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## FROM THE MANOR HOUSE TO THE WORLD

(THE ROLE OF THE MANOR-HOUSE IN CREATING THE VISION OF THE WORLD  
OF THE POLISH MIDDLE NOBILITY IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURY)

The manor-house has frequently been the subject of various studies which were mainly concerned with the architectural and economic aspects of this problem.<sup>1</sup> However, we have very limited data regarding the role which the manor-house played in the development of culture and organization (by means of social ties existing there).<sup>2</sup>

The manor-house, as J. Topolski pointed out, can be looked at as a factor of development processes and as an element and factor of people's lives in the past. Three groups of problems may be distinguished within this approach:

1. explaining the phenomenon of the origins of the manor-house;
2. treating the manor-house as a source for studies of a certain process, particularly in the field of consciousness and mentality, as well as in the field of the social structure;

<sup>1</sup> See A. Miłobędzki, *Architektura i społeczeństwo* (Architecture and society), in: *Polska w epoce Odrodzenia. Państwo – społeczeństwo – kultura* (Poland in the Renaissance epoch. State – society – culture), edited by A. Wyczański, Warszawa 1986; I. Jakimowicz, "Dom pański jako ma być postawion" ("A nobleman's house as it should be erected"), in: *Renesans. Sztuka i ideologia* (Renaissance Art and ideology), Warszawa 1976; T. Jakimowicz, *Dwór murowany w Polsce w XVI wieku* (Brick residences in the 16th century Poland), Warszawa 1979; I. Gołębiowski, *Domy i dworki w dawnej Polsce* (Houses and manor houses in old-time Poland), Warszawa 1830.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Mączak, *Rządzący i rządzeni. Władza i społeczeństwo w Europie wczesnonowoczesnej* (The rulers and the governed. The authority and society in early modern Europe), Warszawa 1986; W. Łoziński, *Życie polskie w dawnych wiekach* (Life in Poland in the olden age), Kraków 1969; M. Bogucka, *Dzieje kultury polskiej do 1918 roku* (The history of Polish culture till 1918), Wrocław 1987; J. Maciszewski, *Szlachta polska i jej państwo* (Polish nobility and its state), Warszawa 1986; J. Tazbir, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce* (Nobility culture in Poland), Warszawa 1983; A. Zajęzowski, *Główne elementy kultury szlacheckiej w Polsce. Ideologia i struktury społeczne* (The main elements of the nobility culture in Poland. Ideology and social structures), Wrocław 1961; W. Czaplinski, J. Długosz, *Życie codzienne magnaterii polskiej w XVII wieku* (Everyday life of Polish magnates in 17th century Poland), Warszawa 1976.

3. studying influence on the historical processes, i.e. the consequences they brought for the process of mental and spiritual changes in people's lives.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to analyze the manor-house mostly within the context of the second and third groups of problems. Therefore, I would treat it as a certain cultural phenomenon, a social and territorial unit on which the most essential problems of the epoch are focussed. In this aspect, it appears as an empirical material which helped me to analyze and reconstruct some aspects of the consciousness and mentality of the middle nobility of that period. I am also trying to present the influence which the existence and functions of a manor-house had on the social and spiritual sphere of the life of the nobility. Thus, it seems very interesting to look at a manor-house as a centre of social and dimensional perception of the world.

In the 16th century Poland, due to the development of the manorial-serf economy system, a specific, social and territorial structure appeared, called hereby a manor-house. By using this term, I describe an estate, minor in size, and of an agricultural character, belonging to a middle nobleman, which consists of a farm and a household. It must be said that the perspective in which the subject of this study is evaluated, stresses as the most important the human relationships existing inside this structure. The economic and social factor can only be significant provided it takes part in the creation of this structure (e.g. serfdom). The analysis was confined to the situation in the estates belonging to the middle nobility owing to the dominant role they played in the economic, political and social life in most parts of the Commonwealth of Poland. Having usually one to three villages, they owned two thirds of the entire area of 16th century Poland. To simplify my further deliberations, I will accept a one-village land estate as a model.

A hundred-year-period of prosperity lasting from the beginning of the 16th century to more or less 1620, was sufficient to create the ethos of the noble ownership.<sup>4</sup> A nobleman became first of all a noble agriculturer. He considered his land estate to be his prime interest. It gave him the social status, defined his outlook on life, created custom and mentality.<sup>5</sup> "Considerable income obtained from the land estate led to the change in the lifestyle of the nobility who at that time were changing from knights to noble agriculturers."<sup>6</sup> This transformation had an influence upon their entire life. A manor-house, analyzed here through the cultural categories, became the fundamental element of the social and economic life in the country. It marked "the entire mentality of the epoch with the feature of rustic patriarchy."<sup>7</sup> Thus, the former residence of a nobleman with its defensive role, was changed into a comfortable dwelling and an administrative centre of the land estate.

<sup>3</sup> J. Topolski, *Economic foundations of the changes in the structure and the life of the Polish nobility in the 16th to the 18th centuries*, typescript, p. 1

<sup>4</sup> See: A. Karpiński, *Staropolska poezja idealów ziemiańskich* (Old Polish poetry of agricultural noblemen's ideals), Wrocław 1983, p. 8

<sup>5</sup> See: J. Maciszewski, *Szlachta polska...* (Polish nobility...) p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> M. Bogucka, *Dawna Polska. Narodziny, rozkwit, upadek* (Old Poland. Birth, development, collapse), Warszawa 1985, p. 236

<sup>7</sup> M. Bogucka, *Dzieje kultury...* (The history of Polish culture), p. 131.

Sixteenth century Poland created specific "cultural circles".<sup>8</sup> This process was based on the gradual detachment of certain social and territorial units from the whole entity; such a small unit had as its centre an estate of one nobleman – an estate consisting of one or a few villages, self-sufficient and to some extent enclosed; in other words, a manor-house which was a small scale projection of the state.<sup>9</sup>

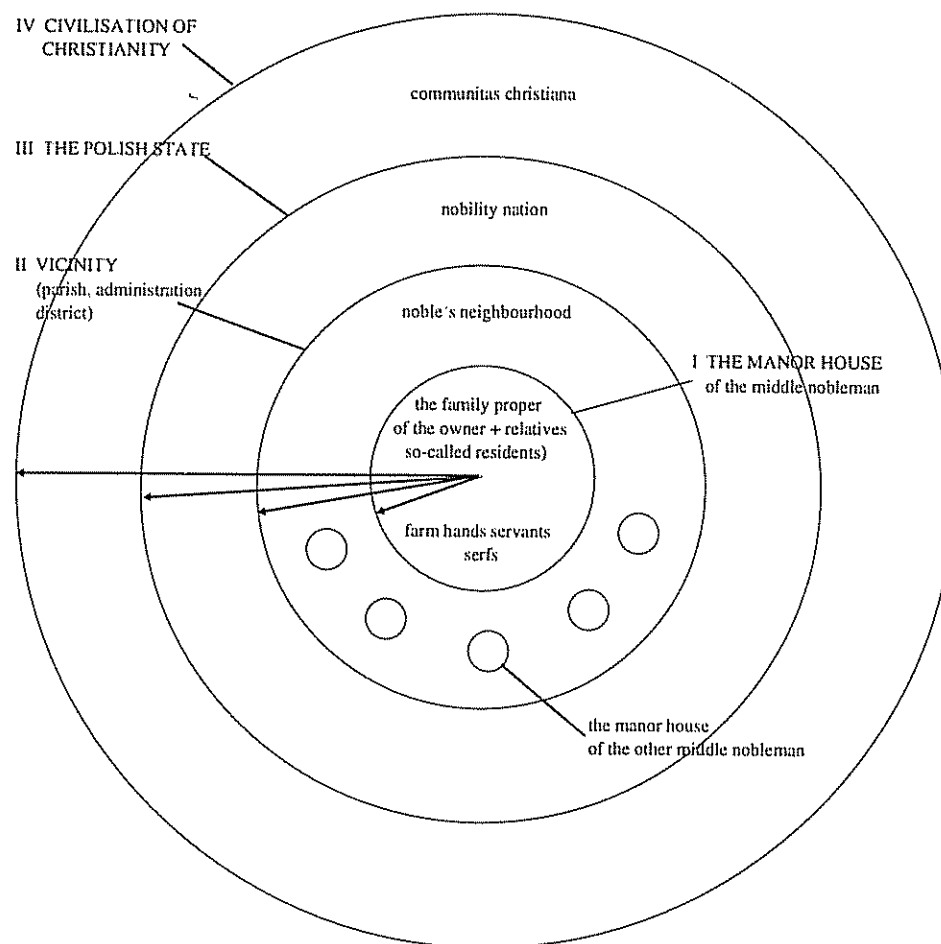


Fig. 1. The vision of the world in the middle nobility's consciousness (Prepared by Ewa Domańska)

<sup>8</sup> My way of using the term "cultural circles" has no connection with the context of its use in cultural-historical school in archeology and ethnology. See this term in *Ethnological dictionary*, Warszawa-Poznań 1987

<sup>9</sup> See: T. Chrzanowski, *Wędrowki po Sarmacji europejskiej* (Pilgrimages through the European Sarmatia), Kraków 1986, p. 13

The manor-house constituted the first – “I”, basic “cultural circles”. Its social unit was a noble family which often included distant relatives (the so-called residents), as well as servants and farm hands. Peasants-serfs, bound to the soil and to feudal service, were the most numerous group in the manor-house. The territorial boundary of the manor-house was marked by the area of the farm.

Using the term of “social circle”, which has its specific meaning in archaeology and ethnography, I was rather trying to achieve a metaphoric picture of the social and territorial perception of the world by the middle nobility in the 16th and 17th century Poland. The metaphor of a circle suggests the existence of an enclosed space, as well as monotony, unity and harmony, uniformity and continuity; it is also a symbol of a border which guarantees magic security. The additional description “cultural” is connected with the processes appearing within the cultural sphere understood here in a broad sense; this sphere, which takes the form of human actions, their results and most of all the form of conscience, constitutes the “material” of a particular circle.

In this option, the unity, which can be identified with the world, appears to consist of a central unit and elements surrounding it. Such a structure could be compared to the situation of throwing a stone into the water.<sup>10</sup> The circular waves on the surface are gradually disappearing. In our case, the centre is identified with the manor-house, which becomes a social and territorial unit isolated from the rest of the world. The manor-house becomes a microcosm, a small world, a miniature of a state; this specific social and territorial unity is surrounded by further spheres which are situated concentrically around the centre. Everything has its own place within itself, but it is connected with certain emotional values (of cultural origin) which are attributed to certain areas.<sup>11</sup> A place acquires identity because of the people who inhabit it or stay there, and because of the role the people prescribe to it. This perspective allows us to look upon the manor-house as a sociocentric constituent. It becomes a pattern which is transferred by the nobleman to the remaining “cultural circles”.

The 16th and 17th century saw the process of identification of groups and social communities with the particular territories, which then could be associated with the “cultural circles”. The manor-house as the basic social and territorial unit which includes the whole family and serfs (because of the system of patriarchy and serfdom existing there) becomes the first (I), most basic circle. The second (II) circle refers to the vicinity which can be simply identified with the closer as well as the more distant neighbourhood (this formulation can accept the vicinity as a neighbourhood, a parish, or an administrative district). The third (III) circle is limited territorially to

<sup>10</sup> See: S. Czarnowski, *Podział przestrzeni i jej ograniczenie w religii i magii* (Division of space and its limitation in religion and magic), in: S. Czarnowski, *Dziela* (Works), vol. III, Warszawa 1956, pp. 225-226.

<sup>11</sup> See: E. Durkheim, *Elementarne formy życia religijnego* (The elementary forms of religious life), Warszawa 1990, p. 10.

the state, and is connected with a sense of belonging to a nation, understood in that period of time as a noble nation. The fourth (IV) and last circle, which was vaguely perceived on the horizon of the nobleman’s vision of the world, is associated territorially with the area of Christian civilization. The sense of belonging to this civilization depends on one’s identification with the *communitas christiana*. In this way, the overlapping of the territorial organization with the social structure is achieved.<sup>12</sup>

The nobleman had his well-established place in the system of neighbourhood, where he was well known and identified with his estate. He was also well aware of his place in the world. In the 17th century, when the country suffered from an economic and political crisis due to the numerous military campaigns and the end of the prosperous grain trade, when the culture was dominated by Sarmatism, the progress of agrarianism deepened the tendency towards isolation among small communities. The history books describe this process as a move from the open culture to the isolated culture, which was connected with the creation of the idea of a small scale stability among the noblemen. “The Sarmatian way of life was associated with the apology of possessing a village, a family residence and the praise of the patriarchal court life.”<sup>13</sup> *Bene natus et possessionatus* – expresses the personality model during that period. The manor-house became a small world. Serfs were bound to the noble agriculturer by the patriarchal relationship expressed among other things by “the protection from harm caused by neighbours and help in the period of misfortune”.<sup>14</sup> Very often a nobleman became a godfather to the babies of his serfs, which then obliged him to support any godchild who became an orphan.<sup>15</sup> A noble family was strongly attached to their family estate, which resulted among other things in creating a family name from the place of origin (for example Rey from Nagłowice).

The manor-house became an emotional value, through which the outlook on the world was shaped; it was a centre for the circles of social ties, which were then spread on the other nearby units and wider territories. From this basis, a strong sense of the local community emerged and a structure of “small and large neighbourhoods” was created.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See idem, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> S. Cynarski, *Sarmatyzm – ideologia i styl życia* (Sarmatism – Ideology and way of life), in: *Polska XVII wieku Państwo – społeczeństwo – kultura* (16th century Poland. State – society – culture), edited by J. Tazbir, Warszawa 1969, p. 235. See also the works concerning Sarmatism: T. Ulewicz, *Sarmacja* (Sarmatia), Kraków 1950; T. Mańkowski, *Genealogia Sarmatyzmu* (Genealogy of Sarmatism), Warszawa 1946 and whole volume of monthly „Teksty” of 1975, no. 3.

<sup>14</sup> See: A. Wyczański, *Dogonić Europę* (To catch up with Europe), in: *Dzieje narodu i państwa polskiego* (History of the nation and Polish state), vol. II-20, Kraków 1987, p. 13. See also: C. Kukło, *Funkcjonowanie społeczności parafialnej na tle rejestracji chrztów parafii Trzcianne 1600-1654* (Functioning of the parish community on the basis of the analysis of the list of baptisms in the Trzcianne Parish 1600-1654), in: *Spółeczeństwo staropolskie* (Old Polish society), edited by A. Wyczański, vol. III, Warszawa 1983.

<sup>15</sup> See: C. Kukło, *Funkcjonowanie* (Functioning), p. 226.

<sup>16</sup> See: A. Zajaczkowski, *Główne elementy* (The main elements).

On the other hand, the attachment to the territory of the state was connected with the sense of belonging to the noble nation, with the feelings of distinctiveness. "The citizens of the Commonwealth felt like the inhabitants of an island, which was surrounded by enemies instead of the sea. (...) The inhabitants of this island were distinguished from their neighbours by three fundamental features which had a significant influence on the isolated character of this culture: religious distinctiveness (the neighbours were Lutherans, Orthodox and Muslims), the habitual distinctiveness expressed by Sarmatism, and a different state organization owing to the fact that at that time absolutism became a prominent feature for the majority of Poland's neighbours."<sup>17</sup>

The perception of the IV "cultural circle" – a wider community, which can be identified with the territory of the Christian civilization – was based on the sense of belonging to *communitas christiana*; as a consequence it was connected with the obligation to defend the Christian belief, particularly if the country one came from was widely considered a frontier of Christianity – (*antemurale christianitatis*).<sup>18</sup>

Despite the fact that the consciousness of a middle nobleman perceived vaguely the territory of the Christian civilization, "the borders of the homeland very clearly divided two territorial spheres: domestic and foreign".<sup>19</sup> In the micro-perspective, this foreign element was attributed to a neighbour, other land estate, other villages, a different region and administrative district. However, the term "foreign" should not carry only a pejorative correlation. "Foreign" means neither bad, nor hostile, nor an enemy. It simply means somebody from the outside of the circle who breaks its magic border, somebody unknown. For an individual consciousness the world is associated with a house. A house constitutes a sphere of personal freedom and security. A manor-house for a nobleman – his household – was not only the centre of the intimate feelings but also became a guarantee of independence, reasonable prosperity; it gave the owner the feeling of security, material stability and peace.<sup>20</sup> The house with the help of the magic borderline of the door, the threshold, windows and walls separated him from the dangerous, outside world. The manor-house belonged still to the world of the nobleman. Yet, everything outside and inside was strictly distinguished. There was still something like a *sacrum* of the inside, of the enclosed space which was always the expression of the yearning for paradise.<sup>21</sup> This sacred space had as its border the door, windows, the threshold, but also the boundary strip. Having a magic meaning they also had juridical justification. The rights of a no-

<sup>17</sup> J. Tazbir, *Wzorce osobowe szlachty* (Personality profiles of the nobleman), Warszawa 1986, pp. 43-44

<sup>18</sup> See: J. Tazbir, *Od antemurale do przedmurza* (From antemurale to bulwark), in: J. Tazbir, *Szlaki...* (The roads...)

<sup>19</sup> T. Michałowska, *Kochanowskiego poetyka przestrzeni* (Kochanowski's poetry of space), in: „Pamiętnik Literacki”, 1979, no. 1, p. 24

<sup>20</sup> Idem

<sup>21</sup> See: M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii* (The treatise on history of religion), Warszawa 1966, pp. 372-373.

bleman ended on the borderline with his neighbour which could not be crossed without a punishment, because it marked a certain space, separated from the rest of the world. Crossing the border meant consecration or deconsecration of the one who crossed. It was expressed by the symbolic gesture of welcoming, coming outside the house, a habit of leaving the door open to invite somebody inside.

All the "cultural circles", that are enumerated above, were not of a strictly enclosed character. They existed, however, in some sort of isolation (it refers mainly to the I circle – the manor-house) based on the idea of distinctiveness which was obvious to the community inhabiting it. This relative "enclosure" meant that a certain group accepted from the outside only those features which did not destabilize their own identity.

The structure presented above allows us to look from a different perspective at some controversial problems of the openness and separatism of the noble societies in the face of foreign influences. Until now historiography has treated the 16th century as the age of openness, whereas the 17th century increased the tendency towards separatism. As can be noticed, this separatism of the noble society was not a new phenomenon, connected among other things with Sarmatism, but it was a process of expansion of the circle of the manor-house onto further "cultural circles". The terms "foreigner" and "foreign" in relation to the "cultural circle" of the manor-house were only transferred onto the territory of the state. Therefore, the treatment of the manor-house in social and territorial terms allows an interesting new interpretation of some traditional problems of Polish history in the 16th and 17th century.