From the Editors

The history of parliamentarism in the Kingdom of Poland, and then in the Polish--Lithuanian Commonwealth, has a rich literature and has been the subject of interest of both legal and 'non-legal' historians almost since the beginning of the nineteenth century until today. It is worth noting that an excellent bibliography of parliamentarism of the Polish-Lithuanian state records 2144 various studies and nearly 200 source publications.[1] Moreover, for the last nine years, over a dozen or so to tens of volumes of texts, ranging from contributions to monographs, have been published annually to broaden the knowledge about the parliamentarism of the past.[2]

However, most of these publications have been published only in Polish, which obviously limits the possibility of their reception to Central Europe's cultural circle. Among the 2144 studies mentioned above, only 95 are in English, accounting for less than 4.5 per cent of the total. It should be borne in mind that in the case of collective publications, each article, according to bibliographic rules, is taken into account separately.[3]

Awareness of this situation prompted the Editorial Committee of *The Sejm Review* (*Przegląd Sejmowy*) to publish an issue of the journal devoted to the problems of early parliamentarism in English. The texts published in the last century in this language were either the works of amateur historians, albeit enthusiasts of the subject,[4] or analytical articles on specific topics, usually presented in a short time perspective. It should be added that the latter focused mainly on the problems of the Constitution of 3 May.[5]

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[1] R. Kołodziej, M. Zwierzykowski, *Bibliografia parlamentaryzmu Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej* (Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań, 2012).

[2] The Sejm Publishing House, which has been operating for 30 years, has made a significant contribution here with a number of monographs on the history of the Sejm and sejmiks in the Polis-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Recently it has published comprehensive studies by Maciej Pieńkowski, 'Trudna droga do władzy w Rzeczypospolitej. Sejm koronacyjny Zygmunta III 1587/1588' and 'Sejm pacyfikacyjny 1589 roku'.

[3] See, for example, S. Fiszman (ed.), *Constitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Poland. The Constitution of 3 May 1791* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington–Indianapolis, 1997).

[4] J. Jędruch, *Constitutions, Elections, and Legislatures of Poland 1493–1993. A Guide to Their History* (EJJ Books, New York, 1993).

[5] See, for instance, J. Bardach, 'The Constitution of May Third and the Mutual Assurance of the Two Nations', *Polish Review*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1991), 407–20; J. Duzinkiewicz, *Fateful Transformations: The Four Years' Parliament and the Constitution of May 3, 1791* (East European Monographs, New York, 1993); M. Rozbicki (ed.), *European and American Constitutionalism in the Eighteenth Century* (American Studies Centre, Warsaw, 1990); J.T. Lukowski, 'Recasting Utopia: Montesquieu, Rousseau and the Polish Constitution of 3 May 1791', *Historical Journal*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1994), 65–87; D. Stone, 'The first (and only) Year of the May 3 Constitution', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 35, no. 1–2 (1993), 69–86.

In the last decade, the number of publications in English has increased, which applies both to Polish authors and those working in foreign centres, with particular emphasis on Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus.[6] The subject of the former Commonwealth is also more broadly reflected in the works of Anglo-Saxon historians.[7] However, the number of publications in the so-called congress languages on the history of Polish parliamentarism still does not correspond to the originality and significance of the old Sejm in the history of Poland and Europe.

The very name *Sejm* (*sjem*, *soim*) occurred in several Slavic languages and denoted a large assembly. In the Old Belorussian language, in which official and court records of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were written down, the term *syjmatsia* meant a gathering in a specific place and for a particular purpose, for example, to hold a people's court.

The history of Polish parliamentarism is one of the oldest in Europe.[8] Its birth dates back to the late Middle Ages, the second half of the fifteenth century. Initially, according to the terminology introduced by the Belgian legal historian John Gilissen, it was an "imperfect representation" (*representation imparfaite*[9]) called by the king, who summoned land officials who acted as representatives of the *communitates nobilium* of their lands.[10] The evolution led to the development of the principle that the knights – the nobility – elected their representatives – deputies who sat in the Sejm composed of two chambers meeting at the monarch's summons. In this way, the model of Polish parliamentarism emerging in the fifteenth century differed from the state assemblies based on separately debating representatives of individual estates, which was predominant in Europe. Earlier, a bicameral parliament had formed in England, and a little later also in Hungary. Until recently, the Piotrków Sejm of 1493 was regarded as the first parliament based on the principle of representation and sitting in two separate chambers. However, Wacław Uruszczak proved that the first Sejm fulfilling the above conditions was the Piotrków Sejm of 1468.[11]

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[6] See, for example, J. Kiaupiene, *Between Rome and Byzantium. The Golden Age of the Great Duchy of Lithuania's Political Culture. Second Half of the Fifteenth Century to First Half of the Seventeenth Century*, transl. J. Will, Series: Lithuanian Studies without Borders (Academic Studies Press, Boston, 2019).

[7] For example, B. Wagner-Rundell, *Common Wealth, Common Good. The Politics of Virtue in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015); C.G. Murphy, *From Citizens to Subjects: City, State, and the Enlightenment in Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus* (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2018); F. Roşu, *Elective Monarchy in Transylvania and Poland-Lithuania, 1569–1587* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017); R. Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, vol. 1: *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015); R. Butterwick, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1733–1795: Light and Flame* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2020).

[8] The Icelandic Althing, which met in 930, is often cited as the first parliament in European history, followed by the Parliament summoned in 1265 in England and the French Estates General (1302); the Hungarian king convened a parliament at the end of the thirteenth century, and the Cortes developed in Spain in the early fourteenth century.

[9] J. Gilissen, *Le regime représentatif avant 1790 en Belgique* (La Reneissance du livre, Bruxelles, 1952).

[10] J. Bardach, W. Sudnik (eds), *Parlamentaryzm w Polsce we współczesnej historiografii* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 1995), p. 43.

[11] W. Uruszczak, 'Najstarszy sejm walny koronny „dwuizbowy" w Piotrkowie w 1468 roku', in W. Bukowski, T. Jurek (eds), *Narodziny Rzeczypospolitej. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza i czasów wczesnonowożytnych*, vol. 2 (Towarzystwo Naukowe „Societas Vistulana", Kraków, 2012), pp. 1033–56.

In the debate on the origins of the Sejm, which continues to this day, two basic paradigms can be distinguished: the institutional and the evolutionary.[12] Institutionalists relate the emergence of sejmiks and Sejm with the monarch's activity. According to this perspective, to obtain the nobility's consent to impose financial burdens exceeding the minimum taxes levied on the nobility and magnates, the king convened assemblies, which with time transformed into bodies with a specific composition and powers. On the other hand, evolutionists in turn take as their starting point the analysis of the changes within the noble society, which eventually led to the formation of political representation. In this assumption, the development of land sejmiks was related to the process of political emancipation of the nobility as a whole, while the development of the Sejm became the result of political games between the middle nobility, magnate officials, and the monarch. However, the principle *quod omnes tangit ab omnibus aprobari debet* (literally: what touches all must be approved by all) was widely observed.

In fact, the institutional and evolutionary perspectives in Polish historiography are complementary and difficult to separate[13] (this is confirmed by similar studies on the development of national parliaments conducted in the countries forming the European Union[14]). Most studies on the parliamentarism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and not only on its beginnings, must consider the methodology of both schools. This is evident in various types of bibliography covering legal-historical topics – one can get the impression that formerly the institutional model was preferred by historians focusing on the analysis of political and constitutional history, while historians of law opted for the evolutionary one. This situation is slowly changing. Today, writing about the Sejm's history has become diachronic and synchronic at the same time, and is moving more and more boldly towards interdisciplinary approaches.

It should be stressed that research into the parliamentarism of the Kingdom of Poland and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is one of the primary tasks of Polish historiography. It was carried out by many eminent historians of law, starting with Joachim Lelewel, Antoni Pawiński, Walerian Kalinka, then Józef Szujski and Michał Bobrzyński, Oswald Balzer, to Władysław Konopczyński and Stanisław Kutrzeba. In the second half of the twentieth century, their legacy was further developed by such prominent scholars

[12] This division, whose authorship is attributed to, among others, Juliusz Bardach, was referred to by Stanisław Grodziski in – symbolically – the article opening the first issue of *Przegląd Sejmowy*: S. Grodziski, 'Pięćset lat sejmu polskiego. Rzut oka na stan badań', *Przegląd Sejmowy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1993), 13–27.

[13] See S. Gawlas, 'Początki polskiego sejmu: problemy i dyskusje', in A. Barciak (ed.), *Systemy reprezentacji i parlamentaryzm w Europie Środkowej w rozwoju historycznym* (Studio Noa Ireneusz Olsza, Katowice, 2016).

[14] As sample publications – in this and following footnotes – books are selected that have been published in recent years. Among comparative studies on the development of national parliaments, see P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie, K. Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism. A Comparative History of a European Concept* (Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2016); A. Barciak (ed.), *Systemy reprezentacji i parlamentaryzm w Europie Środkowej w rozwoju historycznym* (Studio Noa Ireneusz Olsza, Katowice, 2016); F. Roşu, *Elective Monarchy in Transylvania and Poland-Lithuania, 1569–1587* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017); D. Kupisz, W. Uruszczak (eds), *Sejm Królestwa Polskiego i Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów a europejskie reprezentacje stanowe* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2019).

as Władysław Czapliński, Bogusław Leśnodorski, Stanisław Grodziski, Stanisław Płaza, Henryk Olszewski, Jerzy Michalski, and Juliusz Bardach. Their students are still academically active today and popularise the achievements of Polish legal historiography all over the world. The main research centres conducting vivid historiosophical disputes aiming at, for example, explaining the causes of the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian State, evaluating the ideas of Sarmatian republicanism and the concept of 'golden liberty' (*aurea libertas*), include the university circles and research institutes in Cracow, Warsaw, Poznań, and Lublin.

According to the estimates of contemporary historians, in the nineteenth century, one academic text related to pre-partition parliamentarism was published on average every year. In the interwar period, this number increased several times. Between 1944 and 1999, an average of twenty publications on the history of the Sejm in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were published annually, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century – this number is over fifty a year.[15] Observing the above trends and considering the current system of evaluating academic researchers based on parameterisation, it can be assumed that at the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, the number of scientific publications on the history of modern parliamentarism may approach a hundred per year. However, this increase does not have to be correlated with quality, as most publications are monographic articles in historical and less often in legal scientific journals.

Studies on pre-partition parliamentarism have been and still are carried out mainly by Polish historians. However, it is worth noting that in recent years more and more works on this subject have been published in Lithuanian,[16] Belarusian,[17] and, as mentioned above, English,[18] which confirms the vitality of the tradition and the international importance of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Comparative studies are developing, pointing to the uniqueness of the Polish legal and political-system solutions compared to other countries – now the members of the European Union. On the Polish publishing market there are monographs of specific Sejm sessions,[19] less frequently of

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[15] Kołodziej, Zwierzykowski, *Bibliografia parlamentaryzmu*, p. 10.

[16] For example, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės seimelių instrukcijos (1788–1790)*, prep. by R. Jurgaitis, A. Stankevič, A. Verbickienė (Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Parlamentarizmo istorijos tyrimų centras, Vilnius, 2015); R. Jurgaitis, *Nuo bajoriškosios savivaldos iki parlamentarizmo: Vilniaus seimelio veikla 1717–1795 m.* (Lietuvos edukologijos universitetas, Parlamentarizmo istorijos tyrimų centras, Vilnius, 2016).

[17] U. Padalìnskì, *Pradstaŭnìctva Vâlikaga Knâstva Lìtoŭskaga na Lûblìnskìm sojme 1569 goda: udzel u pracy peršaga val'naga sojma Rèčy Paspalìtaj* (Vydavec A.M. Ânuškevìč, Mìnsk, 2017).

[18] See fn. 7.

[19] For instance, J. Byliński, *Sejm z 1611 roku: w nowym opracowaniu* (Wydział Prawa, Administracji i Ekonomii Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław, 2016); E. Gąsior, *Sejm konwokacyjny po śmierci Jana III* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2017); M. Zwierzykowski (ed.), *Sejm Niemy. Między mitem a reformą państwa* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2019); M.A. Pieńkowski, *Trudna droga do władzy Rzeczypospolitej. Sejm koronacyjny Zygmunta III 1587/1588 i sejm pacyfikacyjny 1589 roku* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2021).

sejmiks,[20] biographies of distinguished Sejm deputies,[21] and source publications.[22] Most publications deal with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (especially the times of King Stanisław Augustus, the Great Sejm and the Constitution of 3 May), the least of them – with the fourteenth century.[23] It is worth adding that the research interests of legal historians focus on the lower house of the Sejm – the Chamber of Deputies, and to a lesser extent on the Senate.[24] Increasingly felt is the lack of in-depth syntheses, [25] covering several epochs and showing the evolution of the Sejm throughout history from a legal, political, historical, and cultural perspective.[26]

The intensification of publications occurs with anniversaries, confirmed by the high number of books and albums published on the 550th anniversary of the 1468 Piotrków Sejm,[27] the 450th anniversary of the Union of Lublin,[28] and the 230th anniversary of the Constitution of 3 May.[29]

The current issue of *The Sejm Review* contains ten articles devoted to the history of parliamentarism in the Old Polish Commonwealth (the First Republic). It is intended *a priori* to be a voice in the discussion – to outline specific topics, reveal problems, and indicate possible directions for further research. The authors of the studies represent not only various scientific and academic centres from all over the country, but also different

[20] Among others, A. Król, *Sejmik ziem lwowskiej, przemyskiej i sanockiej w Sądowej Wiszni za panowania Wazów (1578–1668)* (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu, Przemyśl, 2018).

[21] For example, W. Szafrański, *Józef Weyssenhoff: polityk, prawnik, legislator czasów Oświecenia* (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań, 2017).

[22] For example, *Diariusze sejmu koronacyjnego Zygmunta III Wazy 1587/1588 roku*, ed. I. Kaniewska (Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Historia Iagellonica, Kraków, 2016); *Diariusz Sejmu Koronacyjnego Jana III Sobieskiego w 1676 roku*, ed. J. Stolicki (Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Historia Iagellonica, Kraków, 2019); *Akta sejmikowe województwa bełskiego: lata 1572–1655*, ed. M. Zwierzykowski, R. Kołodziej (Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków, 2020).

[23] *Akta sejmikowe*, p. 10. *Bibliografia* was published over ten years ago – the last decade seems to have consolidated the tendencies observed by the authors in the selection of subjects from the history of parliamentarism of the Old Polish Commonwealth.

[24] For instance, A. Korytko, *„Na których opiera się Rzeczpospolita". Senatorowie koronni za Władysława IV Wazy* (Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski, Olsztyn, 2015).

[25] *Cf.* J. Michalski (ed.), *Historia sejmu polskiego*, vol. 1: *Do schyłku szlacheckiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa, 1984); J. Bardach (ed.), *Dzieje Sejmu Polskiego* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 1993; reprinted in 1997 and 2011).

[26] On the dominant trends in twenty-first-century studies of the parliamentary history of the modern era and the potential research challenges in this area, see, among others, R. Kołodziej, 'Z najnowszych badań nad parlamentaryzmem szlacheckim Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVII wieku', *Historia Slavorum Occidentis*, no. 2(5) (2013), 43–57.

[27] For example, M. Kornat, W. Uruszczak, *550 lat parlamentaryzmu Rzeczypospolitej* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2018); D. Kupisz, *Od Piotrkowa do Warszawy. 550-lecie polskiego sejmu dwuizbowego* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2018).

[28] For instance, H. Litwin, *Zjednoczenie narodów cnych: polskiego, litewskiego, ruskiego: Wołyń i Kijowszczyzna w unii lubelskie*j (PIW, Warszawa, 2019); D. Kupisz (ed.), *Unia lubelska 1569: dzieło wspólnoty wielu narodów* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2019).

[29] R. Butterwick, *Konstytucja 3 Maja: testament Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów*, transl. T. Gromelski (Muzeum Historii Polski, Warszawa, 2021); M. Pietrzak, *Konstytucja 3 maja 1791* (Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa, 2021).

methodological perspectives and writing styles. Some articles are characterised by a clear synthesising tendency, while others tend to be more monographing. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, as they make it possible to grasp both the totality of political-system matters that took place at Sejms and illustrate narrower issues, specific aspects of parliamentary life. The texts are also undoubtedly linked by the use of similar types of historical sources and references to the canon of Polish and foreign-language studies.

In the article opening the current issue, Agnieszka Januszek-Sieradzka discusses the functioning of the Crown Sejm in the Jagiellonian era (1386–1572). The author points out that some historians are inclined to consider Slavic tribal meetings as a form of proto-parliamentarism. She draws attention to the apparent increase in the frequency of state-wide assemblies (General Sejm) during the first Jagiellons compared to the earlier period. She sees two symbolic turning points in the history of parliamentarism: 1468, when the deputies elected at land sejmiks took part in debates for the first time, and the chambers debated separately; and 1505, the date of the adoption of the *Nihil Novi* Constitution, in her opinion the final stage in the formalisation of the nobility's parliamentarism. In many respects, these solutions were ahead of the reforms in Western Europe. Januszek-Sieradzka points out that the political-system transformations went hand in hand with changes in the sphere of ideas and political language, the development of republican thought and the shaping of civic ethos.

Andrzej Rachuba presents changes in the parliamentarism of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. This synthetic article opens with a thorough survey of the current state of research. The author refers to several works scarcely available in Poland, including those by scholars from the former USSR countries. The historian compares various models explaining the genesis of Lithuanian parliamentarism. He attaches special attention to the socio-political transformations during the reign of Zygmunt Augustus, which culminated in the conclusion of the Polish-Lithuanian Union in Lublin in 1569. As a result, a unique legal and political organism in Europe was created. The author discusses three Lithuanian Statutes (1529, 1566, and 1588) in the context of the evolution of parliamentary culture in Lithuania, the processes of occidentalisation and acculturation of Lithuanian law.

Edward Opaliński presents the functioning of the Sejm in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the rule of the first six elected kings (1572–1668), i.e. at the time when absolutism dominated in the west of the Continent. He discusses the political changes, the evolution of parliamentary procedures, the debates of the Sejm, and the composition of both chambers in chronological order. Much space is devoted to periods of *interregnum*. The final turning point of the discussed period is 1688, when the Sejm was broken up before the election of the marshal of the Chamber of Deputies, and the parliamentary system turned out to be dysfunctional.

Andrzej Korytko's monographic article analyses selected issues concerning the Senate during the reign of the Vasa kings (1578–1668), when the upper chamber was slowly losing its importance in the Polish Parliament. Based on in-depth source

research, the text begins with the description of the mechanism of granting a senatorial office and the role of appointment policy in shaping the royal party. Next, the author presents the composition, hierarchy, number of senators and the order of sitting in the Senate, the course of the pre-Sejm campaign, as well as proceedings in the upper chamber, with particular emphasis on the role of the so-called senatorial *wota* (opinions and commentaries of senators on the state of the country and necessary decisions). Korytko tries to find answers to the following questions: To what extent did senators play the role of a political authority at the end of the Vasa dynasty, and whether the battles between the magnate factions contributed to a radical change in the image of this Sejm estate?

The next monographic article, by Robert Kołodziej, discusses the legislative process at the Sejm during the reign of Jan III Sobieski, when every second Sejm was broken up. The author characterises the successive stages of the legislation procedure: the legislative initiative, drafting of bills, adoption of constitutions (i.e. laws), their final edition and promulgation. He describes the role of sejmiks called relational or debriefing in the legislative process. Kołodziej draws attention to the active participation of senators in lawmaking, to the closely related transfer of the significance of sessions from the Chamber of Deputies to the Senate and the growing importance of the anti-royal opposition, combining the perspectives of a historian, political scientist and lawyer. As should be emphasised, the study is based on extensive research into handwritten and printed sources.

Dariusz Kupisz analyses the powers and tasks of the marshals of the Chamber of Deputies – the figures who guarded the rights and dignity of the Sejm in the first, second and third Polish Republic (Commonwealth). The text is synthetic in nature, and it shows the process of institutionalisation and formalisation of some parliamentary customs in the Sejm from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The author places the changes in the Sejm marshal's prerogatives in the context of political changes, including the development of the Executionist Movement. He discusses in detail the way of election and the powers of the marshal while stressing the importance of subjective factors: authority, personal qualities, and social position. Kupisz emphasises the small number of studies on the role of the Sejm marshal; he points to the scarcity of sources, including iconographic ones, which may also serve as an incentive for in-depth studies in this area.

Andrzej Stroynowski discusses the role of senators at the Sejms of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The author seeks to create a possibly coherent collective portrait of this group, perceived in Old Polish culture as the nation's political elite, especially in the sixteenth century. He attaches great importance to the presentation of changes in the composition of the Chamber, taking the year 1569 as the internal turning point of this process. Stroynowski does not avoid quoting statistical data, which he treats with common sense distance, given the nature of historical sources. He also describes the course of the struggle between the magnate factions under the Saxon kings and Stanisław Augustus Poniatowski.

Witold Filipczak presents the legislative activity of 'free' (non-confederated) Sejms in the times of the Permanent Council (1778–86) and the significant influence Russia had on the lawmaking process in the Commonwealth. The author focuses on analysing the king's legislative initiative, with particular emphasis on proposals from the throne and the importance of the Permanent Council in drafting laws. Filipczak uses both manuscripts and printed sources. The article is enriched by tables prepared on the basis of source materials, which illustrate the mechanism of appointing members of the constitution deputation, the time of presenting proposals from the throne, and the legislative output of the Sejm.

The next article, by Adam Perłakowski, analyses the functioning of the Sejm during the personal union between Poland and Saxony (1697–1763). The author characterises the source corpus, signalling the need for more profound archival research in Germany, Austria, and the former USSR countries. While discussing the Sejm sessions of the Saxon era, he devotes most space to the so-called Silent Sejm – a pacification session ending the civil war of the nobility against King August II the Strong. Perłakowski, while discussing the crisis affecting the Sejm under the Wettin kings, emphasises the role of this institution in the process of social communication and the significance of the Sejm as a *sui generis* political school. The author refutes many stereotypes accumulated around parliamentarism in the Saxon times – he opposes the perception of the Sejm as the seat of demoralisation, corruption, and the paralysis of power, i.e. an image dominant in Polish and European historiography.

The last study, by Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, deals with the Four-Year Sejm (1788–92). The author divides the Sejm debates into stages that she describes as 'destruction – discussion – creation'; based on these terms, she presents the course of the sessions in Warsaw. Placing the political transformations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in an international context, Grześkowiak-Krwawicz interprets the achievements of the Great Sejm as an example of the revolution of the Enlightenment. From this perspective, the Constitution of 3 May, the first fundamental law adopted in Europe, becomes not only a symbol of the struggle with the partitioners in the eighteenth century but also a founding myth for future participants in the struggle for Polish sovereignty.

The articles included in this volume of *The Sejm Review* create a colourful mosaic of the history of parliamentarism in the old Commonwealth. Their authors – historians specialising in the political system, law, institutions and political doctrines – inspire readers to look at the Sejm from an interdisciplinary, comparative point of view, with particular attention to the uniqueness of this centuries-old institution and the significance of the legacy of Polish parliamentarism in contemporary Europe.

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