

Title: The impact of fiscal pressure and social polarization on the deepening of property disparities among the nobility of the Commonwealth in the 16th-18th centuries.

The purpose of the presented project is to study the causes and consequences of the deepening of wealth disparities among the nobility of the Kingdom of Poland in the modern period (16th-18th centuries). Such elements as fiscal pressures, social polarization, political evolution and war devastation will be taken into account, which may have affected intra-state, political-economic and social relations. Showing the process through the prism of the above phenomena should contribute to a better understanding of the peculiarities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Although studies of the wealth inequality of populations have a long tradition in world historiography, in the case of the elite they have not been widely described so far, especially in Polish historiography. And yet it is clear that the differences in wealth, occurring among the privileged state, must have affected their political, economic activity, daily life or culture. This research is therefore an important step, which at the same time will bring Poland more broadly into the global discussion of the sources of economic development in Europe at the beginning of the modern era or the debate on political and economic crises.

We selected two regions for the study: Greater Poland and Podlasie, for two reasons. First, given the differences in the density of noble settlements, social structure and population, we will be able to show significant regionalisms and the general trend in differentiation. Secondly, the significant number of surviving sources of taxation and evidence of the political activity of the nobility, allows us to make analyses in a broader perspective, for the entire pre-industrial period.

As part of the project, we selected tax records from four periods for analysis: 1578-1581, circa 1629, circa 1662 and 1789-91. These were historically significant moments, and also related to the introduction of a new type of taxation. The registers are therefore characterized by high reliability. Due to the vastness of the surviving source material, tax registers from the provinces of Poznań, Kalisz and Podlasie will be analysed. The second phase of the project will be to identify representatives of the ruling class in the Republic on the basis of surviving sejmik acts, sejm and sejm diaries, sejm constitutions, lists of central and local officials, or lists of electors and deputies. The collected data will enable us to verify research hypotheses in the social, economic and political history of the Commonwealth:

1. The level of poverty among the nobility of Podlasie was higher than among the nobility of Greater Poland. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the index worsened significantly.
2. The long-term tendency to deepen inequality among the nobility may have resulted from purely accidental mechanisms, not necessarily fully related to economic development or war crises, but, for example, the administrative and fiscal situation (the existence of tenures or *arendas*).
3. The phenomena described in points 1 and 2 caused socio-economic polarization among the nobility of Greater Poland and Podlasie, understood as the gap between the poor and rich nobility.
4. Fiscal pressure, which, in the case of the Commonwealth, is the result of the existing administrative and economic system, in which some representatives of the privileged state enlarge their property holdings through the lease of land and royal estates, influenced the deepening of socio-economic polarization and wealth inequality.
5. The phenomena described in points 2 and 4 aimed to make the poor dependent on the rich. The importance of inequality must have led to strong client relationships, selling votes and limiting real political power to a narrow group of the best-off.

The above analyses will seek to answer the question of whether the evolution of the political system - from the developed democracy of the nobility in the mid-16th century, through the magnate oligarchy to the Stanislaw reforms - whose framework and concepts were determined by the nobility while deciding on the tax system to which it was subjected was a cause or effect of the deepening economic differentiation of the nobility.