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The Witchcraft Trial in Doruchów in 1775 Fact or Myth?

STRESZCZENIE

Proces o czary w Doruchowie w 1775 roku. Fakt czy mit?

W tym artykule autor podsumował dyskusję na temat pojawiającego się w literaturze przedmiotu procesu o czary w Doruchowie w 1775 r. Oprócz anonimowej *Relacji naocznego świadka* opublikowanej w 1835 r. na łamach „Przyjaciela Ludu” oraz ankiety z 1828 r., brak jest przesłanek, które jednoznacznie pozwoliłyby stwierdzić, że taki proces rzeczywiście przeprowadzono i na mocy wyroku życie straciło aż 14 kobiet. Proces ten jest – zdaniem autora – mitem, a autor *Relacji...* z wiadomych tylko sobie powodów umiejscowił go w Doruchowie w tym konkretnym roku. Z całą pewnością jedyny proces o czary, potwierdzony źródłowo, przeprowadzono w Doruchowie w 1762 r.

Słowa kluczowe: procesy o czary, Doruchów, państwo polsko-litewskie, Wielkopolska, wiek XVIII, historia płci

ABSTRACT

In this article, the author summarized the discussion on the theme emerging in the subject literature on Doruchów witchcraft trial of 1775. Except for the anonymous eyewitness account [*Relacja*], published in 1835 in the column of the “Przyjaciel Ludu” [Friend of the People] and a survey of 1828, there is no definite indication that such trial actually took place, and that up to fourteen women lost their lives after having been sentenced to death. The author of this



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article maintains that the trial is a myth, and the author of *Relacya* set it in Doruchów in that particular year for the reasons known only to himself. With all certainty, the only witchcraft trial confirmed by sources took place in Doruchów in 1762.

Keywords: witch trials, Doruchów, Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth, Greater Poland, 18th century, gender study

For many years, it was reported and taken for granted in witchcraft studies that the last witchcraft trial in the Polish-Lithuanian state, in which death sentences were passed for the alleged crime of witchcraft, was held in August 1775 in Doruchów¹, a village located in the Ostrzeszów county of Greater Poland. As many as 14 alleged witches were to be put to death there. However, the course of the related events is known only from an anonymous account, signed with the initials X. A. R.² It was not published immediately after the trial, however, but not until many years later, in 1835, in the weekly magazine “Przyjaciół Ludu”³. According to the author of *Relacya*, the wife of one of the co-owners

¹ For example: A. Krzyżanowski, *Dawna Polska ze stanowiska jej udziału w dziejach postępującej ludzkości skreślona w jubileuszowym Mikołaja Kopernika roku 1843*, Warszawa 1844, pp. 537–540; B. Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku*, Łódź 1952, pp. 67–69; B.P. Levack, *Polowanie na czarownice w Europie wczesnonowożytnej*, transl. E. Rutkowski, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1991, p. 258. Only recently in works devoted to witchcraft court proceedings in Poland has this trial been treated as doubtful. Cf. W. Wyporska, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Poland, 1500–1800*, Basingstoke 2013, p. 30; M. Ostling, *Between the Devil and the Host: Imagining Witchcraft in Early Modern Poland*, New York 2011, p. 12. Whereas M. Pilaśzek, *Procesy o czary w Polsce w wiekach XV–XVIII*, Kraków 2008, does not mention it at all.

² X. A. R., *Relacya naocznego świadka o straceniu razem 14stu mniemanych czarownic w drugiej połowie 18go wieku*, “Przyjaciół Ludu czyli Tygodnik potrzebnych i pożytecznych wiadomości”, 17 X 1835, vol. II, no. 16, pp. 126–127; 24 X, no. 17, pp. 134–135; 31 X, no. 18, pp. 138–139.

³ “Przyjaciół Ludu czyli Tygodnik potrzebnych i pożytecznych wiadomości” [Friend of the People or Weekly of Necessary and Useful News] was published in print in Leszno in 1834–1849. It was the first periodical published in the Prussian partition, which dealt with rural issues and was addressed mainly to the noble and intelligentsia readership. The periodical was founded by Ernest Wilhelm Günther (d. 1836), a publisher and printer. It was associated with the conservative camp, but did not address current political or religious issues. It was dominated by Polish history, literature, fine arts, ethnography and folklore. Cf. A. Koziółek, *Działalność rynku polskiej prasy ludowej dla środowisk wiejskich*

of Doruchów fell ill, her hand swelled up, and a *koltun* [Polish plait] appeared on her head⁴, which was widely regarded by doctors of the time as a dangerous disease, and even in the early 1890s there was supposedly “no doctor so reckless as to regard a *koltun* as a disease”⁵. Most of them obviously did not associate *koltun* with a lack of personal hygiene. A feldsher was brought from the town of Kępno, but his skills proved insufficient to stop the disease from developing. He was therefore sent away, and his place was taken by an inhabitant of one of the surrounding villages who treated the sick, although she was widely believed to be possessed by the devil. Upon arriving in Doruchów, the woman took one look at the sick noblewoman and immediately named several women to blame for her illness. Among them was the wife of a local peasant, Kazimierz, nicknamed Dobra [“Good One”]. It was she who was said to have inflicted the quiver by selling the noblewoman pears, which in this case were actually mice. Other alleged witches soon joined Mrs Kazimierzowa. Eventually, 14 women were arrested⁶ from Doruchów and the surrounding villages, who were accused of bringing diseases, stopping rainfall when it was needed most, and in bad weather bringing even heavier downpours to the area, as well as stealing milk from cows. They were also accused of making a pact with the devil and taking part in meetings (sabbaths) on Bald Mountain. The women were then handed over

w zaborze pruskim, “Wieś i Rolnictwo” 2019, no. 2(183), p. 133; B. Zakrzewski, *Günther Ernest Wilhelm (d. 1860)*, [in:] *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. IX, Wrocław 1960–1961, p. 200; M. Kosman, „Przyjaciół Ludu” na tle prasy polskiej w Wielkim Księstwie Poznańskim, [in:] „Przyjaciół Ludu” 1834–1849. W 180. rocznica ukazania się pierwszego numeru, ed. J.M. Halec, Leszno 2015, p. 14; A. Wójcik, *Praca organiczna w myśli ludowej na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, “Roczniki Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego” 1982, no. 22, pp. 77–78; K. Jazdon, *Przyjaciół Ludu czyli Tygodnik rzeczy potrzebnych i pożytecznych wiadomości*, Poznań 2007; K. Kłudkiewicz, *Ilustracje w czasopiśmie „Przyjaciół Ludu” – od oświeconego encyklopedyzmu do wizualnego kanonu narodowego*, “Biblioteka” 2019, no. 23, pp. 121–165.

⁴ X. A. R., *Relacja naoczego świadka...*, no. 16, p. 126.

⁵ J.F. Hoffmann, *Opisanie koltuna z przyłączonymi przepisami, jak się w tej chorobie zachować i jak ją leczyć potrzeba. Na użytek ludu wiejskiego*, Warszawa 1791, p. 14.

⁶ Although J. Makles, *Czarownice z Łysej Górki w ziemi ostrzeszowskiej*, [in:] *Historia doruchowskich czarownic*, eds W. Przybyła, R. Mazur, Ostrzeszów 2008, pp. 20–21, mentioned the names of some of the women who were to be accused and executed, he did not provide information on where he obtained those names. For this reason, the information he provided can hardly be considered reliable.

to an executioner who was brought in to torture them, so to avoid further torment they confessed to the charges against them. Three of them were to die the day after the torture, while the others were burnt alive at the stake.

These were not all the victims of the trial, as one of the three girls aged around 15 or 16 who were daughters of the women tortured died. The judges ruled that “as daughters of witches, they must have learnt the devil’s art and saved their souls for the devils; to renounce association with the devils, they are to be beaten with birch-rods at the pillars”⁷. They were stripped naked and smacked on the bare back with birch-rods. One of the girls died several days later. The death toll was therefore not 14 but 15 women. It is said that the local parson, Józef Bartłomiej Możdżanowski, tried to save them from torture and burning at the stake, but his efforts in Warsaw, where he went on this matter, were unsuccessful.

Two years after the publication of the account, the magazine’s editors declared that they are: “in possession of the authentic court records of the Doruchów witches, and will soon give them to the public, this fact is beyond any doubt. In any case, our account is not extracted from the records, but from an eyewitness’s story. We did not receive the documents until later”⁸. However, the documents were not published. Why not? Unfortunately, we do not know.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Michał Perliński, parish priest in Ostrzeszów, claimed that the files of the Doruchów trial of 1775 were “in the parson’s files in Doruchów”⁹. More recently, in 2022, it was reported that the “Doruchów indignancy records” were found in the early 19th century in the possession of the then Doruchów leaseholder Friedrich Benjamin Broecker (1762–1823)¹⁰. He was a lawyer employed in the Prussian judicial apparatus and,

⁷ X. A. R., *Relacja naocznego świadka...*, no. 17, p. 135.

⁸ R.R., *Palenie czarownic w Szwecyi*, “Przyjaciel Ludu czyli Tygodnik potrzebnych i pożytecznych wiadomości”, 25 III 1837, vol. III, no. 38, p. 297, footnote with an asterisk. Cf. A. Ćwiklak, *Proces o czary w Doruchowie. Kim był X. A. R., autor „Relacji naocznego świadka”?*, “Rocznik Ostrowskiego Towarzystwa Genealogicznego” 2021, no. 16, p. 291.

⁹ M. Perliński, *Wspomnienia o mieście Ostrzeszowie, bliższej i dalszej jego okolicy*, Ostrzeszów 1920, p. 17.

¹⁰ J. Lubierska, *Proces o czary w Doruchowie w 1775 r. w świetle nowych źródeł*, “Historia Slavorum Occidentis” 2022, vol. XII, no. 3, p. 55.

among other things, held the office of commissioner of justice in Kalisz from 1795 to 1802¹¹. He was to hand over the trial records to the Kalisz Tribunal Archive¹². This is unlikely, for although, although, by virtue of a 1768 Sejm resolution, the Crown Tribunal was henceforth to sit alternately in Piotrków and Kalisz, it is known that in Kalisz, which suffered heavily during the fire of 1792, not a single session was held¹³, so no archive of this institution could have been established. The question of where the records of the witchcraft trials held in Doruchów were (and where they possibly are today, if a trial actually took place) is still open.

The trial that supposedly took place in Doruchów in 1775 still lingers in the historical consciousness of many Polish people. For example, information about it can be found on the Doruchów commune website¹⁴. It is here that the action of *Miasteczko* (Poznań 2020), a novel by Natalia Nowak-Lewandowska, is set. For the purposes of the plot, she changed the village into a town and located it in the Łódzkie Voivodeship rather than the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship. The writer stated with conviction that: “the story of the Doruchów witches is true”¹⁵, and therefore she wove information about the trial into the narrative. The Doruchów trial of 1775 is also the subject of Tomasz Kowalski’s novel *Nie pozwolisz żyć czarownicy* (Wydawnictwo MG, Kraków 2018). The author has made the narrator of this mysterious X. A. R., supposedly the nephew of the then Doruchów parish priest Józef Możdżanowski, a parson who sought in Warsaw to save the lives of 14 women accused of being involved in witchcraft. Doruchów is also sometimes referred to as the “Polish Salem”¹⁶. On the Internet, in turn, information about the Doruchów trial can be found on so many sites that it would be difficult to list them all here.

¹¹ R. Straubel, *Biographisches Handbuch der preußischen Verwaltungs- und Justizbeamten 1740–1806/15*, Teil I (*Biographien A–L*), München 2009, p. 138.

¹² J. Lubierska, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹³ *Dzieje Kalisza. Praca zbiorowa*, ed. W. Rusiński, Poznań 1977, pp. 114–115.

¹⁴ Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej. Doruchów. Historia Doruchowskich czarownic, <http://bip.doruchow.pl/?a=941> (accessed: 5 X 2021).

¹⁵ N. Nowak-Lewandowska, *Miasteczko*, Poznań 2020, p. 346.

¹⁶ R. Mazur, *Doruchów – Polish Salem*, [in:] *Historyja doruchowskich czarownic...*, pp. 39–40.

Most of Doruchów's inhabitants, it seems, therefore believe that this famous witchcraft trial took place in their village in 1775¹⁷. In 1976, 1985 and 2005, open-air shows entitled "Farewell to the Devil and the Witch" were staged there. In 1994, TVP2 recorded a film entitled *Diabli nadali*, broadcast in the national band¹⁸.

Archaeological investigations carried out in 1998–1999 also reinforced the inhabitants' conviction, searching for the location of the pyre on which the alleged witches were burnt. According to the organisers, it was found. "It was established" that it was located by the road towards the village of Mikorzyn, near Łysa Górka. The pyre reportedly measured 4.8 x 3.6 m, and on it "11 women were arranged in two rows, who were crushed with thick oak blocks"¹⁹. A cross with a commemorative plaque was erected on this place, and the students of the secondary school put on a performance that attracted residents from all over the county²⁰. It should be noted here, however, that finding the site of the stake 200 years ago is not feasible. Several years ago, an experiment was carried out at the Neanderthaler Museum located in Mettmann (Germany) to prepare a stake according to a design described by Johann Ernst Clausen (1763–1842), an executioner in Lemgo. A stake was built and a pig weighing 60 kg was burnt on it. The result of this experiment was that the burning lasted no longer than an hour and that the pyre leaves no permanent archaeological traces in the ground²¹. Thus, it cannot simply be found after so many years have passed.

The alleged Doruchów trial of 1775 has been surrounded by many myths. Unreliable information appears, such as that Stokowski, the owner of Doruchów, brought not only three judges and three monks from Grabów nad Prosną, but also two executioners, Jakub and Mateusz Ostrowicz²². The latter was not practically

¹⁷ A. Ćwiklak, *Czarownice południowej Wielkopolski*, "Rocznik Ostrowskiego Towarzystwa Genealogicznego" 2017, no. 12, pp. 298–299.

¹⁸ R. Mazur, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁹ Ł. Szczypkowski, *Doruchowski proces o czary. Prawda czy literacka fikcja?*, "Kronika Wielkopolski" 2019, no. 2(170), p. 24.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

²¹ J. Graefe, J. Hugler, C. Pingel, *Das Scheiterhaufen*, [in:] *Galgen, Rad und Scheiterhaufen. Einblicke in Orte des Grauens*, Mettmann 2010, p. 83: "Daraus lässt sich schließen, dass ein Scheiterhaufen bei einmaliger Anlage keine dauerhaften archäologisch fassbaren Spuren im Boden hinterlassen hat".

²² R. Mazur, *op. cit.*, p. 39; J. Makles, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

possible. For executioners functioned only in the richest Polish cities. In the sixteenth century, i.e. in the period of economic prosperity of the Polish-Lithuanian state, only three cities in Wielkopolska employed “masters of justice”: Poznań, Kalisz and Kościan²³. It is not known in which towns in Wielkopolska the executioners functioned in the 18th century. Certainly it was still Poznań, as in 1763 an employment contract was signed there with Jan Kin (Kihn)²⁴. Cities much larger and wealthier than Grabów nad Prosną could not afford to maintain their own executioners. Grabów, on the other hand, looked as follows in the early 1880s: “The town was then in a deplorable state. Debts amounted to 1700 zlotys, the townspeople were uneducated, as there was neither a school nor a bachelor, the houses were wooden, many squares were empty, there was no order, the unpopulated town had neither a town hall nor any buildings of its own, not even a *civile album*, i.e. a register of inhabitants, there was neither a brotherhood nor a guild, not even a single butcher nor a wine merchant, and there were no craftsmen”²⁵. Houses were often covered with straw²⁶. At the time, the town could not even afford to keep night watchmen. It is therefore impossible that a few years earlier the town council had the means to employ one, let alone two executioners. Indeed, the town’s finances did not look any better at the time. The nearest town from which an executioner could have been brought to Doruchów in those years was Kalisz²⁷.

There was also a long-standing view in the literature that the Doruchów trial of 1775 was one of the most important reasons for the abolition of torture in Poland. A major contributor to this view was the journalist, literary critic and writer Stanislaw Wasylewski (1885–1953), who wrote in 1922: “Upon hearing about the barbaric

²³ H. Zaremska, *Niegodne rzemiosło. Kat w społeczeństwie Polski XIV–XVI w.*, Warszawa 1986, p. 31.

²⁴ A. Gulczyński, *Stanowisko prawne poznańskiego kata w świetle umów zawieranych z miastem w XVII i XVIII wieku*, [in:] *Studia z historii ustroju i prawa. Księga dedykowana Profesorowi Jerzemu Walachowiczowi*, ed. H. Olszewski, Poznań 2002, p. 95.

²⁵ S. Karwowski, *Grabów w dawnej ziemi wieluńskiej*, Poznań 1890, pp. 44–45.

²⁶ *Lustracja województw wielkopolskich i kujawskich 1789*, part 2 (*Województwo sieradzkie*), vol. II (*Powiaty piotrkowski, radomszczański, wieluński i ostrzeszowski*), eds R. Kabaciński, K. Mikulski, J. Pakulski, Toruń 2007, p. 304: “This town is built up with wooden buildings”.

²⁷ *Dzieje Kalisza...*, pp. 126–127.

act of the inquisitor from Doruchów, there was an uproar in all of Poland, so much so that at the Sejm, which met in 1776, a royal motion was brought for this reason, banning the use of torture in investigations and abolishing the death penalty for witchcraft²⁸. However, the case for the abolition of torture was quite different. At the Ordinary Sejm sitting in Warsaw from 26 August to 31 October 1776, the issue of torture and the burning of witches and sorcerers came up quite unexpectedly. Well, on 23 October 1776, during the debate, Field Hetman of the Crown Seweryn Rzewuski irritated King Stanisław August by stating that he had been elected ruler by a minority of the nobility, and that he only came to the throne thanks to Russia. The agitated king unexpectedly tabled a motion to ban the use of torture in court proceedings. The castellan of Biecz, Wojciech Kluszewski, added his proposal to the king's motion, proposing that the death penalty in witchcraft cases be abolished on this occasion. Both motions were adopted unanimously. The Sejm Constitution abolishing torture and the possibility of burning alleged witches and sorcerers at the stake was passed on 23 October 1776²⁹. Neither the King nor Kluszewski, however, mentioned the Doruchów trial as an inspiration for their proposals.

Since we do not have and do not even know a fragment of the records of the alleged Doruchów trial, let us try to determine whether, from the available information in the literature, it appears that a witchcraft trial actually took place in Doruchów in 1775, or whether it is, however, merely a myth.

²⁸ *Gawędy o dawnym obyczaju. Wybór ciekawych pamiętników XVIII i XIX stulecia*, ed. S. Wasylewski, vol. V (*Sprawy ponure. Obrazy z kronik sądowych wieku Oświecenia*), collected and prefaced by S. Wasylewski, Lwów-Poznań 1922 [hereinafter: S. Wasylewski, *Sprawy ponure*], p. 23.

²⁹ *Volumina legum*, vol. VIII, St Petersburg 1860, pp. 546–547: “Therefore, to all in our States judicial jurisdictions *jus gladii* having, the ordering of confessions by torture, on pain of penalties, *tanquam pro crimine status* extending to them, we henceforth forbid forever. Which jurisdiction is to use the above mentioned means of conviction in all criminal cases. And should it be necessary to improve them in any way, we declare that they will be amended, modified, or enacted by the next forthcoming parliament. According to the same rule, all courts and *subordinate* courts are to deal *in causis maleficii* and sorcery, in the adjudication of which we shall abolish forever with the death penalty”. Cf. J. Michalski, *Jeszcze o konstytucji sejmu 1776 roku „Konwikcje w sprawach kryminalnych”*, “Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1996, vol. CIII, no. 3, pp. 89–101.

According to the aforementioned Stanisław Wasylewski, the initiator of the Doruchów trial in 1775 was the wife of the Doruchów village heir: “Mrs Stokowska, née Rejczyńska, was said to be a morbid woman, full of delusions. She constantly complained about being persecuted by witches, saying how they harmed her health and possessions. Once, instead of her jewels, she found dung in a box. In the spring of 1775, on her way to a church service, she saw nine women from the village making butter in the forest. They were caught according to the lady’s instructions and a terrible inquisition ensued. Fourteen peasant women were tortured on suspicion of witchcraft, imprisoned in barrels, and finally burned at the stake”³⁰. Wasylewski based his divagations, he claimed, on the diary of an author he did not mention by name.

Is anything more known about the alleged initiator of the trial, Stokowska (née Rejczyńska)? Unfortunately not much. Only Rejczyńska née Stokowska appears in one of the baronage, namely Katarzyna, daughter of Józef Antoni Stokowski and Barbara, née Skórzewska. In 1816, Katarzyna married Józef Wojciech Rejczyński (Rejczyński, d. 1841)³¹. Her father, Józef Antoni, was born around 1773³². Catherine could not, therefore, in 1775, even if Wasylewski had spelled her surname, have led a witchcraft trial, as she was not yet born. In addition, nothing is known of any Stokowski or Rejczyński being the heir of Doruchów in the year of the alleged trial.

Already in the 1760s Doruchów appears as a village with a rather complicated ownership structure. In his memoirs about Ostrzeszów and the surrounding area the parish priest Michał Perliński stated that although in 1759 the only owners of Doruchów were the Rogowscy, four years later, in 1763, the village was already divided among three owners, who were: Jan Doruchowski, his son Ignacy and Eustachy Skórzewski (Skorzewski)³³. However, this is not entirely certain information, given that Jan Doruchowski, the Novgorod stolnik, if it is about him, died before March 1761³⁴.

³⁰ S. Wasylewski, *Sprawy ponure*, p. 23. Following Wasylewski, also B. Baranowski, *op. cit.*, p. 67 made Stokowska the initiator of the Doruchów trial.

³¹ E.H. Nejmán, *Szlachta sieradzka XIX wieku. Herbarz, R*. Revised version 2017, p. 584, <http://www.tpzw.pl/files/herbarz/r.pdf> (accessed: 12 II 2022).

³² *Ibidem*, p. 655.

³³ M. Perliński, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

³⁴ He was married to Katarzyna Kamieniecka, who died on 15 II 1775, aged about 70, and was buried in the Doruchów church. Cf. *Teki Dworzaczka*.

Little is also known about Eustachy Skórzewski, and in addition this information is not entirely certain. He came from a family heavily settled in Wielkopolska³⁵ and was said to have been the owner of the villages of Świątkowice, Dobrosław and Kłoniczki, situated in the Wieluń land³⁶. According to other information, he owned the village of Brzyków, which he bought in 1767, and sold in 1775. He was supposedly still alive in 1793, as he was then to sell to Michał Jaraczewski the village of Kocinów, which belonged to him³⁷. Skórzewski was already in possession of half of Doruchów prior to 1762, as in that year he encamped in the Ostrzeszów castle with the *meszne* of that village³⁸.

Eustachy Skórzewski was the father of Ignacy (1758–1813)³⁹, born from his marriage to Anna (Wiktoria) of the Wiesiołowskis⁴⁰. She probably came from the nearby Strzyżew, which belonged to the Wiesiołowskis from the mid-18th century⁴¹. One of them, Stanisław Florian (1744–1820)⁴², was said to have ordered in 1773 that

Materiał historyczno-genealogiczne do dziejów szlachty wielkopolskiej XV–XX wieku, Kórnik–Poznań 2004 [hereinafter: *Teki Dworzaczka*], *Metrykalnia > Katolickie > Część 7*, 48084 (Doruchów). This marriage produced three sons: Ignacy, Antoni, later canon of Chełm, and Michał.

³⁵ In the village of Zalesie, some 1.5 km from Doruchów, Ludwik Skórzewski lived from the end of the 1750s, who married Marianna Witwicką in 1759. Cf. J. Lubierska, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

³⁶ T. Żychliński, *Złota księga szlachty polskiej*, vol. IV, Poznań 1822, p. 297.

³⁷ E.H. Nejman, *op. cit.*, p. 630.

³⁸ P.W. Fabisz, *Kronika dekanalna Kempieńska*, published by the author, Wrocław 1855 (I used the reprint which appeared in Baranów in 2000), p. 136; *idem*, *Kronika powiatu ostrzeszowskiego*, Oleśnica 1859, p. 140, note 3. There is no mention of him at all; only his name is included in the genealogical table attached to R. Nowicki's work, *Semper recte. Z dziejów rodu Skórzewskich*, Lubostroń 1998.

³⁹ T.A. Nowak, *Ignacy Drogosław Skórzewski (1758–1813), właściciel ziemski*, [in:] *Radomszczański słownik biograficzny*, ed. G. Mieczyski, Radomsko 2017, p. 169; E.H. Nejman, *op. cit.*, p. 630.

⁴⁰ T. Żychliński, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 297. The information given by Teodor Żychliński that Eustachy Skórzewski held the office of *cześnik* of Braclaw seems to be incorrect, as he was not recorded in the study *Urzędnicy Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Spisy*, vol. I (*Województwo wileńskie XIV–XVIII wiek*), ed. A. Rachuba, compiled H. Lulewicz, A. Rachuba, P.P. Romaniuk, in collaboration with U. Jemialianczuk and A. Macuk, Warszawa 2004.

⁴¹ M. Olejniczak, *Strzyżew 1295–1995. Monografia wsi*, Strzyżew–Ostrów Wielkopolski 1995, p. 54.

⁴² He was married to Honorata Kielczewska (1760–1796). He was styled himself as the son of *cześnik łucki*, and was buried in Kotłów, in a newly built family tomb. *Teki Dworzaczka*, *Metrykalnia > Katolickie > Część 9*, no. 58705 (Kotłów).

three women accused of having “tied up” a quiver for him be burnt at the stake. They were burnt not in the village that belonged to him, but in Doruchów⁴³.

Further information about the owners of Doruchów in the second half of the 18th century appears on the occasion of the start of the construction of a new church in 1764, as the previous one had been consumed by fire. The cost of erecting the building was borne by the owners of the village and the surrounding nobility belonging to the Doruchów parish. The main founder was Eustachy Skórczewski, who gave 2000 zloty in cash⁴⁴. In addition to him, the patrons and founders were Ignacy Doruchowski⁴⁵, his wife, Katarzyna née Karsznicka, and Ignacy’s brother, Father Antoni Franciszek Doruchowski, Canon of Chełm and parish priest of Melgiew⁴⁶. Together they also contributed a total of 2000 zloty and *naturalia*⁴⁷. The church building in Doruchów was consecrated at the end of November 1765.

⁴³ M. Olejniczak, *op. cit.*, p. 55. The author of the village monograph, giving this information, referred to the work: E. Callier, *Powiat ostrzeszowski w XVI stuleciu. Szkic geograficzno-historyczny*, Poznań 1888, p. 16. On the same page we read: “Stanisław Wiesiołowski, the heir of Strzyżew, had three women burned here [in Doruchów – J.W.], suspected of giving him *koltuns*”. However, no date is mentioned there. Why were they burnt in Doruchów? Perhaps because in this village, supposedly already from the 16th century, there was a gallows, next to which a stake was probably erected. The gallows was supposed to stand by the road towards Tokarzewo, on the so-called Witches’ Hill (now Kościuszko Hill).

⁴⁴ Plus *naturalia*: 24 barrels of beer, 3 pots of salt, 5 quarters of buckwheat, 2 quarters of peas and 10 quarters of rye. P.W. Fabisz, *Kronika dekanalna Kempieńska...*, p. 136; idem, *Kronika powiatu ostrzeszowskiego...*, p. 36.

⁴⁵ J. Krzywaznia, E.O. von Schlesinger, *Personennamenindex zu Pfarrer Michael Perlinski „Erinnerungen an die Stadt Schildberg und deren nähere und weiter Umgebung”, sowie Matrikelauflistung für den Landkreis Schildberg und deren Aufbewahrungsorte*, Nordestedt 2018, p. 201. Ignacy Doruchowski listed as owner of Doruchów in 1763.

⁴⁶ J.R. Marczewski, *Dzieje chełmskiej kapituły katedralnej obrządku łacińskiego*, Lublin 2013, according to the index in the cadences 1759/1760 and 1767/1768 he was a clerical deputy from the Chełm diocese at the Crown Tribunal. Cf. *Deputaci Trybunatu Koronnego 1578–1794. Spis*, part 5 (1751–1794), ed. J. Ternes, Warszawa–Lublin 2017, pp. 117, 189.

⁴⁷ P.W. Fabisz, *Kronika dekanalna Kempieńska...*, pp. 136–137. The food was intended for the labourers, who worked under the direction of carpenter Krzysztof Jędrzejewski from Ostrzeszów.

According to Stanisław Waltoś, the co-owners of Doruchów on 15 September 1775 were: Michał Doruchowski (son of Jan)⁴⁸, Marianna Doruchowska⁴⁹ and Eustachy Skórzewski⁵⁰.

Let us take another look at *Relacya naocznego świadka*. In 1966 Janusz Tazbir concluded that there was no witchcraft trial in Doruchów in 1775, and that the account of the alleged witness to these events was a forgery written by Konstanty Majeranowski (1790–1851), a journalist, poet, novelist and publisher active in Kraków⁵¹. Although he published not only under his own name, but also under various pseudonyms and code names, but – before Tazbir – code name X. A. R. was not attributed to him⁵².

Janusz Tazbir also surmised that Konstanty Majeranowski most probably included another text⁵³ – *Czarownica (Powieść z prze-*

⁴⁸ It is known about Michał that on 21 I 1757 the Dean of Lutomierz Franciszek Skaliński, with the consent of Bishop Marcin Załuski of Płock, recognised his marriage to the widow Marianna Strzelecka, *primo voto* Miłońska. On 6 December 1757, however, the same dean of Lutomierz baptised, “out of necessity, omitting the ceremony”, their son Mikołaj. The baptism ceremony was completed in 1758 in the Doruchowski parish church by the local parson, Józef Bartłomiej Możdżanowski, and the godparents were his grandparents Jan and Katarzyna Doruchowscy. Cf. E.H. Nejman, *op. cit.*, p. 162. Michał Doruchowski appeared in the sources again in July 1771 with the title of *łowczy brzeziński* (Ziemia Łowicka): *Urzednicy województw łeczyckiego i sieradzkiego XVI–XVIII wieku. Spisy*, compiled E. Opaliński, H. Żerek-Kleszcz, ed. A. Gąsiorowski, Kórnik 1993, no. 50, p. 28, which was probably a mistake, as he had the title of Braclaw’s gamekeeper. Cf. *Teki Dworzaczka*, *Metrykalia > Katolickie > Część 5*, 32313 (Mikorzyn), 10.10.1771.

⁴⁹ Marianna Doruchowska was probably identified as Marianna Rupniewska, née Doruchowska, about whom we know that after the death of her first husband Wiktor (we do not know when he died; he was still alive in 1791, cf. *Teki Dworzaczka*, *Grodzkie i ziemskie > Kościan > Inskrypcje*, 11378 [no. 337] 1791) she remarried to the widower M. Wiewiórowski. The wedding took place in the parish church in Doruchów on 19 X 1795. Cf. *Teki Dworzaczka*, *Metrykalia > Katolickie > Część 7*, 48106 (Doruchów); S. Waltoś, *Czarownice z Doruchowa*, [in:] idem, *Owoce zatrutego drzewa*, 2nd ed., revised, Kraków 2010, pp. 132–133.

⁵⁰ S. Waltoś, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁵¹ J. Tazbir, *Z dziejów fałszerstw historycznych w Polsce w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 1966, vol. LVII, no. 4, p. 590; idem, *Proces czarownic w Doruchowie*, [in:] idem, *Cudzym piórem... Falsyfikaty historyczno-literackie*, Poznań 2002, pp. 103–109.

⁵² *Bibliografia literatury polskiej. Nowy Korbut*, t. V (Oświecenie. Hasła osobowe I–O), ed. E. Aleksandrowska et al., Warszawa 1967, p. 287.

⁵³ Konstanty Majeranowski is also credited with a text published in “Przyjacieli Ludu” and devoted to the Easter custom of blessing food. Cf. S. Waltoś, *op. cit.*,

szłego wieku) [The Witch. (A Novel from the Past Century)] – in “Przyjaciel Ludu”, as this short story very much reminded him of the narrative style of *Relacya naocznego świadka*⁵⁴. However, the mentioned short story is signed with the pseudonym P.L.⁵⁵ X. A. R., on the other hand, is under two other texts.

The first is a “school story” titled *Quare*. In it, the author tells of a story he heard from an acquaintance about a peasant’s son being tested on his knowledge of Latin by an organist who replaced the reverend, who was unwilling to do so, as “Alwar had long since been evaporated from his head”⁵⁶. The organist also did not know Latin very well, but convinced the peasant that his son had not studied at school. So he was ordered to herd oxen. While working, the boy liked to sing to himself in Latin. A bishop passing by one day heard him doing this. Having realised in the course of conversation that the boy knew Latin quite well, he sent him to the seminary and, after ordination, made him parish priest in the village from which he came⁵⁷.

Second text signed with initials X. A. R. is a short story titled *Strachy* [Fears]. It is set in Kalisz and concerns two local shoemakers who lived and worked on the same street. So they were necessarily competitors. In addition, one was hard-working and conscientious, while the other was a drunkard, a drunkard and a wastrel who, pretending to be a ghost, would steal leather from his rival to make or repair shoes⁵⁸.

Who, then, if not Majeranowski, could have been the author of *Relacya naocznego świadka*, a publication signed with the initials X. A. R.? The first letter clearly indicates that it was a priest.

p. 129. It should be noted, however, that this text, published in two parts (*Święcone wielkanocne*, “Przyjaciel Ludu” 1837, vol. III, no. 38, p. 302 and no. 39, pp. 306–307), was not signed.

⁵⁴ J. Tazbir, *Z dziejów fałszerstw historycznych...*, p. 590, note 70.

⁵⁵ *Spis zawartości prasy wielkopolskiej*, issue 19 (*Przyjaciel Ludu 1834–1849*), ed. K. Jazdon, Poznań 2003, p. 105.

⁵⁶ X. A. R., *Quare? (Powiastka szkolna)*, “Przyjaciel Ludu, czyli Tygodnik potrzebnych i pożytecznych wiadomości”, 12 XII 1835, vol. II, no. 24, p. 190. Alvarez was commonly referred to as a textbook for learning Latin: *De institutione grammatica*, first published in 1572, by the Portuguese Jesuit Emanuel Alvarez. The textbook was used throughout Europe, also in Poland in the 19th century.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ “Przyjaciel Ludu, czyli Tygodnik potrzebnych i pożytecznych wiadomości”, 16 I 1836, vol. II, no. 29, pp. 226–227.

Indeed, the letter “X” was commonly used in the 19th century as an abbreviation for *ksiądz* [priest]. Adam Ćwiklak suggested that these initials belong to Father Antoni Radzki (c. 1809–1895), nephew of Antoni and Jan Popliński, founders and publishers of “Przyjaciel Ludu”⁵⁹. However, he did not resolve the issue definitively, stating that the articles so signed could have been written by the Poplińskis themselves, as “they had sufficient literary potential and knowledge of the history of the region to create the poems needed for the weekly”⁶⁰. Adam Ćwiklak also established that the monogram of X. A. R. can be found on two books published in Poznań by Antoni Popliński. These were *Dzieje Starego i Nowego Testamentu. Arranged by X. A. R.* and the *Roman Catholic Catechism for the Use of Rural and Urban Schools by X. A. R.*⁶¹; both were written by Antoni Radzki.

It is worth checking whether there is any information in *Relacya naocznego świadka* that would identify its author. It suggests that he was the nephew of the local parish priest, as he wrote that at the time of the trial “my uncle was the local parson”. It is known that in 1775 the parson of Doruchów was Józef Bartłomiej Możdżanowski (Mozdżanowski)⁶². The term “uncle” would mean that the author of the account was the son of Możdżanowski’s sister, as in the 18th century the father’s brother was usually referred to as “uncle”⁶³.

Anna Lubierska, on the basis of the Doruchów metric records, came to the conclusion that the author of the text was none other than Father Aleksy Ignacy Rytter (Rytterski), born in mid-1769

⁵⁹ A. Ćwiklak, *Proces o czary w Doruchowie. Kim był X. A. R. ...*, p. 290.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 289.

⁶² P.W. Fabisz, *Kronika dekanalna Kempieńska...*, p. 142 stated that he was a parson as early as 1760. This is confirmed by entries from 1761–1763 in the Ostrzeszów grodzki books, in which he appears as Bartłomiej Mozdżanowski. Cf. Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie (Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw) [hereinafter: AGAD], *Księgi grodzkie ostrzeszowskie, Libri decretorum 1581–1790, sygn. 36, Manuale decretorum, 1761–1763*, sheets 1v, 44v, 82v. His predecessor at the Doruchów presbytery was most probably Józef Zajączkowski, parish priest from 1740. In turn, J. Makles, *Kościoty i parafie w Doruchowie*, [in:] *600 lat kościoła Doruchów. Praca zbiorowa*, Doruchów 2003, p. 65, incorrectly stated that in 1760–1800 the parish priest in Doruchów was Tomasz Możdżanowski, during whose tenure the witchcraft trial took place in 1775.

⁶³ W. Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, vol. III, part 3 (*od P [Polikseny] do Ż*), Warszawa 2007, p. 99.

in Doruchów, son of Józef and Regina née Możdżanowska, who was most probably the sister of the then parish priest Józef Możdżanowski. In this situation, Rytter would have been a “nephew” and the parson *an* “uncle”, as described by the author of *Relacya naocznego świadka*. This would solve the question of authorship, although, as Lubierska added: “the description of the events from Doruchów is an ‘eyewitness account’ enriched by family messages heard by Fr. Rytter and perhaps by details from reading about witchcraft trials”⁶⁴.

It is also not known when Father Ryterski’s account was written – whether it was written for the “Przyjaciół Ludu” or whether it was written earlier and only printed in 1835⁶⁵. Nothing is also known about his collaboration with the “Friend of the People” and whether he was the author of the other texts signed with the initials “X. A. R.”

Returning to the witchcraft trial in 1775 in Doruchów, the fact that it took place was supposedly confirmed by information related to a conflict between the starost of Grabów and the burghers of Grabów nad Prosną. In August 1773, Michał Hieronim Radziwiłł (1744–1831), Grand Swordsman of Lithuania, was appointed to the office. From the moment he assumed the starosty, he remained in dispute with the aforementioned burghers⁶⁶. Already at the beginning of September 1773, the town council and the burghers protested against the seizure of the town’s land by the ducal commissar⁶⁷, Franciszek Przebołowski⁶⁸. In the following months the dispute spread to other issues, the burghers did not want, for example, to walk with letters or to repair the dike at the mill⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ J. Lubierska, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 40–41.

⁶⁶ In 1773 Grabów nad Prosną was a town with 137 houses and 583 inhabitants. Cf. S. Karwowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 and 41; M. Rezler, *History of Grabów until 1793*, [in:] *Z dziejów Grabowa nad Prosną. A collective study*, eds B. Polak, M. Rezler, Kalisz 1990, pp. 31 and 41.

⁶⁷ S. Karwowski, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ In 1786 he was heir to Sucha in the Ciechanów district. He married Jadwiga Węgierska in the same year. Cf. *Teki Dworzaczka*, Grodzkie i ziemskie > Kalisz > Inskrypcje > XVII/XVIII wiek, 7963 (no. 226) 1786.

⁶⁹ S. Karwowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24. The Starosty of Grabów remained in the hands of the Radziwiłłs from 1728, when the Crown Treasurer Jan Jerzy Przebendowski ceded it to his grandson Marcin Radziwiłł, Grand Landlord of Lithuania. Cf. P.W. Fabisz, *Kronika powiatu ostrzeszowskiego...*, p. 34.

In March 1783, the Commission of Good Order began operating in Grabów, which, among other things, was to settle a dispute between the town and Radziwiłł the starost of Grabów. Incidentally, we learn that a witchcraft trial was conducted in Doruchów, involving the Grabów assize court⁷⁰. In fact, there is an extract from the Ostrzeszów municipal records containing a protest of the Grabów burghers' manifesto⁷¹. It was lodged on behalf of starost Radziwiłł by his commissioner Franciszek Przebołowski, in connection with a dispute over houses and serfs who lived on starost's land⁷².

The protest states, among other things, that: "the *manifestant* [Radziwiłł – J.W.] dismissed burghers unsuitable for *landwójtostwo* and *ławica*, he did it in a careful manner, and he did it for the good of the town itself, when he dismissed unskilled and uneducated people from holding offices⁷³. For those who were dismissed from their offices, having come to the inquisition of the Doruchów heir, having founded the landowner's jurisdiction, ordered six women appointed as witches to be burnt without sufficient conviction, for which they were dismissed from their offices"⁷⁴. Unfortunately, no date was given in the protest regarding the trial and the removal of

⁷⁰ Unfortunately, as far as we know, the council and jury books of Grabowo have not survived. They are not mentioned in the last monograph of the town: I. Mamczak-Gadkowska, *Źródła archiwalne do dziejów Grabowa nad Prosną*, [in:] *Z dziejów Grabowa nad Prosną...*, pp. 11–20.

⁷¹ J. Michalski, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁷² AGAD, Grodzkie ostrzeszowskie, Libri relationum et oblatorum 1702–1794, sygn. 15, 1782–1783, sheet 458r. Protest entered in the Ostrzeszów *grodzka* book on 10 June 1783.

⁷³ The fact remains that the level of education of the inhabitants of Grabów, including members of the council and the municipal bench, left much to be desired. The Committee for Good Order of the Land of Wieluń, when ending its activities in 1784, left, inter alia, such a recommendation: "As the ability to learn to write, read, and keep perfect accounts are the most important means of establishing a town, they are a confirmation of religion, a barrier to transgression, a cause of unity and order, and in this town of Grabów there is no bachelor of arts, for the study of which reason this town, being in darkness, can neither elect able men to offices, nor conduct trade, therefore the Commission of Good Order has been established, a house should be bought in the town, and a teacher should be brought in to teach them". Quoted after: M. Rezler, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–44.

⁷⁴ AGAD, Grodzkie ostrzeszowskie, Libri relationum et oblatorum 1702–1794, sygn. 15, sheet 458v. Cf. B. Baranowski, *Posłowie*, [in:] K. Baschwitz, *Czarownice. Dzieje procesów o czary*, transl. T. Zabłudowski, Warszawa 1971, p. 429; J. Michalski, *op. cit.*, p. 94; S. Waltoś, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–130. Incorrect quotation in: Ł. Szczypkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 24, note 17.

the jurors from office. The starost Radziwiłł, if such a removal of the assize occurred, could rely on the regulations of the assessor's court, which in 1768 forbade municipal courts of small towns to go to villages for sessions and try witchcraft cases there⁷⁵. However, these regulations were often violated, and this could probably have been the case in the situation described. Larger towns than Grabów nad Prosną were forbidden to try witchcraft trials. This applied, among others, to Przemyśl, which from 1756 had to send such cases to Lviv⁷⁶.

All we know for certain is that a witchcraft trial was held in Doruchów in March 1762. The owner of part (half?) of the village, the aforementioned Eustachy Skórzewski, brought the municipal court from nearby Ostrzeszów⁷⁷, to try four women, alleged witches who were supposed to have made his wife Anna Wiktoria ill. Namely, it was a matter of "inflicting" her quiver. The women were imprisoned and then tortured and interrogated. The defendants were also alleged to have done damage to the barns and stables belonging to the Skórzewskis. The surviving verdict shows that three of the four accused women were sentenced to death by burning at the stake, as they were "proven" to have brought illness on Anna Wiktoria Skórzewska, planning to kill her child and her maid. It is not known what happened to the fourth defendant, who was not mentioned in the verdict⁷⁸.

Perhaps it is Eustachy Skórzewski who is referred to in a later account by the villagers, dating from the 1820s, according to which he was a "great superstitionist", who "ordered cocks to be fired because they would drive the rain away", while the priest was instructed to consecrate the water in the spring, which the women then carried in jugs, necessarily in one hand, to the border of the

⁷⁵ J. Rafacz, *Dawne polskie prawo karne. Część ogólna*, Warszawa 1932, p. 8; idem, *Sprawy karne w sądach miejskich w epoce nowożytnej*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1933, vol. XLVII, issue 3, pp. 563–564.

⁷⁶ J. Rafacz, *Dawne polskie prawo karne...*, p. 565.

⁷⁷ On the judicial competences of the Ostrzeszów town council cf. W. Golub, S. Nawrocki, *Ostrzeszów. Past and Present*, Poznań 1969, p. 58.

⁷⁸ Biblioteka Naukowa PAU i PAN w Krakowie (Scientific Library of the PAAS and the PAS in Cracow), rkps 11 449, sheets 1–8; E. Danowska, *Proces o czary w Doruchowie – prawda czy mit? O nieznanym dokumencie z 1762 roku*, [in:] *Oświecenie nieoświecone. Człowiek, natura i magia*, eds D. Kowalewska, A. Ročko, F. Wołański, Warszawa 2018, pp. 277–291; J. Wijaczka, *Proces o czary w Doruchowie w 1762 r.*, [in:] idem, „Czarownicom żyć nie dopuścisz”. *Procesy o czary w Polsce w XVII–XVIII wieku*, Poznań 2022, pp. 137–169.

estate. He also ordered women to carry water on sledges to the border of the Zaleski pond in times of drought, which was supposed to bring rain⁷⁹.

In the Archdiocesan Archive in Poznań there is a questionnaire, recently found by Joanna Lubierska, concerning Doruchów, which was drawn up in 1828 by the then parish priest Szymon Lewandowski. One of the two appendices attached to it contains information relating to the history of the parish, and it was there that, among other things, information about the burning of witches in Doruchów in 1770 was found⁸⁰. According to testimonies received from villagers who remembered the event, seven women were tried and burned in the trial, four from Doruchów and three from nearby Strzeżewo. The names of the women brought from Strzyżewo were not remembered, while three of the Doruchów residents were remembered: Magdalena Gruchociakowa, “pastuszyna” Więkoska and Kaźmierczykowa⁸¹.

Also imprisoned was Petronela Markiewiczowa, née Kańkoska (Kankoska), from Doruchów, a married woman, mother of several children, including one infant, who was released before the trial. She managed to get away with it thanks to the intervention of Józefa Wolicka (c. 1732–1817), née Wiesiołowska⁸², wife of Ignacy Wolicki, owner of the Godziętowy estate⁸³. Why she intervened, and only in relation to Markiewiczowa, we unfortunately do not know. What we do know is that Petronela was born in 1745 in Godziętowy⁸⁴.

The parish priest of Doruchów, Szymon Lewandowski, verifying the information given to him by several residents, who were well advanced in age, set the date of the trial they mentioned as October 1770⁸⁵. He based this on two pieces of information, namely the dates of birth of two children whose mothers were accused of practising pernicious witchcraft. The first of these children was Józef Markiewicz, baptised on 5 February 1770⁸⁶, whose father as “being at the breast carried him to his mother in prison to feed him”⁸⁷.

⁷⁹ J. Lubierska, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 42; appendix published on pp. 55–58.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁸² M. Olejniczak, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁸³ J. Lubierska, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 44, 57.

The second was Jan Gruchot, born in Doruchów on 17 June 1763⁸⁸, who remembered that his mother was burnt at the stake when he was eight years old⁸⁹.

However, the year 1770 as the date of the trial was questioned by Joanna Lubierska, because she found an entry in the baptismal register of the Doruchów parish that one of the women accused and allegedly sentenced to death in 1770, Magdalena Gruchociakowa, gave birth to another child, Jakub, baptised in Doruchów on 10 July 1774⁹⁰. Thus, she could not have been burnt at the stake in 1770. The fact remains, however, that the book of the dead of the Doruchów parish does not record the death of any of the women burnt at the stake, either in 1770 or in 1775⁹¹. Joanna Lubierska stated instead that: "It is difficult to make the assumption that women who were proven to have had contact with the devil and were executed were thereby excluded from the circle of Christians, and that their deaths could not be recorded in the *liber mortuorum* of the parish in question"⁹².

It should also be noted that one of the people with whom priest Lewandowski discussed witchcraft trials was the "old court servant" Piotr Olewicki. He died in Doruchów on 25 September 1828. The death certificate states that the deceased was an eighty-five-year-old widower and beggar⁹³. He was therefore born around 1743⁹⁴. Pastor Lewandowski recounted: "I might have been about 20 years old, I was curious to find out about the witches' confessions – they were being investigated at night – no one was allowed to enter the house – I, from another side, where the guards were not there, hid in a *taz* [?] and watched through the hole [...]"⁹⁵. Two things are striking in this story. The first is that if Olewicki was in his early twenties when he peeped into the cruel torture of women in Doruchów, then he may have witnessed the events of the 1762 trial. Besides, it can be noted that his recollections partly

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 44, 56. Elsewhere in this article (on p. 46) we find 1764 as Jan Gruchot's date of birth.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 32, note 6.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*; the author stated that "the age was overstated", but did not state on what basis she based this statement.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

coincide with the story of the boy from *Relacya naocznego świadka*, who also watched the torture at night, from hiding, and was also caught by the guards.

The literature also cites two references that appeared in the foreign press to confirm the trial carried out in Doruchów in 1775. At the end of November 1775, a newspaper published in Hamburg reported that “not long ago” in Kalisz Voivodeship a certain nobleman had ordered nine old women to be burnt because they had caused crop failure by means of witchcraft⁹⁶. The second piece of information comes from the *Gazette de Leopol*, published in French in Lviv⁹⁷. In its first issue, published on 1 January 1776, there was a short note in which the author, writing about superstitious beliefs, mentioned the burning near Kalisz – by a certain “little despot”, who was also a member of the (Crown) Tribunal – of several old women, who with the help of witchcraft were supposed to cause a crop failure in the area⁹⁸. The author of the note stated that the burning of the women was the result of the abuse of private justice and the decision of a “judge as stupid as he was unenlightened”⁹⁹.

If we search for the “little despot” mentioned in the Lviv newspaper, who was a judge of the Crown Tribunal and the initiator of the witchcraft trial, in the term of 1774/1775 the Kalisz province was represented by Rafał Umiński¹⁰⁰, owner of two villages – Żuki and Laski, located next to the town of Turek. Both villages lie at a distance of about 45 km from Kalisz¹⁰¹. In the term of 1775/1776 there was a vacancy from this province¹⁰². On the other hand,

⁹⁶ S. Waltoś, *op. cit.*, pp. 130–131: “weil sie durch ihre Hexereyen den dortigen Misswachs verursacht haben”.

⁹⁷ V. Hawryluk, *Gazette de Leopol, année 1776: le premier journal en Ukraine*, Milhaud 2012.

⁹⁸ J. Lubierska, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁹⁹ Quoted after: J. Tazbir, *Wawrzeński i Żagiell jako twórcy falsyfikatów*, “Nauka” 2006, vol. XIII, no. 3, p. 48. However, the claim that Marian Wawrzeński was a forger needs to be corrected, cf. J. Wijaczka, *Czy Marian Wawrzeński był twórcą falsyfikatów historycznych?*, [in:] idem, „Czarownicom żyć nie dopuścisz”..., pp. 205–230.

¹⁰⁰ *Deputaci Trybunału Koronnego 1578–1794...*, p. 203; Teki Dworzaczka, *Metrykalia > Katolickie > Część 3, 7279* (nr 214/216) 1775.

¹⁰¹ On the subject of witchcraft trials conducted by the court of Kalisz in the 18th century, unfortunately we know nothing, as there are no sources. Cf. B. Baranowski, *Najdawniejsze procesy o czary w Kaliszu*, Lublin–Łódź 1951, p. 9.

¹⁰² *Deputaci Trybunału Koronnego 1578–1794...*, p. 209.

a member of the Tribunal coming from the Sieradz Voivodeship (where Doruchów was located) and the Wieluń Land in the term of 1774/1775 was Sieradz Ensign Aleksander Maćczyński¹⁰³. On the other hand, in the term of 1775/1776, the representative of the Sieradz voivodeship and Wieluń land in the Tribunal was the starost of Wieluń and Radom, Stanisław Męciński¹⁰⁴. None of them can be linked to Doruchów in any way.

In addition, the accusation against the women, according to the newspapers, did not refer to a *koltun*, but to causing a climatic disaster and crop failure by means of witchcraft. Unfortunately, not much is known about elemental disasters in Greater Poland in the second half of the 18th century. What we do know is that the first half of 1775 was full of natural disasters in the Crown. As early as January, the Vistula flooded, causing such a flood “that no eye could see through the water near Kraków, which, with the ice going down at that time, did a lot of damage”¹⁰⁵.

As can be seen from the facts given here, much of the information contained in *Relacya naocznego świadka* could have been taken from the records of the trial held in Doruchów in 1762, for the author considered the fact that: “the heir’s wife [...] fell ill: she got a great pain in her finger, the hair on her head began to curl”¹⁰⁶. In both cases, *koltun* was mentioned as an illness and the village heir’s wife fell ill. The author of the description of the events alleged to have occurred in 1775 may have known the 1762 trial from a story. He could also have pieced together a lot of information from other accounts of the witch hunt.

In conclusion, I think that the witchcraft trial in Doruchów in 1775, which resulted in the deaths of 14 women, burnt at the stake and murdered under torture, did not take place. This is a myth created by the author of *Relacya naocznego świadka*, published in 1835 in “Przyjaciół Ludu”. If such a trial, in which as many as 11 women were sent to the stake and three were murdered under torture, had really taken place, it would probably have reverberated in Polish and foreign enlightened periodicals of the late

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁵ R. Girguś, *Wyjątki ze źródeł o nadzwyczajnych zjawiskach hydrologicznych i meteorologicznych na ziemiach polskich w latach 1601–1920*, Warszawa 2022, no. 760, p. 154.

¹⁰⁶ X. A. R., *Relacya naocznego świadka...*, no. 18, p. 138.

18th century. It is unlikely that not even a small mention of the subject would have appeared in the “Monitor”, which was involved in combating witch-hunts and the belief that witches committed evil deeds¹⁰⁷. Already a few years before the alleged Doruchów trial, on 3 October 1767, the Jesuit Franciszek Bohomolec (who edited “Monitor” in 1765–1784) wrote scathingly that, although there were some among his readers who did not believe in witches, there was a preponderance of those to whom belief in witchcraft and witches was very close¹⁰⁸. He also ridiculed not only the superstitions prevalent, especially in Warsaw, blaming all failures on witchcraft, but also the proliferating belief in prophecies¹⁰⁹. Surely, if he had heard about the deaths of the 14 women condemned in 1775 as alleged witches, he would not have missed mentioning it. And this did not happen.

It is also difficult to believe that the efforts made by Pastor Możdżanowski from Doruchów to King Stanisław August, as it was probably him he was looking for help from, were unsuccessful and that this ruler did not intervene. It is doubtful that the king believed in witches, since he did not believe in ritual murders by Jews and defended a tailor sentenced to death by the court in Olkusz in 1787, who was convicted of such a charge¹¹⁰. The story about Priest Możdżanowski’s journey to Warsaw to rescue women accused of witchcraft is – as it seems to me – only a beautiful family legend.

What is certain, however, is that a trial for witchcraft took place in Doruchów in 1762. Was another one held a few years later? Until sources are found to unequivocally confirm it, it remains, in my opinion, a myth.

¹⁰⁷ B. Woźniak, *Walka z przesądami na łamach „Monitora”*, “Studia Historyczne” 2004, vol. XLVII, issue 2, pp. 157–168.

¹⁰⁸ “Monitor” 1767, no. 79, pp. 684–865.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 690–691.

¹¹⁰ J. Wijaczka, *„Oświecone” społeczeństwo wobec Żydów. Procesy o mordy rytualne w państwie polsko-litewskim w drugiej połowie XVIII wieku*, [in:] *Oświecenie nieoświeczone. Tradycja, tożsamość, inność*, eds D. Kowalewska, A. Ročko, F. Wolański, Toruń 2022, p. 177.

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