

# Wiesław Caban

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"Sukcesy i porażki: ziemiaństwo polskie Ziem Zabrzanych w wyborach do Dumy Państwowej i Rady Państwa 1906-1913", Roman Jurkowski, Olsztyn 2009 : [recenzja]

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## DEBATES, REVIEWS AND OVERVIEWS

**Roman Jurkowski, *Sukcesy i porażki. Ziemiaństwo polskie Ziem Zabrzanych w wyborach do Dumy Państwowej i Rady Państwa 1906-1913 (Success and defeat. Polish gentry of the Taken Lands during elections to the Russian Duma and the State Council in 1906-1913)*, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Olsztyn 2009, 550 pages.**

The history of Polish communities, in particular the Polish gentry, in the Taken Lands has captured Roman Jurkowski's interest ever since he wrote his Master's thesis in 1980 at the University of Gdańsk under the supervision of Professor Roman Wapiński. The thesis, entitled *Polish gentry in Belarus and Poland's Eastern policy in 1919–1921*, received a special mention. Roman Jurkowski's doctoral thesis entitled "Polish gentry in the North-Eastern Territories in 1864–1904. Social and economic activity" (600 pages) was published in 2001 as part of the *Bibliotheca Europae Orientalis* series printed by *Przegląd Wschodni*.

Jurkowski's most recent book, *Success and failure. Polish gentry of the Taken Lands during elections to the Russian Duma and the State Council in 1906–1913* (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Olsztyn 2009, 550 pages), is excellently researched, and it received the *Przegląd Wschodni* Award. The author has examined a vast number of source documents in Russian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Polish libraries and archives. The results are impressive. His research is also based on 35 Polish and Russian press titles dating back to the studied period. The obtained results enabled Jurkowski to significantly expand his survey questionnaire. He was aided in his efforts by various official forms and memoirs of the Polish gentry, although there is a general scarcity of the latter, both in printed and manuscript form. This may come as a surprise because many members of the Polish gentry living in Lithuania, Belarus and the Ukraine kept diaries and historical records. Several years ago, when browsing through a section of the Russian State Historical Archives in Petersburg devoted to private banks operating in Russia from 1917, I was amazed to discover that the banking sector had employed many Poles, including in managerial positions. Many of them had left behind written accounts of their time which could open a new avenue of research for the author who, as I believe, will continue to investigate the history of the Polish gentry in the Taken Lands.

The structure of the book fully supports its main purpose. In Chapter I, Jurkowski discusses the election statute of the successive Dumas and State Councils. The first chapter spans a total of 60 pages, and some passages gave me the impression that this part of the book could have been abridged. Yet ultimately, I concluded that a detailed description of the cited resolutions and ordinances provides the necessary basis for the discussion that follows in subsequent chapters.

In the following four chapters that constitute the main body of his work, Jurkowski examines the course of elections in different curias to determine whether the Polish gentry made the most of the opportunity to bring its representatives into the state bodies in Petersburg. Poles were presented with quite a few opportunities for governance, but many of those chances were forfeited due to the gentry's inability to cooperate with other national groups, in particular the Lithuanians. Yet in view of the frequent amendments to the election statute as well as the popular conviction that few changes could be forced through via the parliamentary route in Russia, some members of the gentry lost all interest in political activity. The degree of their political engagement was further minimized by the Russians' and other national groups' progressing resentment of Poles. The fact that some Poles were related to the Russian gentry is an equally important consideration. Those members of the Polish gentry were less politically active since their main focus was on maintaining good family relations.

In the discussed four chapters, the author did not limit himself to portraying the attitudes of the Polish gentry only on Lithuanian and Belarusian territories, but he extended the scope of his investigations to cover also the Ukraine. This approach enabled Jurkowski to capture the specific local factors that determined the political engagement of the Polish gentry and to pinpoint the differences between Vilnius and the Vilna Governorate (Guberniya), and the Minsk, Volhynian, Podolia and Kiev Governorates (Guberniyas).

The author skillfully depicts the circumstances that prevented the Polish gentry from regaining their political status from before the January Uprising. The members of the Polish community could, to a certain extent, be blamed for this state of affairs, yet in general, the situation from before 1863 could never be restored. Those four chapters deliver a thorough analysis of the Polish gentry's status in the Taken Lands, and in my opinion, they are the book's greatest strength. The discussed four chapters are also of great cognitive value. Jurkowski was able to identify and elaborate on various aspects of social and political life engaging all nationalities and social groups in the Taken Lands.

Chapter VI, entitled "Towards the Elections", discusses the preparations for the election campaign, the course of the campaign and the vast number of legal irregularities and instances of abuse of authority observed in the process. In this overview, I would like to focus on the negative role played by the Orthodox clergy in the elections. The clergy exerted significant influence

not only on the Russians, but also on members of Belarusian and, obviously, Ukrainian communities. The cited facts fully substantiate the argument that the leaders of the January Uprising, regardless of whether they had formed alliances with the Reds or the Whites, had every reason to defy Mikhail Bakunin's postulates that after the abolition of Tsar's rule in 1863, the inhabitants of the Taken Lands should be allowed the freedom of choosing Poland or Russia as their home country. In their opinion, that choice could never have been made independently by the Ukrainians or the Belarusians whose fate was decided by the Orthodox clergy. If this situation were to materialize, we can assume that the realm of influence exercised by the Orthodox Church would be even greater than during the elections to the Duma and the State Council.

The book ends with Chapter VII which paints a collective portrait of parliamentary deputies. The presented information provides a solid basis for further analyses of Polish gentry's political activity in the Duma and the State Council. I strongly believe that Roman Jurkowski is the most competent candidate for portraying the activity of Polish deputies residing in the Taken Lands during the successive terms of the Russian Duma and the State Council. There is a pressing need for such an analysis since the existing body of work addressing the topic is largely outdated (I'm referring mostly to the works of Zygmunt Łukawski and Mirosław Wierchowski), while other publications tackle only minor aspects of the problem.

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***W kręgu sporów polsko-litewskich na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Wybór materiałów, t. 1-2, (The Polish-Lithuanian Conflict at the Turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. A Selection of Source Texts, vol. 1-2), selected and edited by Marian Zaczyński and Beata Kalęba, Jagiellonian University Press, vol. 1 – Kraków 2004, p. 214; vol. 2 – Kraków 2009, p. 244.***

The first volume of the book entitled *W kręgu sporów polsko-litewskich na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* was published in 2004 by Jagiellonian University Press. The following part of the anthology was published in 2009. It is a compilation of selected sources that make a reference to complex Polish-Lithuanian relations. Chronologically, both volumes cover the years from 1883 to 1919. The oldest text is the article "Objaw litewski" (The Lithuanian Symptom) which was printed in 1883 in *Dziennik Poznański*, Vaclovas Biržiška's piece, "Golgota litewska" (The Lithuanian Golgotha), initially printed in *Głos Litwy* in 1919, is a more contemporary feature. The discussed anthology is the first source study devoted to Polish-Lithuanian relations