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INVESTMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN 16TH CENTURY POLAND

Polish historiography has been interested for many years in the history of education considered, however as the history of schools as institutions. Simultaneously the problem of the pedagogical ideas and the model of upbringing of children was the goal of numerous studies. Quite recently some historians have observed the level of literacy in Poland of the 16th century. Nevertheless nobody has tried to approach this problem from the social and economic point of view; the study of the functioning of schools, namely of the investment and rentability of child education. This investment and rentability are not the problems of our economic calculation in the meaning of our quantified notion, but obviously that of the reasoning of the people living in the 16th century Poland.

The investigation of the new phenomena requires an outline of the difference between the 16th c. and the mediaeval school systems, as well as an explanation as to what we mean as the mediaeval school and its function.

Notwithstanding always very diversified reality, we wish to emphasize two important features. Namely, education as the social trait of the clergy and, consequently, the school's professional and ecclesiastical purposes. Finally the material sponsorship concerning rather the institutions, for instance, the university or its chairs, not the young people directly.

The educational revolution, the notion launched by L. Stone in the context of the history of Europe of the 16th c. finds its relevant phenomena in Poland.

According to the traditional study of Polish cultural history, great changes occurred in the Polish school system. The reforms slowly but not completely achieved, took place in the old university of Cracow. In the same century, on the basis of the Polish king's privilege, the Protestant university in Königsberg (1544) was established, followed by the Jesuit university in Wilno (Vilna) (1578). Finally J. Zamoyski founded a private university in Zamość (1596). In all those universities the humanities predominated over the traditional scholastic program.

The second novelty was the appearance of humanistic schools called "gymnasia" or "colleges". First the different Protestant groups created their own schools, on the pattern of Strasbourg, such as the schools in Pińczów, Lubartów,

Leszno, and many others, founded and usually sponsored by the gentry. Simultaneously, the urban Lutheranian gymnasia in Gdańsk, Toruń and Elbląg were created by the town authorities. The schools sponsored by the nobility were short-lived, while the urban ones existed for two or three centuries. From 1564 on the Jesuit gymnasia, called collegia, were founded and predominated in the educational system of the 17th c., especially those devoted to the education of young nobles.

The third new phenomenon was the tendency to continue the education of the young men abroad, especially at Italian and German universities. Iter Italicus embraced the gentry and the townsmen from the South of Poland, while the urban population from North Poland was more attracted by the German universities. This movement soon became important, for instance in Padua at the end of the century where nearly one hundred young Poles were studying. In the existing registers of foreign universities during the 16th c. there are five thousand Polish students, noble and urban alike. The phenomena presented above are known and mentioned in publications, while we are interested in motivations and purposes of this kind of human activity and expenses. In pedagogical literature of the time one can find two types of argumentation. In general, according to the majority of writers, education was considered as edifying and of special moral value. Some of them, however, accent the practical issues of learning and especially of university education. For instance, A. Frycz-Modrzewski and Szymon Marcyjusz from Pilzno (Pilzen) claimed appropriate education as a condition for getting high secondary offices¹ the demand for which was sometimes fulfilled by the urban and ecclesiastical authorities.

There are very few studies dealing with the educational standard of the particular professional groups. In the case of an important – from the political and cultural point of view – group of royal secretaries, who served King Sigismund I (1506-1548), ninety six percent of them distinguished themselves in university studies, mainly in Italy, and 25 percent of them were rewarded doctoral degrees. This composition was the result of conscious royal selection of his collabarators, but also of acknowledgement of the social value of education and of cultured people.²

Proof of the social value of education can be found in the great register of illegal nobilitations; a list compiled at the beginning of the 17th century. According to the author Walerian Nekanda Trepka, the mark of nobility was not only gentle origin, but simultaneously the ability to read and write.³ Similar condition was included in the law voted by the Diet in 1563, which required a written tax deposition by the landlords. The Diet, however, recognized the possibility of the existence of some illiterate noble landowners.⁴ Direct acknowledgment of the

¹ A. Frycz-Modrzewski, *O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1953, p. 606. Szymon Marcyjusz z Pilzna, *O szkołach czyli akademiach ksiąg dwoje*, Wrocław 1955, p. 60.

² A. Wyczański, *Między kulturą a polityką. Sekretarze królewscy Zygmunta Starego (1506-1548)*, Warszawa 1990, p. 37-43.

³ Walerian Nekanda Trepka, *Liber generationis plebeanorum*, cz. I, Wrocław 1963, p. 53, 63, 69 etc.

⁴ W. Palucki, *Uniwersały poborowe z 1563 r.*, *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, XIV, p. 519-522.

prestige of people with high intellectual ability as well as emphasis on the social value of knowledge was the privilege of King Sigismund, which was issued in 1535. The king honoured all the professors of the university of Cracow, who had worked 20 years in this school, giving them hereditary nobility rights.⁵ In the act voted in 1590, the Diet assigned a separate tax from those people with the degree of doctor, which proves the distinction and special charge alike.⁶

The value of education was related to the change in the kind of school program and the attractiveness of the new knowledge, i.e. humanism, in the meaning of acceptance of the antique legacy – literature, philosophy, science, law and language. The old scholastic program was rejected as useless and futile, while antiquity was treated as the source of all the knowledge, including professional. Consequently, literary and rhetoric skill opened the way to public offices, although in our opinion they needed more practical, professional training. Evidently the new requirement in the area of education, its large scope and longer learning raised the cost of education. Unfortunately, the different elements of those costs did not become the object of systematic studies. Hence our current goal is not to evaluate the total cost of the new educational system, but to observe the change in some forms and purposes of educational expenditure.

New schools – universities, gymnasia, perhaps some parochial schools as well – obviously called for expenditure, however, in this respect we observed rather the growth of costs than the change in their character. In 1493 in Cracow the construction of the new building for the university, Collegium Maius, was initiated.⁷ In the following years several ecclesiastical beneficia helped the university in its poor material situation. The diet claimed the better financing of the university (1538/39), however, considering this school as the ecclesiastical institution it required the fulfilling of this obligation by the church.⁸ Consequently, A. Frycz-Modrzewski's proposal, influenced by protestant thinking, was to use the monastery estates for educational purposes.⁹

All the universities and gymnasia listed previously required great expenditure in the form of investment, in materials (buildings, books, equipment) and in the running costs, the latter being often similarly great to the above-mentioned investments. The founders secured new schools giving them estates or money, the latter in the form of the purchase of the rent, i.e. the location of the capital, which guaranteed stable rent. In the case of ecclesiastical sponsorship the church revenues could be used, such as the chantries, the tithes, the parish income etc. In reality this kind of funding was often insufficient and the new school could not survive after the death of its founder, and was closed down or restricted its activity. A better situation was that of the gymnasia in the rich towns of northern Poland, where the urban authorities guaranteed the money necessary for the school needs.

⁵ Codex Diplomaticus Universitatis Cracoviensis, t. IV, nr 364.

⁶ J. Senkowski, *Uniwersał poboru pogłównego z 1590 r.*, Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej, XVIII, 1970, p. 61-84.

⁷ *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w latach 1363-1764*, I. Kraków 1964, p. 197.

⁸ H. Barycz, *Z epoki renesansu, reformacji i baroku*, Warszawa 1971, p. 104.

⁹ A. Frycz-Modrzewski, op. cit., p. 597.

The first investment, which changed the traditional type of expenditure, was the founding of the boarding-houses for the university students in Cracow. In 1420 the oldest boarding-house for the poor scholars, named Bursa Pauperum was created, and in 1455 another one, Bursa Jerusalem, finally, in 1460 the university hospital was established.¹⁰ This tendency was continued in the 16th century, when in 1507 a boarding-house for lawyers opened and in 1558 a boarding-house for philosophers.¹¹ This kind of investment had a double aim – it expanded the growth of the university property and thus guaranteed indirect help for the students, who could find there cheap boarding and moral tutorship. A very new kind of investment was the creation of scholarships for students of the Cracow university. In 1530 scholarships for students from the town of Szamotuły were established, and in 1531 scholarships for four monks, who wished to study in Cracow.¹² The next founding of scholarships was in 1533 and 1548.¹³ The most important one was, however, that of Stanisław Borek, who set up a fund in 1549 and continued till his death in 1557. He bequeathed 7.200 zloty for scholarships and for alimentary help for students living in boarding-houses.¹⁴ His founding grew subsequently and in the beginning of the 17th century reached the amount of 10.800 zloty with the annual rent of 516 zloty.¹⁵

In 1558 the bishop of Płock, Andrzej Noskowski offered 12.000 zloty for 40 students, living in the boarding-houses. The scholarships were paid for three years in the case of a B.A. degree and for the following two years for an M.A. with special privileges for students from the Płock diocese and for relatives of the founder.¹⁶ In 1587 Marcin Łyczko, a parson from Tarnów, founded three scholarships for young men from this town.¹⁷ Marcin Nerwiczus, a professor of the Cracow university founded in 1582 scholarships for students from his native locality.¹⁸ In 1585 the bishop of Warmia, Marcin Kromer created scholarships for students from Biecz¹⁹ and the following year Wawrzyniec Pontificius founded six scholarships for students from the Płock voivodeship and from Cracow.²⁰ In 1591 we find scholarships founded for students of Kurzelów²¹ and in 1599 for four students from Pyzdry and Błażejów.²² and finally scholarships for Warsaw students were founded.²³ Of peculiar character was the founding of scholarship for the

¹⁰ *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, p. 55-56, 129.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

¹² J. Michalewicz, M. Michalewiczowa, *Liber beneficiorum et benefactorum Universitatis Jagellonicae in saeculis XV-XVIII*, t. I, *Fundationes pecuniariae Universitatis Jagellonicae pars I*, Kraków 1578, nr 162 (value 600 zl).

¹³ *Ibidem* nr 171 (value 300 zl), nr 197 (value 1500 zl).

¹⁴ *Ibidem* nr 234 (value 7200 zl).

¹⁵ *Ibidem* nr 234 Comments.

¹⁶ *Ibidem* nr 240-241 (value 12000 zl).

¹⁷ *Ibidem* nr 297 (value 1600 zl).

¹⁸ *Ibidem* nr 313 (value 100 zl).

¹⁹ *Ibidem* nr 319 (value 2083).

²⁰ *Ibidem* nr 320 (value 2700).

²¹ *Ibidem* nr 337 (value 1000 zl).

²² *Ibidem* nr 365 (value 1000 zl).

²³ *Ibidem* nr 427 (value 200 zl).

student who wished to be an astronomer.²⁴ Finally, Stanisław Krasieński founded 12 scholarships in 1589 especially for the petty gentry from Masovia.²⁵

In general, this kind of founding means the investment of the capital, the interest from which guaranteed a stable, annual rent. Prevalent among the founders were the townsmen, often the rich members of the clergy or professors of the university, who sponsored the study of the young men from their native towns. Evidently there were also those, who gave their beneficia to the university, the money of which to help, for instance, the boarding houses. Once we met a donation given to the university library for the purchase of the books,²⁶ however this kind of founding does not concern our current research.

The foundations of scholarships listed being new phenomena, could be considered as a peculiar undertaking related only to some urban and university circles. This is not true because reality was certainly much more varied. First we find many private scholarships, which could be taken as typical Renaissance patronage, but it was something greater. This patronage included obviously the creation of scholarships for relatives studying abroad. For instance, bishop Piotr Tomicki paid for his nephew Andrzej Krzycki's Italian studies and the latter having become rich founded a similar scholarship for his nephew Andrzej Zebrzydowski.²⁷ The family money spent for the studies of Stanisław Tarło reached the enormous sum of 10.000 zloty.²⁸ These kind of examples could be multiplied easily, adding the scholarships given to the poor and talented young people by their rich patrons, although the curricula seem to be related to the family ambition or the hope of the future career and gratitude.

In fact these cases of individual sponsors, who founded scholarships, can be understood as the normal form of the Renaissance patronage of arts and sciences. Despite this doubt, the tendency to create the stable system of scholarships, we could point out more clearly in a different field, where the institutional sponsorship was active. First, the use of the scholarships could be considered as a way of introducing a higher level of educational standard among the canons. In this situation the chantry founded the scholarships for its members, especially when they were of plebeian origin and should receive a doctoral degree, according to the existing regulations.²⁹

The system of scholarships working in great towns, especially those in Royal Prussia, i.e. North Poland was more important. For instance, Gdańsk authorities sent numerous young people to German universities giving them relevant scholarships for several years of studies. However, it was not a useless expenditure of the municipal taxes. Students returning after their university studies were obliged to work in urban institutions such as schools, town hall offices etc. Thus this

²⁴ Ibidem nr 369 (value 600 zl).

²⁵ Ibidem nr 363 (value 7000 zl).

²⁶ Ibidem nr 245 (value 1000 zl).

²⁷ J. Olkiewicz, *Polscy Medyceusze*, Warszawa 1985, p. 157.

²⁸ J. Fijalek, *Tarłowie, znakomitego rodu początki i świetność*, *Przegląd Historyczny*, X. 1910, p. 184-205.

²⁹ A. Wyczański, op. cit. p. 41.

expenditure constituted a practical investment aimed at obtaining good, professional servants for the town's needs. The same policy existed in other rich towns in Poland, especially where university education became a condition of a career in city administration. We do not know the exact number of the municipal scholarships in 16th century Poland, but quantity must have been significant because we could calculate ca 2400 Polish townfolk during the 16th century studying abroad.³⁰

Evidently, observations presented above do not fully prove the phenomenon of conscious and systematic investment in education of children in Poland in the 16th century. This claim should be tested on the basis of larger and deeper research proposals and prospects which we have tried to form in this paper. Research is worth pursuing as the key to interpreting the social, economic and cultural situation of Poland and especially as a way of understanding the mentality of our predecessors. The growing level of literacy, the social value of education and the profitability – thanks to these individual careers – of this investment seems to promise very interesting scientific results.

³⁰ M. Pawlak, *Studia uniwersyteckie młodzieży z Prus Królewskich w XVI-XVIII w.* Toruń 1988, tables.