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Of the tradition of the Polish political science (Part 4) : The „golden age” of political culture

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Bronisław Pasierb

**OF THE TRADITION OF THE POLISH
POLITICAL SCIENCE (PART 4).
THE „GOLDEN AGE” OF POLITICAL CULTURE**

1

A study into the heritage of the Polish Noble Republic occupies an important place in the scientific contribution by Józef Siemieński which was to research political culture. The study constituted a summary of the tenets put forward by the author so far. Looking back on the tradition, in the study Siemieński described attitudes of Poles towards institutions and values which had been shaped in the course of history. He perused the history of the Polish Republic in order to identify leading ideas which were similar, at times the same, and occasionally more developed than ideas in the West of Europe where they frequently reached a status of postulates by the „civilized societies”. To characterize them, Siemieński deployed contemporary vocabulary aiming at bringing the ideas „close to us” in their „deepest essence”, without undue concretization which could reveal their historical „anachronisms”. He focused on participation of society in political power and three ideas in particular: freedom, tolerance towards other nationalities, and all-encompassing national power (*wszechwładztwo narodowe*) (Siemieński 1918: 17).

A paper entitled „Poland’s political culture of the XVI century” („Kultura polityczna Polski w. XVI”), delivered and discussed in June of 1930 during Zjazd Naukowy im. J. Kochanowskiego in Cracow, within the framework of the symposion’s historical-social section (Siemieński 1931: 52–61), was the most mature of Siemieński’s papers, constituting a summary of his research in the field of political culture. The paper was published in 1932 (Siemieński 1932: 119–167). It created a basis for a list of issues which – according to its author – were

to constitute a conception of Polish political culture of the „golden age”. Siemieński divided his paper into six uneven parts. First three of them were devoted to fundamentals of the Polish political system in the sixteenth century.

Drawing on his own earlier studies into the political regime, primarily into the Polish political law, he initiated a polemical debate with the so called Cracow School (*szkoła krakowska*) as well as with those students of the history of the political regime and political law who represented views different than the opinions of Siemieński. He defended the political role played by the Polish gentry (*szlachta*)¹, perceiving this particular social stratum as a mature political elite, responsible for the country, patriotic, politically very much cognizant, capable of compromise, wise, presenting high moral values in the practice of government.

2

Siemieński began his descriptive analyses from institutions of „court negotiations” (*roki sądowe*), mass attended by the gentry because of their need to „gain insight reaching outside of the homeland backyard” (*wejrzenia poza ojczyste opłotki*) but also because the gentry looked for „more numerous company” (*licniejszego towarzystwa*), were hungry for „news from the world in the times devoid of roads and post offices” (*wiadomości ze świata w tych czasach bez dróg i poczty*), and, naturally, because the gentry were ready to have „fun” (*zabawy*). Apart from that, the gentry was interested in „the vernacular execution of justice” (*potoczny wymiar sprawiedliwości*), which was only rarely „decorated with contingent statutes which applied to all” (*okraszany z rzadka przegodnymi uchwałami, obowiązującymi ogół*). In this manner, according to the author, there emerged a „most important organ of the public opinion in Poland, soon turning into an organ of an absolute civic authority of the gentry-nation” (*najważniejszy w Polsce organ opinii publicznej, niebawem nawet organ wszechwładzy obywatelskiej narodu szlacheckiego*). By this he meant a genealogy of *sejmiks* (gentry assemblies)², especially country assemblies (*sejmiki*

¹ Nobility, landed noble class.

² „A sejmik (diminutive of the Polish word ‘sejm’, meaning a type of parliament) was a regional assembly in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and earlier in the Kingdom of Poland. Sejmiks existed until the end of the Commonwealth in 1795 following the partitions of Poland” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sejmik>) – a note added by the translator.

ziemskie), which evidenced that towards the end of the sixteenth century, „the political culture of the gentry masses had already built on two earlier centuries of its development” (*kultura polityczna ogółu szlacheckiego miała już za sobą dwa wieki rozwoju*).

The institution of government was the next element in which – according to Siemieński – the most developed, ultimate and most typical aspect of the Polish political culture was manifested. The author reconstructed an evolutionary process during which the Polish state had been shaped as an *oeuvre* by the „whole of the nation” (*ogół narodowy*) in an atmosphere marked by a struggle of the gentry with the king and aristocracy. During this period Poland had been transforming from a feudal state into a state of noble republic. The importance of „one-and-a-few-village-” esquires (*jedno- i parowioskowa szlachta*) became clear then, but only as regards the Polish gentry. The Polish state was created not by a „genius-reformer-ruler, victorious *tribunus populi*, a religious leader or a war-lord (*genialnego jakiegoś reformatora władcy ani zwycięskiego trybuna, przywódcy religijnego czy kondotiera*). The Polish statist construction was not influenced by foreign fashions and not modeled on other structures such as for instance the ancient Roman Empire. It developed, rather, according to some internal logics until the period of absolutism, when „the Polish politician pointed rather towards the solemnity of the Senate as a model which is respectful and worth following” (*polityk polski raczej na powagę senatu wskazywał jako na wzór szacunku i naśladowania godny*). It was the Polish gentry from the Crown (*Korona*)³ that moulded „the Polish state into a shape which it assumed in the second half of the sixteenth century” (*państwu polskiemu tę postać, jaką przybrało w drugiej połowie wieku XVI*).

³ The Crown – a popular name used to refer to the Polish part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, „also known as the First Polish Republic or Republic (Commonwealth) of the Two (Both) Nations (Peoples), (Polish: Pierwsza Rzeczpospolita or Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów; Lithuanian: Abiejų tautų respublika) or as the „First Republic”, was one of the largest and most populous [16] countries in 17th-century Europe. Its political structure – that of a semi-federal, semi-confederal aristocratic republic – was formed in 1569 by the Union of Lublin, which united the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and lasted in this form until the adoption of the Constitution of May 3, 1791. The Commonwealth covered not only the territories of what is now Poland and Lithuania, but also the entire territory of Belarus and Latvia, large parts of Ukraine and Estonia, and part of present-day western Russia (Smolensk and Kaliningrad oblasts). Originally the official languages of the Commonwealth were Polish and Latin (in the Kingdom of Poland) and Ruthenian and Lithuanian (in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania)” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth) – a note added by the translator.

Siemieński rejected the so called progressivism (*postępowość*) as well as a comparative method, assuming that Poland was in the sixteenth century „very progressive, let us even say, the most progressive” (*wielce postępową, powiedzmy nawet, najbardziej postępową*). Although to prove the conviction there were no specific comparative studies, according to Siemieński, Poland had been ahead of the West „as far as the three features, fundamental from the point of view of democracy” (*trzema cechami zasadniczymi z punktu widzenia demokracji*):

1) the biggest share of the population participated in the Polish democratic system and enjoyed warranted liberties; the participation was most egalitarian of all, besides it was even broader than anywhere else, both as regards the state authorities and the institutions of self-government – participation in them was related to criteria such as membership in the gentry social strata and land ownership;

2) all of the gentry enjoyed equal rights, irrespective of their social position and economic status;

3) the competencies of gentry representatives vis-à-vis the monarch who initially possessed all power, were much broader than anywhere else.

This made the author conclude that democratization, understood as equal participation of all in the „full political power” (*pełni władzy*), „progressed the furthest” (*postąpiła najdalej*) in Poland. In the conclusion, Siemieński discussed also the institution of strata-bound self-government (*samorząd stanowy*) which to an extent balanced the „advantages of the gentry in the government of the state” (*przewagę szlachty we władzy państwowej*).

Political liberalism was another indicator of democratization which the author named. The immunity of the gentry homestead was an iron rule albeit relying only on a custom. The rule belonged to the so called liberty rights (*praw wolnościowych*), or civic liberties.

The author listed the following civic liberties:

1) the immunity of one’s personal property – which could only be confiscated on the basis of a court sentence, and an „exquisite statute *Neminem Captivabimus* – a principle of personal immunity” (*prześwietny artykuł Neminem Captivabimus – zasadę nietykalności osobistej*). Instituted not for all, not even for all of the gentry, the statute was premised on „settlement or a bail guarantee” (*osiadłości albo rękojmi*). It was closer to the famous *Habeas Corpus* of the seventeenth century than to medieval Western regulations;

2) the immunity of the gentry homestead – as a rule which was mandatory although only customary;

3) a freedom of teaching and practicing science, which was closely related to religious tolerance;

4) a freedom of print and expression;

5) a freedom of political criticism which was in the Poland of the sixteenth century recognized as not only an individual freedom but also a factor contributing to a common good (Kot 1919: 159–160).

By means of a footnote to those stipulations, Siemieński took also issue with so called „indicator of the strength of the monarch’s government” (*miernik siły rządu monarchy*). In its stead, he proposed another indicator, „most serious” (*wcale poważny*), that is an opinion of contemporaries, especially „experts in the political law” (*znawców prawa politycznego*) (Kot 1919: 31–32, 132).

The degree of equality in the law before the court was to be yet another indicator of the political culture in the state. This idea was rooted in very essence of democracy but only owing to the feudal culture of the medieval and early modern Europe was it still present in the sphere of ethic „as a command to treat the lower strata in a humane manner” (*jako nakaz ludzkiego stosunku do warstw niższych*). The latter domain was in the Polish political culture underdeveloped, as Siemieński admitted. Some progress was to be achieved only in the eighteenth century.

The second part of Siemieński’s study was devoted to law and its implementation, which is taken to constitute an indicator of the level of political culture in any type of democracy. Polish political law was being shaped to the advantage of the gentry, the gentry pressed for it and was able to use it because, apart from so called mental training (*przygotowania umysłowego*), the gentry had also other beneficial characteristics to which the author included so called „democratic discipline” (*dyscyplina demokratyczna*), labelling it „obedience in public life” (*karność w życiu społecznym*). This was, according to him, a separate indicator of the level of political culture of a society. „Democracy devoid of this virtue cannot function, without this virtue participation of the masses in government leads to stagnation or anarchy, if not to a masked oligarchy. Therefore, democracy is a more difficult path. No mental censuses can help here. (*Demokracja bez tej cnoty nie jest zdolna do działania, bez niej współdział mas w rządach prowadzi do zastoju albo do anarchii, jeżeli nie do zamaskowanej oligarchii. Dlatego demokracja jest drogą trudniejszą. Nie pomogą tu*

żadne cenzusy umysłowe) (Kutrzeba 1916: 64). Democratic self-discipline (obedience) was to be a quality absolutely different than „obedience with regard to authorities” (*karność wobec władzy*). What was at issue was a certain moderation (*umiary*) „in insisting on one’s own rights, on one’s own opinion about a public issue (*w obstawaniu przy swoim prawie, swoim zdaniu w sprawie publicznej*). In short, he meant, as I believe, an ability to reach a political compromise, which is so important in a situation circumscribed by a rule of unanimity. In such circumstances the so called obedience – an ability to reach a compromise – could have multiple and beneficial uses. All depended on the wisdom of the political opposition. Political morality of the sixteenth century prompted a search for exactly such a means, being of a relatively high standard if „so many so controversial issues could be successfully dealt with by the sejmiks and sejms at the time” (*skoro tak wiele i tak drażliwych spraw umiały załatwić sejmiki i sejmy w tamym czasie*).

The degree of law observance was still another indicator of political culture. Law stood in Poland above the king, which established adequate relations between the state authorities and citizens of the state. The relationships between the citizens themselves were, however, quite a different matter. „Sanguine temper which prevailed at the time and the weakness of the executive power, not infrequently led to violence and made it difficult to seek justice” (*Krewkie temperamenty owego czasu, brak dostatecznej siły wykonawczej, wywoływały nieraz gwałty, utrudniały dochodzenie sprawiedliwości*).

The institutional performance of the state machinery was the last indicator of principles regulating the shape of liberal political culture. According to Siemieński, its symptoms could be identified by means of comparison. Specific initiatives and their durability could be evaluated, their history investigated in detail, their concrete results or lack thereof could be checked. In the author’s opinion, Poland of the sixteenth century passed the test with flying colours when compared, for instance, with the German Reich with regard to foreign relations, at least at moments such as when it faced the Turkish threat or when it tackled problems related to Livland (*Inflanty*).

The third part of Siemieński’s study dealt with so called ideology inherent in the Polish political law and the idea of collective life which guided the deeds of the founders and participants of the Polish state. The Polish political regime was based on ideals of freedom and equality which the state inculcated in its citizens, teaching them to be

ready to surrender everything for the sake of the Polish Republic. This striving for freedom was expressed both in the guaranteed liberties and political rights enjoyed by the gentry. Nothing should be imposed on a free citizen. „I am convinced – wrote Siemieński – that in psychological terms the freedom of religion in Poland originated from attitudes typical of the gentry: It is none of anyone’s business what priest I want to follow and what priest I host at my home” (*Jestem przekonany, pisał Siemieński, że psychologicznym zaczątkiem prawa o wolności wyznania w Polsce było szlacheckie, co komu do tego, jakiego ja kaznodziei chcę słuchać i jakiego u siebie trzymam*). The striving for political freedom stemmed from a feeling of dignity, typical of the gentry. It was expressed in the fact that economic differentiation was politically invalidated and so called social equity was stressed. „It is unheard of elsewhere that a powerful lord should be equal before the law with the poorest of his tenants. Both at the sejmik, convocation, during elections and at a confederation. The same regards the court. (...) No one is to be better than the Polish citizen” (*Niesłychana to rzecz indziej, aby potężny pan był równy wobec prawa politycznego najuboższemu ze swoich dzierżawców. Zarówno na sejmiku, jak w sejmie, na konwokacji, na elekcji, w konfederacji. To samo wobec sądu. (...) Nikt nie ma być lepszy od obywatela polskiego*).

The next part of the study encompassed the political life in Poland of the sixteenth century as a major aspect of its political culture. Lacking case studies were substituted by Siemieński with research suggestions related to the area of study. He pointed out the need to undertake research into „the political milieu of the royal court” (*środowiska polityczne dworu królewskiego*), including central state offices which were linked to the milieu. He was interested in investigations revealing how particular „political initiatives of government” (*inicjatywa polityczna rządu*) were born, who was involved in their development apart from the king, marshals, chancellors and senators-in residence, who changed every six months; what was the role of „royal experts (*doradcy królewscy*), and in particular the role of the so called un-official (*nieurzędowych*) foreign experts who could be removed from the royal court by decisions of sejmiks or sejms; what was the role of the „magnate court” (*dworu pańskiego*) as a political milieu. As concerns the latter, more was known about the mores which prevailed in the milieu than about political influence of this particular type of the center of political life. The lack of knowledge about the shape of those factors which were decisive in politics, for instance about the public opinion, or, as the author would

have it – „the vernacular opinion” (*zdania pospolitego*) on public issues. Siemieński rightly indicated these research problems as ones directly related to the field of political culture.

He outlined in an interesting manner a process of development of the gentry public opinion which played a decisive role in policies implemented by the state. At that time, Poland did not have either published newspapers or a network of post offices, which is why the life of the high society ran a different course than the life of the gentry poors (*doły*), so called one- and a few-village- esquires (*szlachta jedno- czy parowioskowa*). Political parties or other such groupings were still not known in the Poland of the sixteenth century to strive to reach a shared aim and then to take tactical decisions on the way to reach the aim. The gentry was as yet not mature enough to play such a role. Besides, according to Siemieński, the gentry followed another „commandment of morality” (*nakaz moralności*). Whoever wanted to take part in public debates, should not be biased and should not act according to a pre-planned strategy. The author admitted that there existed temporary „political streams and political camps which formed against their background” (*prądy polityczne, na ich tle obozy polityczne*) which raised specific slogans, those were, however, not accompanied by any clear-cut programmes of action and lacked a common method of action. There also existed „orientations” (*orientacje*), which were sometimes characterized by stable sympathies and antipathies and „political fractions” (*frakcje polityczne*), formed on the basis of „a solidarity of the blood and a shared attitude towards their clientele” (*na solidarności krwi i na stosunku klienteli*), united by material or ideal backgrounds. Apart from that, the Polish militant temper „most frequently made individuals group either «for» or «against» those who were in government” (*najczęściej grupował jednostki „za” lub „przeciw” tym, co rządzi*). It is therefore clear, how deep into the past reached the roots of the Polish „contestation” (*kontestacja*). The „execution movement” (*ruch egzekucyjny*) was an example of a political movement of exactly this kind. The author provided more such examples describing one by one orientations and political fractions to finally conclude that „permanent oppositionists” (*wieczni opozycjoniści*) are also known more than well and are found in our own, very recent times. The conclusion is interesting, because it amounts to a statement claiming that the society living in the sixteenth century Poland „was not organized politically” (*nie było zorganizowane politycznie*) and this was the reason why the importance of eminent individuals rose who were characterized by a „leading will”

(*o kierowniczej woli*), were capable of leading masses and, in addition, were „talented demagogues” (*zdolni demagogowie*). Political haggling took place mainly during sejmiks, whereas during sejms there clashed and struggled opinions which had been shaped during the sejmiks. „The sejmiks are thus a most interesting phenomenon in the domain of the Polish political culture both because of activities undertaken – since it was there that the fate of the sejms was decided, and because of the personages [who took part in them], since it is through them that a better insight may be gained into the culture of Polish political life” (*Toteż sejmiki są najciekawszym zjawiskiem dziedziny polskiej kultury politycznej – zarówno ze strony rzeczowej, bo tu rozstrzygały się losy sejmów, jak i ze strony postaci, bo tu najlepiej przyjrzeć się można kulturze polskiego życia politycznego*).

Siemieński described with a particular expertise the manner in which the sejm debates were prepared and staged. He characterized conflicts, revealed strategies to promote arguments, quoted the force of the arguments and the arguments of the force, outlined procedures of debating, analyzed sejm speeches. He highlighted the importance of „political rhetorics” (*krasomówstwo polityczne*) in Poland of the sixteenth century encouraging research of this kind as well as initiating research into the letter-writing of the historical epoch. He rightly pointed out that such documents contained „much political, legal and everyday wisdom” (*wiele mądrości politycznej, prawniczej, życiowej*). It is therefore not surprising that Siemieński as an experienced analyst of Polish parliamentary life was also interested in sources and methods of gaining knowledge which had been used by the Polish politicians of the past, „great and insignificant, men of the state and sejmiks’ voters” (*wielcy i mali, mężowie stanu i sejmikowi wotanci*). He was keen to discover especially „where they took this knowledge of laws and state issues from” (*skąd brali tę znajomość praw i spraw krajowych*), the possession of which they proved at every moment, making Europe wonder. The author indicated a few such sources. The first place where the gentry were taught such lessons were at public debates themselves, other lessons were partly drawn from reading publications on legal issues – since currently obtaining law was not taught at school and historians did not take into account „internal affairs” (*spraw wewnętrznych*). Court proceedings were, in turn, open to the public just as the sejmik and the sejm proceedings. „During a sejmik, each debating circle was surrounded by a multitude of people whose composition no-one ever checked” (*Na sejmiku koło obradujące otoczone było tłumem, którego składu nikt nie*

badal). It is certain that there were plenty of youth there, who listened to the debates. A beginning participant did not, as a rule, took the floor but rather listened and learnt. This is the reason why in the sejm and sejmik speeches one might come across some traditional political golden thoughts which had been handed down by mouth rather than contained in any written works. All of this was, however, not sufficient to achieve a satisfactory level of the legal-political skills. In addition, a „certain theoretical cultivation of the mind” (*niejaka uprawa umysłów teoretyczna*) was needed, which involved reading a variety of published works, starting from ancient authors, especially historians and theoreticians of the state and arriving at general historiography and Polish history. Still, not much was written there „about political law” (*o prawie politycznym*). Yet another source of knowledge was then found in the so called science of contemporary Poland which contained some „applied history and obtaining political law” (*historii stosowanej i obowiązującego prawa politycznego*). The fourth and the most important part of Siemieński’s study was constituted by a collection of laws, which included both obtaining law and the old law, already changed or dead. The laws were both an indicator and evidence of the „Polish political culture not only as a book from which the contemporaries learnt the basics of politics. The characteristic feature of the period is that those works from which the majority drew the most in terms of their political awareness had been written not by experts-theoreticians or professors of law as it was to be the case in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, but by practical experts in legal issues: farmers, politicians, at the most – judges. The works evidence clearly albeit indirectly the qualities of the whole milieu from which the authors originated: they were not a group of scholars but representatives of a broad stratum of gentry, people like the ones for whom the works were created” (*polskiej kultury politycznej nie tylko jako książki, z których się współcześni uczyli podstaw polityki. Cechą charakterystyczną tych czasów jest, że te dzieła, z których ogół czerpał najwięcej dla swego uświadomienia politycznego, pisane były nie przez teoretyków-specjalistów, profesorów prawa, jak w wieku XVII i XVIII, ale przez ludzi życia praktycznego, przez rolników, polityków, co najwyżej sędziów. Świadczą one wymownie, acz pośrednio, o całym środowisku swoich autorów: nie była nim jakaś warstewka bakałarzy, jeno ta sama szeroka warstwa szlachty właściwej, dla której te książki pisano*) (Siemieński 1932: 159). The author described an example of such a „petty man of letters” (*pisarczyk*) and noted that it was

a category of man who knew law not from books but from practice, who had to do with many different people and „was accustomed both to the court’s waiting hall and a farm backyard” (*zwyczajny mu był zarówno przedsionek sądowy, jak gospodarskie podwórze*). Most important of all, his description pictures in front of the reader a figure of a sejmik speaker: “with a hat slightly pushed off his forehead, face most serious, with a hand supporting his trunk – as he in a full voice, and not beating around the bush, with a nobleman’s self-confidence – in short with a characteristic buoyancy persuades the gentry brotherhood in a fashion owing to which soon a unanimous cry «agreed», «not agreed», «we will not allow» will burst out” (*z czapą nieco z czoła zsuniętą, z miną gęstą, z ręką w bok wspartą – jak głosem donośnym, mową dosadną, szlachecką pewnością siebie – słowem swadą charakterystyczną jednoczy brać szlachtę w nastroju, z którego zaraz zgodny wybuchnie okrzyk „zgoda”, „nie ma zgody”, „nie pozwolimy”*) (Siemieński 1932: 160). These analyses were, according to the author, to prove that „the Polish gentry was then aware of the high level of their own political culture” (*szlachta polska ówczesna miała świadomość wysokiego poziomu swojej kultury politycznej*). He ignored at this point classical testimonies of the political culture, such as professional and political literature, as too voluminous. Instead, he pointed out topics which were broached but still needed to be researched further, such as for instance circles of people „getting together to have serious legal-political conversations (...)” (*zbierających się na poważne rozmowy prawnopolityczne...*).

Lastly, after he had finished the fourth part, Siemieński wrote a general characteristics of the Polish political culture. He believed that the Polish political law was an expression of this culture. He wondered to what extent it had contributed to a „decline of the state” (*upadku państwa*), which, in his view, had not been explained properly so far. The law was one of the causes of the decline. However, the political culture first and foremost contributed to successes of the Polish state and its power.

3

Such were the interpretations of the history of the political regime in the noble Republic of Poland as formulated by Siemieński, who understood its essence as „a collection of experiences which may be very useful both for the present and for the future” (*zbiór doświadczeń*,

które mogą być wielce pożyteczne dla współczesności i przyszłości) (Grabski 1969: 55–57; 1975: 510).

The last part of Siemieński's study was dedicated to a description of the period of decline which followed the „times of a splendid development” (*czasach świetnego rozwoju*) of the Polish „legal-political creativity” (*twórczości prawnopolitycznej*). Life and law went apart then, institutions, which had been created earlier, in other circumstances, started to exhibit symptoms of an internal corrosion. The basic elements of the creativity survived on „deep levels of the political consciousness of society, in the concepts of good and evil in collective life” (*na głębokich pokładach politycznego sumienia społeczeństwa, w pojęciach, co dobre, a co złe w życiu zbiorowym*). At the moment when its legal-political rebirth occurred, Poland started to build on the foundation of the sixteenth century. The old regime was purged of „weeds, overgrown by them especially after the «deluge» caused by the muddy Saxonian epoch, and modernized” (*chwastów, rozplenionych zwłaszcza po „potopie” w grząskiej epoce saskiej i zmodernizowano go*), without accepting „foreign principles” (*obcych zasad*), adapting „Polish institutions to new challenges” (*polskie instytucje do nowych zdań*). The author returned thus again to the role and significance of political culture to which Poles were indebted for their survival after a „century of un-freedom” (*stulecie niewoli*) and a century of attempts at their de-nationalization, and owing to which they victoriously endured being constantly ready to fight for their independence.

The next period, mentioned by the author, encompassed the time of the First World War. He was critical especially of the events which had taken place since 1918, when the independence of the Polish state was rebuilt. His criticism applied especially to the March constitution which had not been based on the Polish tradition and „was not based on the Polish reality either (...)” (*nie była też oparta na rzeczywistości polskiej...*). The last paragraph written by him contained an appeal addressed at the author's own generation, urging it to realize who they were „as a historical force, and what contributed to our national individualism. Not to adore it and preserve without any changes but to know what predispositions are to be dealt with, what needs to be curbed and on what we may rely as on our own supreme heritage” (*jako czynnik dziejowy, co składa się na nasz indywidualizm narodowy. Nie po to, aby go uwielbiać i zachowywać w niezmienności, ale aby wiedzieć, z jakimi predyspozycjami mamy do czynienia, co zwalczać, a na czym się oprzeć jako własnym, wzniosłym dziedzictwie*).

Siemieński ended his arguments with a postulate to continue research into the sixteenth century because it is „interesting and important, because from this perspective we see Poland in full bloom” (*ciekawe i ważne, bo oglądamy z tej perspektywy Polskę w rozkwicie*), whereas in a long term historical perspective we distinguish „shapes and contents, forms of principles and the principles themselves, lyrics and melody of the eternal national song which will be handed down from generation to generation expressed by words typical of each” (*kształt i treść, ujęcie zasady i zasadę samą, odwiecznej pieśni narodowej słowa i melodie, którą w słowach każde własnych pokolenia przekażą pokoleniom*) (Siemieński 1932: 166; Chodynicki 1939: 248–266).

Such were the main ideas contained in J. Siemieński’s study into the Polish political culture of the sixteenth century. His study was an important document since it initiated a discussion over a new category to describe political reality. Searching for traces of Polish studies into politics and political culture, one could not ignore the scholarship of this author (Pasierb 2007: 112–121). Siemieński’s study proved also that in science the „new” is always born during polemical exchanges and discussions. Debates triggered by the paper delivered by Siemieński during the II Session of Towarzystwo im. Jana Kochanowskiego, just as later polemical exchanges related to this paper, must however wait for another opportunity to be discussed (Siemieński 1931: 52–61). This statement equally applies to the notion of the political culture itself. The notion was willingly used by Siemieński both in his journalist interventions and in his academic papers. However, he did not define it precisely. He deployed the notion in its everyday meaning, grafting it directly from a definition of culture as heritage into the domain of political life (Siemieński 1931: 119–167).

The obstinacy with which Siemieński used the notion is intriguing. He was interested in issues related to the political regime and most notably to the evolution of the regime in the period of the Polish gentry republic in the sixteenth century, the period of its „golden age” (*złotego wieku*). He was fascinated by the gentry, by the political maturity of the social stratum, the understanding it showed for general issues and not only for particularistic interests. Owing to such factors, a slow but constant development of the political regime in the country occurred, leading in the direction of modern democracy. The adoption of a constitution on the 3rd of May in 1791 was to be its expression. The author showed a sensitivity to the evolution of indigenous sources of the political regime in Poland. He was less interested in factors which

circumscribed its mode of functioning, efficiency and instead much more drawn to inquiries into its genealogy (Siemieński 1932: 121–122).

The scholarly activity by Siemieński was, as it seems, primarily motivated by his desire to contest the views of the so called *szkoła krakowska*, which were still present in the social consciousness (Bobrzyński 1987: 454). Siemieński took as his starting point his conviction that the sixteenth century was characterized by a high level of genuine Polish political culture which creatively contributed to the process during which Polish political institutions were given shape.

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