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Courtships, premarital actions and wedding ceremonies among the magnates in the Saxon times

Summary

A woman in Old-Polish culture in almost any period of her life never was an autonomous individual, hence she rarely remained in maidenhood till death. Having left parental responsibility, she had to go either under the authority of a husband or a monastery, while the first option was naturally much more common. The main goal of this dissertation is to recognize the path of a magnate woman in the eighteenth century from birth, through preparation for marriage and courtships till finally getting wed. On the one hand, the subject of the scientific narration in this paper is a woman and her role in society back in the day. On the other hand, the output of the presented considerations will be a model of typical courtship and wedding ceremonies in the Saxon era.

The analysis will include topics such as: education in the context of the future marriage, the age of the bride, the courtships, in particular by identifying the different types of methods and means used by the competitors to gain a wife, the engagement period and customs accompanying weddings with their ideological significance for the construction of the family ambitions. One of the most interesting and yet not fully explained problems are the consequences of the broken engagement, which often found its finale at court.

The issue of this dissertation is undertaken on many levels (legal, social, ideological), using a large source database, including private correspondence, memoirs, diaries, moralistic and panegyric literature. The basis of the analysis will be numerous and various examples, both from the area of the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which will characterize not only the successive stages of the path to marriage, but also the contemporary folk views on the discussed issues. Modern age, especially the Saxon times, was a time of great changes in the perception of the women's position in the world, as well as the mentality of women themselves. The question is, how these transformations are related to the changes in customs that accompany marriage (for example, bigger freedom of choice of spouses).