roman Catholic families if we look at a situation where the bride and the bridegroom came from two neighbouring parishes. Similar, even more numerous examples can be found among the Greek-Catholic population, for whom the villages situated in one Roman Catholic parish, often belonged to different Greek-Catholic parishes. For both the Roman and Greek Catholic population out of 61 weddings 98.3% were celebrated in the parish of the bride, whereas only 1.7% in the bridegroom's²⁷.

The bride and bridegroom mostly came from the territory of the Roman Catholic parish of Brzeżany, some of them from an unknown location, and the rest from very distant places. According to the available public marriage registers (both Roman and Greek Catholic) 67.8% of men and 74.2% of women came from the Brzeżany parish, 20.2% of men and 21.5% of women from an unknown location, and 12% of men and 4.3% of women from outside the parish²⁸.

The bride and the bridegroom usually came from the same place, where they also lived after the wedding, i.e. those living in a town also came from that town, those from a suburb lived in the same suburb, and of course those from a certain village lived in that village. Newcomers from other places were a minority. The migration from the country to the town in the analysed parish was very small.

Marriage was generally contracted by people of the same religious persuasion. Of all the marriages between 1641 and 1800 that took place in the parish church, 96.3% were contracted by Roman Catholics, 3.5% by Greek Catholic men and Roman Catholic women, and 0.2% by Roman Catholic men and Greek Catholic women. In Greek Catholic parish marriage registers 99.9% of marriages were contracted by members of the Greek Catholic Church.

Bachelors usually married single women, more seldom widows. The same rule applied to widowers. Of all the marriages entered into in the parish church between 1641 and 1800, 85.1% were marriages of bachelors and single women, 6.2% of bachelors and widows, 5.2% of widowers and single women, 3.5% of widowers and widows. The differences between Roman and Greek Catholics come mainly from the fact that among Roman Catholics there were more marriages between bachelors and single women or widows, and fewer between widowers and single women or widows.

²⁶ B. Puczyński, *Ludność Brzeżan i okolicy w XVII i XVIII wieku, Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski*, t. IV-VI, 1971-1974, part II, p. 15-64.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

The widows and widowers were mostly once widowed. Roman Catholic public marriage registers do not include information about any second-time widows or widowers, and in the Greek Catholic parishes there were only three marriages where the man was twice-widowed²⁹.

It was usual for people to get married comparatively early. Between 1784 and 1800, 4% of the Roman Catholic women got married before the 15th year of life, 10.1% of men and 54.1% of women at the ages of 16-20 years, whereas 40.7% of men and 17.4% of women at the ages of 21-25 years. Similar figures apply to Greek Catholics. Men got married at the earliest at the ages of 16-20, but most frequently between 21 and 25, whereas women – even before the age of 15, and usually at the ages of 16-20 – that is on average 5 years earlier than the men. The average age of bachelors among the Roman Catholic population was 24.8 years, of unmarried women 20.1 years, widowers 40.2 years and widows 32.2 years. The average age of bachelors and widowers altogether was 28.0 years, and of unmarried women and widows 21.3 years. As far as the Greek Catholics are concerned, the corresponding figures are as follows: the average ages of the bachelors and widowers altogether was 27.8 years, of unmarried women and widows 21.3 years³⁰.

Marriage played a key role in the process of creation and functioning of peasant households. For the marriage of feudally dependent country folk a permission of the feudal landlord was required. The lack of such permission could result in a fine for the bride and the bridegroom along with the priest who celebrated the wedding³¹. In Silesia, if a marriage resulted in leaving the village and an extinction of the feudal relationship, a special contribution had to be paid to the landowner³². Most farms, especially rich peasant farms were run by married couples.

Among all the farms in Kujawy 92.7% were run by married couples, whereas among the big and medium-sized farms the number exceeded 94%. The numbers were only lower for tenants (87.2%), craftsmen (80.6%) and, significantly, for landless peasants – *kątnicy* – (only 47.1% of married couples). Single women rarely ran households and usually only for a short period after being widowed. Widowhood usually lasted only for a short time, and ended by a remarriage. Sometimes the children overtook the farm or the landowner appointed another tenant to take over the land³³.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 23-24.

³¹ Z. Kwaśny, *Rodzina chłopska w parafii Dobra w latach 1727-1758*, [in] *Wesela, chrzciny i pogrzeby w XVI-XVIII wieku. Kultura życia i śmierci*, ed. H. Suchojad, Warszawa 2001, p. 25.

³² A. Konieczny, *Ograniczenia swobody zawierania małżeństw wśród chłopów na Górnym Śląsku w połowie XVIII i na początku XIX wieku*, *Studia Śląskie*, t. I, Opole 1958, p. 111-113.

³³ W. Kula, *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego*, Warszawa 1983, p. 236-242.

In the registers of Kujawy province there were 84 (4.4%) – out of the total number of 1910 – farms run by women; 76 of these were widows. The same was true for three parishes of Wieluń province, where only 3-4% of the farms were run by women. The relation between the number of inhabitants on the farm and the fact that it was run by a woman doesn't exist, which strengthens the thesis about only temporary management of the farm by women. Therefore farmers' widows should be looked for mostly among the relatives and tenants. In Edmund Piasecki's opinion, women whose husbands died in the parish of Bejsce between 1761 and 1810, usually remarried within two months after the death of their husbands (20.4%). The same was true for men. However, it should be noted that the 23% of women remarried 5 years after the death of their partners. Unfortunately, we are unable to say anything about their status in the new households³⁴.

Studies concerning the population of Szaradowo parish conducted by Marek Górny are very valuable for the development of the research on the family in Great Poland³⁵. In this area all farms were run by married serfs with children. The same was true among the poorer serfs. However, on the basis of the analysed sources it is very hard to state the time of the remarriage of those who became widows or widowers. Those who remained in widowhood and handed over the farms to their children were rare. The analysis of the population structure of Szaradowo parish in the years 1721 - 1800 shows that 64% of the widowers remarried within five months after the death of their first wife. Some got married again during the first month of mourning. Women usually remarried after over a year in widowhood (65%), but earlier remarriages occurred (often before the sixth month of widowhood – when the potential pregnancy was invisible yet). Górny thinks that the time of remarriage was similar in the whole province of Great Poland. Therefore, we can speak of a certain tendency concerning the time of remarriage in all villages of this province. What factors influenced the time of remarriage? The laws proclaimed by the landlords? The tradition? The economic situation or the number of children? Contemporary life conditions forced every fifth or fourth spouse to face the need of choosing a new partner³⁶.

The age of the partners was strictly related (apart from the economic and cultural factors mentioned above) to the marital status of the future partners. Krystyna Górna draws our attention to this fact in her study on Upper Silesian family, where in the 18th century two thirds of the marriages were the first ones for both partners³⁷. The canonical law allowed to marry very young, but the

³⁴ E. Piasecki, *op. cit.*, p. 156-164.

³⁵ M. Górny, *Zawarcie małżeństwa na wsi pałuckiej w XVIII wieku: parafia szaradowska*, *Genealogia*, t. 7, 1996, p. 69-96.

³⁶ M. Górny, *Mieszkańcy parafii...*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

³⁷ K. Górna, *Narodziny, śluby i zgony na Górnym Śląsku w XVIII wieku*, [in] *Wesela, chrzciny i pogrzeby w XVI-XVIII wieku. Kultura życia i śmierci*, ed. H. Suchojad, Warszawa 2001, p. 33-42.

actual matrimonial age started at 18 for women and 21 for men. The age of the partners in Upper Silesia is mainly known thanks to the sources dating from the seventeenth century. It appears that on average in Krapkowice parish women from towns first married at the age of 23, from villages – at 22, whereas the men at 27 and 25 respectively. We can also see slight differences between parishes: the ages varied even by one year. Krystyna Górna writes that serfs married at the age of 25, and they had the youngest wives: aged 20. Lesser serfs and their wives were a year older, and the cottage-workers one and a half year older. So, the age of contracting a marriage was strictly connected to the economic situation of the future partners. The marriages where the husband was older than the wife were in great majority (three fourths), in 12% the wife was older than her husband and in 10% they were of the same age. It is worth noticing that the oldest couples were those coming from different parishes³⁸.

According to the law, the weddings mostly took place in the bride's parish. However, it sometimes happened that the girl was in service in another parish and she got married there. In parishes included in the studies almost all marriages could be described as territorially endogamic. Since the end of the 17th century we can observe a slight decrease in the number of marriages between partners from different parishes. For example, in Krapkowice parish at the end of the 17th century almost one third of men and one fifth of women came from outside the parish. But in the first half of the 18th century the number dropped to 19% and 10%, whereas in the second half to 25% and 13% respectively. In Krzanowo parish 43% were couples coming from the parish, 36% from the neighbouring territories, and one fifth from more distant places. In Ziemięciny at the turn of the 17th century over 80% of the newly married couples came from the parish, but at the end of the 18th century only about 60%³⁹.

Single women and men were not regarded as worthy heads of a household⁴⁰. Piasecki quotes an astonishing proportion of widows to widowers – 2:1 – in the under 55 age group. He attributes it to the longer period of widowhood for women. A large number of widowers – heads of households – constitutes an additional argument for the fact that men wanted to stay at the head of the farm as long as possible. The situation of widows was different. Piasecki claims that women with sons over 18 remarried rarely (3.7%). The only choice they had was to hand over the farm to their grown-up children⁴¹.

According to the conducted research the age for contracting marriages in central Poland before the partitions was comparatively high, especially for men, who in Great Poland married between the 25th and 29th year of age, whereas in Bejsce in Kielce province at the age of 28 (between 1791 - 1800). In

³⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁹ K. Górna, op. cit., p. 38.

⁴⁰ M. Kopczyński, *Studia nad rodziną chłopską w Koronie w XVII-XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 1998, p. 138.

⁴¹ E. Piasecki, op. cit., p. 161-165.

cities the age for entering into marriage was similarly high, for example in Warsaw in the 17th century it was 28-29 years. It was generally lower for women: between 20 and 25 years. Women married at the age of 22-23 (Bejsce), 23-25 (10 Silesian villages) and 21.9 (Szaradowo in Great Poland)⁴².

Registers in Kujawy province, as most parish registers, do not make the research into the age of contracting a marriage easier. They simply lack marital status data. The information whether a specific person was married is available only if the register includes the name of his/her partner. However, widowed people were often noted in those registers. The greatest problem are single people between the ages of 25 and 50, whose marital status is difficult to define⁴³.

In calculating the average age of entering into marriage in Kujawy John Hajnal's technique was used⁴⁴. It is based on similar assumptions as the construction of life length tables. Finding the average age of contracting a marriage is a mean based on changing proportions of the number of people remaining single up to the 50th year of age. In Michał Kopczyński's opinion the proper assessment is hindered by the type of data included in the civilian/military registers. The problem here is that those registers are less precise as far as the marital status of older people is concerned. Taking this into consideration, he is convinced that we should presume the common nature of marriage. In calculating the average age at which marriages were contracted, he assumes that people with unknown marital status should be treated as single, widowed, or married, but living without their partner, or should not be counted at all⁴⁵.

In a society strongly dependent on nature, or tough urban reality, the best way to exist for a man was in a family. Contracting a marriage was a privilege of those who had their own workshop. But along with the growth of the population the number of definitively unmarried people rose – due to poor economic conditions. Some couples got married because of the woman's pregnancy. The sources indicate quite a large number of prenuptial births, which implies a social acceptance of premarital relations. Rich farmers in Great Poland usually had bigger families and got married earlier than poor peasants. The rich ones also had better opportunities to employ their own children on family farms⁴⁶. Rich families from Great Poland are characterised by a large number of mar-

⁴² M. Kopczyński, *op.cit.*, p.139; M. Górny, *Mieszkańcy parafii...*, p. 115.

⁴³ C. Kukło, *Ludzie starzy w miastach i miasteczkach u schyłku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej*, [in] *Gospodarka, ludzie, władza*, ed. M. Kopczyński, A. Mączak, Warszawa 1998, p. 56.

⁴⁴ J. Hajnal, *Age at marriage and proportions marrying*, *Population Studies*, t. VII, 1953; eadem, *European marriage patterns in perspective*, [in] *Population in history: essays in historical demography*, ed. V. Glass, D. E. C. Eversley, London 1965, p. 100-143; eadem, *Two kinds of preindustrial household formation system*, [in] *Family forms in historical Europe*, ed. R. Wall, J. Robin and P. Laslett, Cambridge 1983, p. 65-104.

⁴⁵ M. Kopczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁴⁶ M. Górny, *Mieszkańcy parafii...*, p. 115.

ried children living with their parents. The early marriage contracting was conditioned by several factors like biological maturity, health of parents and the will of parents and children (however, it is difficult to speak here about a tendency, rather about individual cases). The rules of the feudal system should be kept in mind, as the landowner, who supervised all the matters connected with the functioning of his property, intended to maintain the appropriate number of farms of various sizes. He also wanted farms to be able to fulfill their feudal duties as well as it was possible. Therefore, marriage policy became an important factor in shaping the economic condition of the grange. This thesis is confirmed in the landowner's attitude to the widowed, who were encouraged to remarry or to hand over their farms to children. Each person working on the farm was treated individually, and his or her place in the structure of the farm was treated as "irreplaceable", no matter if the farm was a serf's or half serf's one, because a peasant family could be counted as a trade group working in one workshop⁴⁷.

The development of the family, both in towns and in the country is connected with the economic growth, overcoming the effects of wars and natural disasters. Maintaining the family structure is an important defence mechanism against the external threats. It is also shaped by the changes in the social organisation and the evolution in production techniques. Development of towns, of manufacturing industry, transport and local market resulted in changes in country folk's attitudes and in the social and economic relations.

⁴⁷ Ibid.