



## Summary

There are very few Lithuanian clans descended from rank-and-file nobility that, like the Meysztowicz family, can boast a documented genealogy dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and probably even to around 1400. The publication of this documentation by Aleksander Meysztowicz in 1929, in a short monograph entitled *Meysztowiczowie herbu Rawicz* [The Meysztowicz Family of the Rawicz Coat of Arms], was severely criticized. Zygmunt Lasocki accused the author of allegedly „embellishing” the family origin. The reliability of the argumentation of the book, based on court documents, has, however, been confirmed by other eminent scholars, such as Oskar Halecki and Stanisław Ptasiński, as well as Jan Jakubowski, who edited the monograph. Contemporary research confirms that the Meysztowicz family, who consistently used the Rawicz coat of arms, had originally settled in the Mejsztowicze field (town), located in the southern part of the former Kowno district, in the Dorsuniszki parish. They performed their military service with a group of other landowners in nearby Stokliszki. Other Rawicz families, the Saybut and Korkoz families, also settled in the same area and were probably related to the Meysztowicz's, who had initially owned estates along the Nemunas river, south of the Strawa river mouth. In 1600, twelve Meysztowicz families and several Saybut and Korkoz families lived there, which is a small number compared to other contemporary boyar clans who lived in the northern part of the Kowno district at the same time. This relatively small growth of the Rawicz clan on the Nemunas is also indirect evidence that makes it justified to see one common ancestor of all the joint heirs of Mejsztowicze in a person who lived around 1400.

The retrogressive analysis of ownership and family relations allowed us to formulate a very probable hypothesis about the origin of the Meysztowicz family from one of the Minigajło brothers, the first Castellan of Vilnius and the closest associate of Grand Duke Witold, who, along with his family („cum genealogia sua”), was adopted into the Rawa coat of arms in the Union of Horodło (1413). Perhaps this ancestor was Romejko, whom the Teutonic Knight spies had mentioned in 1385 as the co-owner of a fortified manor near Stokliszki with his brother Minigajło. Minigajło died around 1413, in the period preceding the feudalisation of the Lithuanian elite, and his immediate family lacked any continuators of his outstanding public activity. This fact resulted in the family falling outside the circle of beneficiaries of estates consistently given away by the Grand Dukes.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Mejsztowicze estate became an area of economic expansion for the Ogiński princes, who expanded their estates from the neighbouring Koszany, which was the centre of their properties. Among the numerous representatives of the Meysztowicz family who left their homeland in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century, only the ancestor of the later Użusol line maintained his social status. Over time, his descendants joined the ranks of the wealthy landed gentry, even displaying ambitions to join aristocracy. Other Meysztowicz clan members, representatives of the Monkiewiczze and Sipowiczze lines, lived the life of minor, partial gentry families. Still others, after the sale of their hereditary parts in Mejsztowicze, settled in Stokliszki, where they merged with the town’s population, and the poorest representatives of the family even fell into the peasant class. Thus, we are dealing with an extremely interesting, documented phenomenon of the mobility between different social estates of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Initially, the future of the Użusol line did not seem optimistic either. Its progenitor, Sebastian Juriewicz, maintained, and even slightly increased, his part in Mejsztowicze, but the pressure from the Ogiński family was enormous. We do not know if it was himself or his only son, Jan Sebastianowicz, who decided to sell his estate to the magnate family. It was probably the last area of the village of Meysztowicze that remained in the hands of its original heirs. The relatively high material level of Sebastian’s family, compared with others from his milieu, prompted him to take care of the education of his only son. It was probably not the regular education in one of the schools that operated at that time; young Jan stayed at the court of his distant relative, Mikołaj Wążod

Pasamowski, a courtier and royal secretary, and then the royal equerry in Vilnius. As a result, Jan became fluent in reading and writing, and obtained general knowledge necessary to function actively in the noble society. He also received a generous gift from his employer and guardian in the form of the large estate of Ginejtyzski in the Troki district. It was the beginning of the path that led his descendants into the circles of the wealthy landed gentry. The marriage with the wealthy and educated Anna Piotrowicz, daughter of Maciej, raised Jan to an even higher social level. Suffice it to mention that one of his brothers-in-law was Adam Rajecki, a legal official for the congregations of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and a royal courtier. The money from the sale of Ginejtyzski and his wife's dowry enabled Jan to purchase the fiefdom estate of Kołniany-Użusole near Kowno in the Kormiałów starosty. The estate remained in the hands of the family until the 1860s, when it was finally sold due to its remoteness from their main estates.

The economic growth of the Meysztowicz family was interrupted by the invasion, and then the several-year-long occupation of Lithuania by the Muscovy army. The youth of Jan's sons coincided with these tragic times. Their early orphanhood and war contributed to them remaining illiterate for the rest of their lives, unlike both of their parents. This, in turn, undoubtedly shaped the intellectual horizons and attitudes of both sons. Although they both married brides from wealthy homes, this did not translate into an increase in wealth and social promotion. Neither did they achieve any office or display any public activity. As a consequence, the offspring of the younger of them, Dominik, fell to the rank of partial gentry, and then, after moving to Vilnius, merged with the local bourgeoisie.

The elder brother, Walerian, was more fortunate, and bought from his brother his rights to Kołniany, and then, for his war merits, he received a privilege from the king for this estate. Of his six sons, only two started a family, which saved the family from fragmentation and sliding down the social hierarchy.

A turning point in the history of the family was the marriage of Piotr, the elder of Walerian's sons, to a representative of the eminent and wealthy Blinstrub family from Samogitia. Although this did not immediately bring tangible material benefits, as a result of the consistent efforts of as many as three consecutive generations of the family, the descendants of Piotr and Joanna née Blinstrub came into the possession of a large and economically attractive estate of Pojoście in

the Upita district. The family kept it until the end of the First World War. The consistent marriage policy, clearly visible in the next generations, made it possible for them to obtain the first district offices in the middle of the 18th century. It happened thanks to the marriage with a daughter of the Kończe family and the simultaneous entry of the Meysztowicz family into the group of clients of the Zabiełło clan, who ruled the Kowno district at the time. Subsequent marriages concluded in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries tied the Meysztowicz family with the Kończes, Truskowskis and Wawrzeckis, and through them with many important families in Lithuania, including Kossakowski, Brunnow, Pióro, Wereszczyński, Bystram, Szretter, Tyzenhauz, Puzyna, and Dołgoruki, Pac and Radziwiłł. The relation with the Wawrzecki family also brought them another increase in property in the form of the inherited estate of Mejkszty in the Brasław district.

The well-thought-out marriage policy was accompanied by intense economic activity. In addition to agriculture, it included animal farming and exploitation of forests as well as trade in potash, wood and hides. The Meysztowicz family made excellent use of all possible opportunities to increase their wealth, such as the stationing of Muscovite troops in the Republic of Poland. They earned significant amounts of money, among other things, from deliveries to the Russian army.

The growth in property and social advancement of the family did lead to their scholarly interests, cultural patronage and charity activities, but it was relatively late, only in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All these elements came together in the person of Michał Meysztowicz, a graduate of the University of Vilnius, benefactor of the Piarist monastery in Poniewież, and an amateur archaeologist. He also went down in glory in the history of the family by joining the insurgent National Government in Poniewież in 1831. The activity of Michał Meysztowicz prepared the ground for his descendants, who took a prominent place in the Lithuanian elite of the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. His „antiquity” passion probably led to the first attempts to explain the origin of his own family and here we should look for the source of the legend that derives the family from Lithuanian princes (known as *kunigases*).

As a result of many years of archive searches, we managed to collect a source material genuinely extensive for a boyar family, dating back to the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It provided a unique opportunity to trace the history of the family over a long time-span, and thus to observe the phenomena occurring in

the estate society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – the processes of promotion and demotion, career mechanisms or attitudes towards historical challenges.

We end our comments with the death of Michał Meysztowicz in 1848. It coincided with a (slightly earlier) disbanding of the institutions of noble self-government, which dated back to the pre-partition times, the elimination of the Polish language from the public sphere, and the significant legal changes caused by the repressions instituted after the November Uprising of 1830–1831. The later, extremely interesting history of the Meysztowicz family will be presented in the second part of this monograph.