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“I Cannot Write Often Due to a Constant Headache and Rhinitis”. Health and Illness Presented in Women’s Correspondence in the House of Radziwiłł. Research Introduction

Abstract

Although the studies of women’s health in the early modern era have recently received some attention from researchers in various fields, they still provide much space for analysis in biological, medical, social, and cultural contexts. The desire to look at how women used to write about health and illness has become the main objective of my article. The study subject is private correspondence written by Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł née Wiśniowiecka, who is one of the key representatives of the then-noble social class. Yet still little is known about her “privacy” and her activity in the role of a wife, a mother, or a daughter. The letters which she left behind, written mainly to her husband, Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł “Rybeńko”, and his mother, Anna Radziwiłłowa née Sanguszko, which are currently kept in the Main Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw, give a great opportunity for research on women’s everyday life and reveal a whole range of health-related issues concerning women and their loved ones. The article aims to answer some questions, at least partly because only the correspondence written up to 1742 has been analyzed.

The results of the conducted research lead us to conclude that the Princess often presented information on health and illness through the prism of her blessed state, which she had an opportunity to experience dozens of times. It ensured her well-being or brought several dire physical consequences, such as ailments, illnesses, and indispositions. Descriptions of a good state of her health or specific conditions that affected her should be read as a code – an assurance of her readiness to give birth to a child. According to the state of awareness at the time, the essential priority was to maintain the balance of fluids (the so-called humors) circulating in the human body. As she struggled with her illnesses, she fought for her well-being but also her body as its good condition could allow her to fulfill the duties of a wife, a mother, and a hostess.

Słowa kluczowe: zdrowie, choroba, kobieta, Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów, Radziwiłłowie

Keywords: health, illness, women, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Radziwiłłs

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth¹, one's health was perceived as a personal value that was undoubtedly believed to be as valid and precious as a "treasure" for individuals and society as a whole. Physical well-being troubled people's minds (when weakness, illness, or, finally, death came) but was also a reason for joy when they managed to fight off a disease or happily gave birth to a child². Such feelings and emotions seemed to be experienced on a daily basis. People used various practices to preserve health and sent prayer intentions to God³, with the help of the Holy Virgin Mary and the Saints. Also, votive offerings⁴ and pilgrimages were made to holy places⁵. They constituted an excellent value as it was expressed best by the words of an eighteenth-century magnate and, at the same time, the heroine of these considerations – Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa, née Wiśniowiecka (1705–1753)⁶. She wrote to her mother-in-law, Anna Radziwiłłowa née Sanguszko (1676–1746): "Nobody can regain the lost health, yet fortune is an acquired thing"⁷.

¹ B. Popiołek, *Kobiety świata w czasach Augusta II. Studia nad mentalnością kobiet z kręgów szlacheckich*, 2nd edn expanded, Kraków 2018, p. 171 et seq. See also A. Jakuboszczak, *Rodzina i rodzinność szlachcianek wielkopolskich w XVIII wieku. Perspektywa kobieca*, Poznań 2016, pp. 135–136; J. Węglorz, *Zdrowie, choroba i leczenie w społeczeństwie Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVIII wieku*, Toruń 2015, p. 259.

² A. Penkała-Jastrzębska, *Macierzyństwo w świetle korespondencji Karoliny Teresy z Radziwiłłową Jabłonowskiej do matki Anny z Sanguszków Radziwiłłowej*, "Horyzonty Wychowania", 18, 2019, 46, pp. 69–82.

³ A.J. Zakrzewski, *Choroby i uzdrowienia w świetle jasnogórskich ksiąg cudów*, in *Kobieta w kulturze i społeczeństwie*, vol. 1, ed. B. Jedynak, Lublin 1990, pp. 139–155; M. Delimata-Proch, *Ciąża, poród oraz połóg w świetle polskich ksiąg cudów i łask (od średniowiecza do XVIII w.)*, "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", 63, 2015, 3, pp. 433–439; eadem, *Choroby w świetle ksiąg cudów i łask Matki Bożej Świątógórskiej (XVI–XVIII w.)*, "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", 66, 2018, 3, pp. 271–287; eadem, *Ciąża i narodziny dziecka w świetle Prospektu Wesołego Miłosiernych Oczu, Przenajświętszej Maryi (...) z Gory p. Gostynskiej (XVI–XVIII w.)*, "Historia Slavorum Occidentis", 19, 2018, 4, pp. 76–93; J. Korch, *Choroby nękające społeczeństwo Podlasia w XVIII w. (na podstawie Księgi cudów przed ikoną Matki Bożej Kornieńskiej)*, "Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne", 16, 2001, 1, pp. 48–49.

⁴ Katarzyna Krupska claimed that the offering of a votive gift resulted from two religious attitudes: request or thanksgiving. The reason for the first was health, a potential threat of a disease or an epidemic; see K. Krupska, *Modlitwa w srebrze zaklęta. Siedemnasto- i osiemnastowieczne wota z Ziemi Chełmińskiej*, "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", 61, 2013, 1, p. 15. See also J. Jagła, "Magiczne ropuchy" i "brzuszne węże" – motyw medyczny w przedstawieniach wotywnych, "Medycyna Nowożytna", 15, 2008, 1–2, pp. 7–28; eadem, *Wieczna prośba i dziękczynienie. O symbolicznych relacjach między sacrum i profanum w przedstawieniach wotywnych z obszaru Polski Centralnej*, Warszawa 2009.

⁵ T. Ciesielski, M. Sawicki, *Pilgrimages of the Polish Gentry to holy places in the 17th and the 18th centuries*, "Biuletyn Polskiej Misji Historycznej", 10, 2015, pp. 181–196.

⁶ K. Wierzbicka-Michalska, *Radziwiłłowa Franciszka Urszula (1705–1753)*, in PSB, 30, Wrocław 1987, pp. 388–390.

⁷ "nikt straconego zdrowia nie wróci, a fortuna rzecz nabyta", F.U. Radziwiłł to A. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 31 August 1735, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych (AGAD), Archiwum Radziwiłłów (AR), IV, call no. 660, fol. 211.

Health and physical vitality were thus the subject of daily conversations, together with one of many other topics discussed on the pages of private correspondence⁸. Sending greetings, wishing health and long years of life in prosperity along with declarations of faithfulness, humbleness, and a sense of duty towards letter recipients were enshrined in the rules of the then epistolography⁹. Apart from the formulas of politeness, correspondence provided its readers with several interesting pieces of advice, such as how to take care of one's physical well-being. It also gave detailed descriptions of various disease symptoms the senders had to deal with. Finally, the authors of the letters informed their recipients on how to protect themselves from multiple ailments and disease repercussions¹⁰. Agnieszka Jakuboszczak analyzed noble women's family life in Greater Poland and observed that health and diseases occupied the central place in the overall correspondence of noblemen and magnates. It was attributed to the fact that bodily ailments repeatedly hindered personal contacts¹¹. It seems that one more aspect should be taken into account here, namely, the fact that health issues or sorrow caused by illnesses gave a chance to establish or reestablish relationships, strained or even broken at times and it often became a "tool" to motivate letters' recipients to meet sooner or to return home¹².

With this in mind, the author of this article decided to take a closer look at certain selected health aspects of a lady¹³, who was one of the leading representatives

⁸ In the correspondence, apart from political, economic, or religious subjects, its readers also find a whole range of family-related topics, including health issues, see A. Słaby, *Macierzyństwo. Studium z historii mentalności szlachty Rzeczypospolitej czasów saskich*, Kraków 2023, p. 145. Correspondence, as a form and an opportunity to spend time together, was discussed by A. Jakuboszczak, *Rodzina i rodzinność*, pp. 91–108.

⁹ K. Sicińska, *Wierność, powinność, uniżoność i inne kategorie grzeczności językowej w finalnych formułach epistolarnych XVIII wieku*, "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Językoznawcza", 27, 2020, 1, pp. 163–183.

¹⁰ The abundance of women's correspondence directly or indirectly concentrating on health issues was underlined by Bożena Popiołek in her article devoted to plant medicaments used in the treatment of the eighteenth-century noblemen, see B. Popiołek, *Medykamenty roślinne w leczeniu szlachty w osiemnastowiecznej Rzeczypospolitej (na przykładzie zamówień aptecznych Elżbiety z Lubomirskich Sieniawskiej, kasztelanowej krakowskiej)*, "Medycyna Nowożytna", 30, 2024, Suplement I, pp. 118–119.

¹¹ A. Jakuboszczak, *Rodzina i rodzinność*, p. 95.

¹² B. Manyś, *Radości i troski Anny z Mycielskich Radziwiłłowej w listach do męża Michała Kazimierza Radziwiłła "Rybeńki"*, in *Kobiece kręgi korespondencyjne w XVII–XIX wieku*, ed. B. Popiołek, U. Kicińska, A. Słaby, Warszawa 2016, pp. 179–180.

¹³ Such a postulate was formulated by Cezary Kukło in his article *Badania nad historią kobiet w Polsce XVI–XVIII wieku w latach 2011–2020. Niezmienna atrakcyjność, ale czy nowe pytania?*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica", 107, 2020, p. 33. The lack of studies on women's health issues in the Old Polish period was also indicated by Anna Szylar, see her text *Troska o zdrowie kobiet w klasztorach w XVIII wieku w świetle zachowanych źródeł zakonnych*, "Nowiny Lekarskie", 2, 2010, pp. 108–118. It is worth noting that the need for research on the Old Polish social health status was also recognized by Tadeusz Srogosz, see idem, *Między biologiczną egzystencją człowieka w dziejach a historią nauki*, Częstochowa 2003, p. 79.

of the magnate social stratum in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at that time, who was the already mentioned Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł née Wiśniowiecka, the first wife of Prince Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł “Rybeńko” (1702–1762), the Grand Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Voivode of Vilnius¹⁴.

The analysis of her correspondence prompts us to try to answer at least the following questions, among others. What health-related information can we find on the pages of her letters? How did the Princess experience illnesses and weaknesses that tormented her? Which health problems did she pay the most attention to? The answers to these questions will allow us to determine, at least partly, this magnate’s perception of “the phenomenon of health and illness” and the context in which she wrote about them.

We can expect that looking at the lady’s physical health should bring much thought-provoking information and data about her everyday life. It will hopefully show how she functioned socially and as a family member, and to what extent the activities she undertook in various fields impacted her well-being. Finally, some light will be shed on what she revealed to her spouse about her bodily ailments. Let us stipulate here that the presented considerations do not endeavor to create a complete review of the issue and certainly do not aim to “reconstruct” Franciszka Urszula’s state of health (due to the vastness of the problem under study, as well as the type of the analyzed source). Thus, the author’s goal is not to make any kind of retrospective diagnosis¹⁵. Following the words of Osamu Muramoto, the illnesses described or mentioned by the Princess are perceived as the “medical reality” of Franciszka Urszula. They are analyzed by reconstruction and their embedding “in our discourse through our own perception using the information currently available, particularly texts and artifacts, along with modern medical knowledge”¹⁶.

The author will not attempt to match a given disease’s contemporary name with a description in a letter but will only point out arguments that may suggest such or the other interpretation¹⁷. Let us emphasize that the studied source, i.e., the correspondence, brings a diverse range of related problems. We should remember that it does not constitute the only account of illnesses and health of the Radziwiłł family members. However, given the lack of in-depth research in this area, we should treat it as a “starting point” for the analysis of a broadly understood women’s health,

¹⁴ H. Dymnicka-Wołoszyńska, *Radziwiłł Michał Kazimierz zw. Rybeńko (1702–1762)*, in PSB, 30, Wrocław 1987, pp. 299–306.

¹⁵ For more on the rationale of its use, see O. Muramoto, *Retrospective diagnosis of a famous historical figure: ontological, epistemic, and ethical considerations*, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine”, 9, 2014, art. 10, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1747-5341-9-10>.

¹⁶ “[...] in our discourse through our own perception using the information currently available, particularly texts and artifacts, along with modern medical knowledge”, *ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁷ D. Raj, J. Węglorz, *Pułapki i meandry. Trudności poznawcze i interpretacyjne towarzyszące badaniom przyczyn i przebiegu chorób w przeszłości*, “Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki”, 63, 2023, 1, pp. 49–62, at pp. 53–54.

which was of great interest in the early modern era, as evidenced by treatises and other literary works that were written on the subject¹⁸.

Looking at this topic from a broader perspective and considering other female representatives of the Radziwiłł family together with further available sources would probably give some interesting findings. They would include biological functioning, perception of health, illness, and the body itself at the dawn of the Enlightenment. However, this is still a research task for the future¹⁹.

At this point, the findings based on the epistles are not reflected, confirmed, or negated by bioarchaeological medical research, as is the case for representatives of the aristocracy of Western Europe, such as the Italian Medici²⁰. This state of affairs confirms the need to research in the context of the written sources left behind, especially private correspondence²¹.

To conclude, the presented considerations become a part of the research on women's health²² in its broadest sense, which has been a subject eagerly undertaken by Polish

¹⁸ J. Sharp, *The midwives book. Or the whole art of midwifery discovered. Directing childbearing women how to behave themselves*, London 1671; R. Graaf, *De mulierum organis generationi inservientibus tractatus novus. Demonstrans tam homines & animalia caetera omnia, quae vivipara dicuntur; haud minus quam ovipara ab ovo originem ducere ...*, Lugduni Batavorum 1672; J. Maubray, *The female physician, containing all the diseases incident to that sex, in virgins, wives, and widows: together with their causes and symptoms...*, London 1724; S. Tissot, *The Lady's Physician: A Practical Treatise on the Various Disorders Incident to the Fair Sex...*, London 1766.

¹⁹ On the one hand, it should also refer to wellness analysis of other women from the House of Radziwiłł, particularly the Prince's mother (Anna Katarzyna née Sanguszkó) but also his second wife Anna Ludwika née Mycielska *primo voto* Radziwiłł (1729–1771), the Prince's sisters and his daughters born of the two marriages. On the other hand, we should also take a closer look at an extended list of research questions that would take into account source examination, for example, made by doctors who were in Radziwiłł's service, historical material that would allow an analysis of the applied diet and its impact on health and, lastly, medicines ordered in Jesuit pharmacies.

²⁰ G. Fornaciari, A. Vitiello, S. Giusiani, V. Giuffrè, A. Fornaciari, N. Villari, *The "Medici Project": first Anthropological and Paleopathological Results of the Exploration of the Medici Tombs in Florence (15th–18th Centuries)*, "Medicina nei Secoli", 19, 2007, 2, pp. 521–544.

²¹ Such a postulate was formulated already in the 1980s by Albrecht Classen, see idem, *Female epistolary literature from antiquity to the present: An introduction*, "Studia Neophilologica", 60, 1988, 1, pp. 3–13. It should be noted that the correspondence written by female representatives of the Radziwiłł family is available to the researchers as manuscripts.

²² J. Węglorz, *Staropolskie poradniki medyczne o zdrowiu i chorobach kobiet*, in *Per mulierem... Kobieta w dawnej Polsce – w średniowieczu i w dobie staropolskiej*, ed. K. Justyniarska-Chojak, S. Konarska-Zimnicka, Warszawa 2012, pp. 421–432; J. Węglorz, *Zdrowie, choroba i leczenie*, *passim*; W. Kocela, *Trudna sztuka babienia. Kultura medyczna Polski drugiej połowy XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 2020; K. Justyniarska-Chojak, *Troska o zdrowie kobiet w polskich zielnikach z XVI wieku*, in *Per mulierem*, pp. 407–420; B. Wojciechowska, *Porady dla kobiet ciężarnych i rodzących w wybranych pracach od późnego antyku do wczesnej nowożytności*, "Medycyna Nowożytna", 20, 2014, 1, pp. 145–151; B. Popiołek, *Medykamenty roślinne*, pp. 117–137. Karolina Stojek-Sawicka's research subject is based on illnesses faced by women during the Polish Enlightenment, see K. Stojek-Sawicka, *Szlachcianki w dawnej Polsce – na salonach i od kuchni*, Warszawa 2014, see also eadem, *O zdrowiu i chorobach szlachty polskiej. Ludzkie defekty, humory i następcy Hipokratesa*, Warszawa

historians, especially in recent years. They also correlate with research into the “biological existence” of one of the most prominent magnate families of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, namely the Radziwiłł family. Representatives of the line in Biržė and Dubinė have recently become the subject of Raimonda Raguaskienė’s investigations²³.

In addition, they correspond with the studies of the history of a body, analyzed in social, cultural, religious, and political terms. Moreover, the considerations presented here will be limited mainly to examining the physical and mental condition of the said magnate. A separate topic is the health of Radziwiłł’s offspring. Let us emphasize that this issue, however, requires an individual study.

The letters subjected to the examination have been collected at the Radziwiłł Archives at the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw in more than 1000 epistles. Due to the size of the collection and the variety of the issues raised in the epistles, the study mainly examined letters from the first period of her activity, up to 1742. In that very year, the body of Franciszka Urszula’s beloved father, Janusz Antoni (1678–1741), was laid to rest in the Lviv Cathedral²⁴, which event greatly affected her.

2014. Perinatal care was also discussed in the pages of Dorota Żołądz-Strzelczyk’s literary work, see D. Żołądz-Strzelczyk, *Dziecko w dawnej Polsce*, Poznań 2002; as well as Bożena Zaborowska’s literary work, see B. Zaborowska, *Pomoc przy porodach w Rzeczypospolitej w epoce nowożytnej w świetle zielników i poradnikach medycznych*, in *Wśród córek Eskulapa: szkice z dziejów medycyny i higieny w Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVIII wieku*, ed. A. Karpiński, Warszawa 2009, pp. 279–348; B. Manyś, *Ciężowe perypetie Anny z Mycielskich Radziwiłłowej jako przykład problemów zdrowia reprodukcyjnego kobiet żyjących w XVIII stuleciu*, in *Problemy zdrowia reprodukcyjnego kobiet, 2: Wybrane problemy zdrowia reprodukcyjnego kobiet w relacji do biologii i kultury*, ed. B. Płonka-Syroka, A. Szlagowska-Papuzińska, Wrocław 2018, pp. 53–70. Health issues, including women’s health, have been of interest to Western European historians for years, see among others: Sh.T. Storchia, *Introduction: Women and healthcare in early modern Europe*, “Renaissance Studies”, 28, 2014, 4, pp. 496–514; L.W. Smith, *Society for the Social History of Medicine Student Millennium Prize Essay: Reassessing the Role of the Family: Women’s Medical Care in Eighteenth-Century England*, “Social History of Medicine”, 16, 2003, 3, pp. 327–342. See also: *Women, Gender and Disease in Eighteenth-Century England and France*, ed. K. Hardesty Doig, F. Berger Sturzer, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014; L. Cataliotti, D. Lippi, T. Lotti, *Dermo quiz: the illness and death of Anna Maria Lodovica de’ Medici, Palatine Electress (1667–1743)*, “Dermatologic Therapy”, 23, 2010, pp. 37–40; W.D. Churchill, *Female Patients in Early Modern Britain Gender, Diagnosis, and Treatment*, London 2016; L.M. Klein, *Lady Anne Clifford as Mother and Matriarch: Domestic and Dynastic Issues in her Life and Writings*, “Journal of Family History”, 26, 2001, 1, pp. 18–38; G.M. Weisz, W.R. Albury, M. Matucci-Cerinic, G. Girolomoni, D. Lippi, *Skin disease in the Medici family and the illness of Contessina de’ Bardi de’ Medici: a dermatological puzzle*, “International Journal of Dermatology”, 53, 2014, 6, pp. 786–788; D. Lippi, *The strange destiny of Caterina de’ Medici and a case of puerperal fever in the sixteenth century*, “Journal of Maternal-Fetal & Neonatal Medicine”, 24, 2011, 4, pp. 650–651.

²³ R. Raguaskienė, *Śmierci nie udało się pokonać. Historia biologiczna księżąt Radziwiłłów na Birżach i Dubinkach (koniec XV wieku – XVII wiek)*, Kraków 2020; see also: M. Jarczykowa, *Familijne “pisanie” żon i córek Radziwiłłów z XVII wieku*, “Napis”, 23, 2017, pp. 19–38.

²⁴ “Kurier Polski”, 276, 14 February 1742.

The choice of the heroine of this article is not accidental, for we are dealing here with an extraordinary lady who has been functioning in Polish historiography mainly as a poet and a playwright who was exceptionally active in the realm of the theater²⁵. Let us emphasize that Franciszka Urszula's preserved correspondence brings a lot of interesting data about her daily life, given from a female perspective. It includes various illnesses, ailments, and disorders that tormented her and her loved ones²⁶. The source material used for this study allows us to grasp some interesting pictures. Firstly, a picture of health and illness faced by a young girl, who, as a result of a family-arranged marriage²⁷, became (against the will of her future mother-in-law, Anna Radziwiłł' née Sanguszeko) a member of a significant lineage and who was expected to fulfill her basic duty of giving birth to her descendants. Secondly, we can see an image of an experienced woman in the "prime" of her life, who played the role of a caring wife and a mother. Let us note that in the case of both wives of "Rybeńko", namely Franciszka Urszula and Anna Ludwika Radziwiłłowa née Mycielska²⁸, the state of their health was an object of interest not only of Prince Radziwiłł himself or of their mothers (Teofila née Leszczyńska Wiśniowiecka [1680–1757] and Weronika Mycielska née Konarszewska) but also of the remaining members of the House of Radziwiłł, especially their mother-in-law²⁹. Such a state of affairs was obviously caused by one basic reason: bearing children³⁰, most preferably a number of them. It was expected both from Franciszka Urszula³¹ and Anna Ludwika³², and their position in the House of Radziwiłł³³ largely depended on it.

²⁵ *Teatr Urszuli Radziwiłłowej*, ed. K. Wierzbicka-Michalska, introd. J. Krzyżanowski, Warszawa 1961; B. Judkowiak, *Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa – w poszukiwaniu własnego głosu. Propozycje interpretacyjne, dokumentacyjne i edytorskie*, Poznań 2013. See also: I. Maciejewska, *Nie tylko pochwała rodu – o znaczeniu ramy wydawniczej "Komedyj i tragedyj" Franciszki Urszuli Radziwiłłowej w upamiętnieniu pierwszej polskiej dramatopisarki*, "Napis", 26, 2020, pp. 252–261; B. Judkowiak, *Arystokratyczna tożsamość księżąt nieświeżkich w świetle obrazów literackich i teatralnych. W kręgu twórczości Franciszki Urszuli Radziwiłłowej*, in *Socialinių tapatumų reprezentacijos Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kultūroje*, ed. A. Palušytė, Vilnius 2010 (Art History Studies, 4), pp. 433–436.

²⁶ K. Łachacz, "(...) Pokaż całemu światu, że mnie cokolwiek kochasz...". *O sposobach wyrażania uczuć w listach Franciszki Urszuli z Wiśniowieckich Radziwiłłowej do męża Michała Kazimierza Radziwiłła "Rybeńki"*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 125–126.

²⁷ M. Liedke, *Rodzina magnacka w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVI–XVIII wieku. Studium demograficzno-społeczne*, Białystok 2016, p. 246.

²⁸ R. Krzywy, *Dusza rogata. Autobiograficzny wiersz Anny Ludwiki z Mycielskich Radziwiłłowej*, "Pamiętnik Literacki", 2018, 4, pp. 251–270, at p. 255.

²⁹ See A. Słaby, *Macierzyństwo*, pp. 180–181.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 145ff.

³¹ A. Jakuboszczak, B. Manyś, *Interesa światowe i sprawy rodzinne w korespondencji Teofili z Leszczyńskich Wiśniowieckiej (1680–1757)*, "Balcanica Posnaniensia", 29, 2022, pp. 145–168, at pp. 159–162.

³² Eadem, *Obraz małżeństwa Anny z Mycielskich i Michała Kazimierza Radziwiłła "Rybeńki" w listach "drugiej pani na Nieświeżu" z lat 1754–1762*, in *Wokół Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego i jego tradycji*, ed. B. Manyś, M. Zwierzykowski, Poznań 2016, pp. 185–200, at pp. 193–196.

³³ Ibidem, p. 196.

An interesting supplement to the source material is the letters of the mother of Princess Teofila Wiśniowiecka née Leszczyńska, the wife of Janusz Antoni (d. 1741), the Castellan of Krakow, which put the discussed issues in the context of mother vs daughter or mother-in-law vs son-in-law relations. In addition, the Prince's diary was used for this article. Apart from his correspondence, it also brings a great deal of information about both of his wives' health problems³⁴.

Up to now, women's health from the Nesvizh lineage has attracted little attention from researchers. One exception may constitute issues related to childbirth and motherhood in their broader sense. Agnieszka Słaby, while examining aspects of the noble women's experience of motherhood in the Saxon era, devoted much of her attention to Franciszka Urszula and Anna Ludwika³⁵. Anna Penkała-Jastrzębska also took a closer look at the pregnancy and birth of children in the Radziwiłł family in the first half of the eighteenth century³⁶. Such a state of affairs means that in the presented article, we will analyze pregnancy and perinatal care in the context of health and possible complications that might have occurred. Thus, our attention will be directed, at least partly, to the type of treatment or medical practices that aimed at supporting women's fertility as well as ailments that occurred during the postpartum period and were a consequence of difficult deliveries.

Researchers' interest has also been aroused by Prince Radziwiłł's health and the children born from the marriage to his second wife, the aforementioned Anna née Mycielska³⁷. As a result of the research conducted by Krzysztof Zuba, we obtained a psychophysical portrait of Michał Kazimierz³⁸. Zuba characterized and described some medical procedures to which the Prince was subjected³⁹. He also pictured surgeons, feldshers, and barbers who remained at the Radziwiłł family's service and the apothecaries operating in their land properties⁴⁰. Also, aspects of Franciszka Urszula's physical condition have been tackled in Klaudia Elżbieta Łachacz's literary work⁴¹.

³⁴ AGAD, AR, VI, call no. II-80a.

³⁵ See also: B. Manyś, *Ciążowe perypetie Anny z Mycielskich Radziwiłłowej*, pp. 53–70.

³⁶ A. Penkała-Jastrzębska, *Pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum in wealthy noble families in the first half of the 18th century in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, "Res Gestae. Czasopismo Historyczne", 13, 2021, pp. 22–41.

³⁷ B. Manyś, *O problemach zdrowotnych magnackich dzieci w XVIII w. na przykładzie potomstwa Michała Kazimierza Radziwiłła zw. "Rybeńko" i Anny z Mycielskich Radziwiłłowej*, "Medycyna Nowożytna", 24, 2018, pp. 85–102.

³⁸ K. Zuba, *Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł (1702–1762) – portret psychofizyczny*, "Medycyna Nowożytna. Studia nad Kulturą Medyczną", 9, 2002, 1–2, pp. 53–84.

³⁹ K. Zuba, *O tym, jak "Rybeńkę" leczono. Kuracje i zabiegi medyczne Michała Kazimierza Radziwiłła (1702–1762)*, "Medycyna Nowożytna. Studia nad Historią Medycyny", 18, 2001, 1, pp. 89–110.

⁴⁰ K. Zuba, *Chirurdzy, felczerzy i cyrulicy w dobrach Radziwiłłów linii nieświeskiej w XVIII w.*, "Medycyna Nowożytna", 6, 1999, 1, pp. 77–104; idem, *Aptekarze i apteki w dobrach Radziwiłłów linii nieświeskiej w XVIII wieku*, "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", 49, 2001, 4, pp. 345–366.

⁴¹ The author gives examples of diseases the Princess struggled with, see K. Łachacz, (...) *Pokaż calemu światu*, pp. 126–129.

As already mentioned, health information occupied a significant position in women's correspondence to their loved ones⁴². It can also be frequently found in greetings, as evidenced by Teofila's words to Janusz Antoni on the occasion of the upcoming Christmas. She wrote: "I wish you, my Dearest Benefactor, at best health and the longest life pass all your life moments in the greatest contentment"⁴³. We can observe that the described women carried their peculiar "dialogues" on the pages of various letters⁴⁴, forming a "substitute for conversation". They endeavored to report on their physical condition and showed their interest in the health aspects of their letter recipients by inquiring about their condition⁴⁵. They expressed satisfaction at the news of the Prince's good form⁴⁶, sent wishes to him so that "his health so dear to all of us protects"⁴⁷, or so that "the Divine Providence on all your paths assists you, preserves you in good health and gives you the longest life"⁴⁸.

Equally often, they expressed concern and even sorrow for the ailments troubling those close to them⁴⁹. The importance of the reports on her family members' health was clearly evidenced by the words of Franciszka Urszula, which she addressed to Anna Radziwiłłowa, née Sanguszkó. She wrote as follows: "In unutterable grief I exist not knowing so far in what health you remain"⁵⁰. Even though we see that this note was meant to be kept in the existing epistolary convention, it still undeniably contains concerns for the health condition.

The issues of health that appeared on the pages of the examined correspondence concerned the closest circle of people, and both the women described here also wrote about their own health. They described the physical symptoms of their near and

⁴² B. Manyś, *Radości i troski Anny z Mycielskich Radziwiłłowej*, p. 179.

⁴³ "Życzę tedy Serdeńko Dobrodzieju mój, żebyś przy jako najlepszym zdrowiu y jako najdłuższym wieku wszystkie momenta miał przepędzane w największym ukontentowaniu", T. Wiśniowiecka to J.A. Wiśniowiecki, from Czartorysk, 21 December [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 52.

⁴⁴ K. Sicińska, *Wierność, powinność*, p. 164.

⁴⁵ In a letter to Anna Radziwiłł, Teofila wrote "you are asking kindly about my health and my businesses" ("pytasz się łaskawie o zdrowie i obroty moje"), T. Wiśniowiecka to A. Radziwiłłowa, [s.l.], 25 July 1728, AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514a, fol. 10.

⁴⁶ "I am unspeakably pleased to hear of the good health of both Your Highness and your family" ("Niewymownie jeźdem ukontentowana wiadomością o dobrym zdrowiu obojga WXMci y całej familiej"), T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, [s.l.], 30 August [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 6.

⁴⁷ "swego zdrowia tak drogiego dla nas wszystkich ochraniać", T. Wiśniowiecka to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Czartorysk, 22 February 1728, AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514a, fol. 6.

⁴⁸ "ażebym Opatrzność Boska na wszystkich drogach asystowała WXMci zachowując w zdrowiu dobrym y najdłuższym życiu", T. Wiśniowiecka to M.K. Radziwiłł, [s.l.], 12 April [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 9.

⁴⁹ In one of her letters, Teofila Wiśniowiecka wrote what follows: "I am incredibly troubled by my daughter's weakness" ("Niesłychanie się turbuję słabością córki"), T. Wiśniowiecka do M.K. Radziwiłł, [s.l.], 30 May [s.a.], *ibidem*, fol. 14.

⁵⁰ "W nieutulonym zostaje żalu, nie wiedząc dotąd w jakim zdrowiu zostajesz", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Alba, 5 June 1725, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 657, fol. 15.

distant relatives⁵¹. Teofila's letters included information about physical problems of her husband Janusz Antoni, her daughter Franciszka Urszula⁵² (mainly in the context of her pregnancies), or her son-in-law Michał Kazimierz, when, to take an example, she expressed her concern about his toothache⁵³, which tormented him for unknown reasons. "The Lady on Nesvizh" also reported on her parents' health⁵⁴ issues, as well as her spouse's⁵⁵ mother-in-law's condition⁵⁶. Much space was devoted to descriptions of disease symptoms that her children struggled with. She also informed her husband about cases of illnesses occurring among other family members (e.g., her uncle⁵⁷), visiting guests⁵⁸, court servants⁵⁹, even about diseases (epidemics?) that occurred in Nesvizh and took a deadly toll among the city and the castle residents⁶⁰.

⁵¹ E.g., in one of her letters Teofila Wiśniowiecka wrote to her daughter: "The gout already slightly left my husband so that he could walk yesterday, today again at night with swelling of his knees cruelly attacks" ("pedogra jusz memu mężowi była sfolgowała że mógł chodzić wczoraj, dziś znowu w nocy z puchliną kolana okrutnie napastuje"), T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, [s.l.], [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 34.

⁵² "[...] I wrote to my daughter as I had a thought that she must use enema and when the swelling goes down, for the sake of God, I am begging her to protect her own health" ("pisałam do moi córki reflexyje, żeby się przepurgowała, jak zejdzie puchlina na miłość Boga zaklinam ochraniać się"), see: T. Wiśniowiecka to M.K. Radziwiłł, [s.l.], [s.a.], ibidem, fol. 44. It is likely that the letter was written at the end of 1750. At that time the Prince was struggling with a jaw illness which manifested itself through pain and swelling, see K. Zuba, *O tym, jak "Rybenkę" leczono*, pp. 98–99.

⁵³ T. Wiśniowiecka to M.K. Radziwiłł, [s.l.], [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XII, fol. 37.

⁵⁴ "My parents go down to their knees before Her Highness Benefactor, from whom I had letters today – my father is perfectly healthy which makes me unspeakably overjoyed" ("Rodzice moi ścielą nogi W.X.Mci Dobrodziki, od których dziś miałam listy, mój ojciec całe zdrow z czego się niewymownie cieszę"), F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Kartelichy, 30 July 1725, AGAD, IV, call no. 657, fol. 37.

⁵⁵ "My husband feels healthier but still a bit of a headache bothers him" ("mąż mój zdrowszy, ale jeszcze trochę ból głowy go inkomoduje"), F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, [s.l.], 20 June 1725, ibidem, fol. 30.

⁵⁶ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 13 March 1731, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 659, fol. 52. In one of her letters, she poignantly asked Hieronim Florian about her mother-in-law's health: "My Beloved, I am seriously ill, however, my indisposition is greater upon the news about the weakness of her Highness Mother Benefactress and it frightened my heart so greatly that I am sending a messenger to Your Highness Prince asking for more information" ("Lubo sama cienszko choruje, jednak przydaje mi indyspozycyi odgłos postronny o słabości Xiężny mci Matki naszej y Dobrodziki, tak mi ta wiadomość serce przeraża, że posyłam umyślnego do WXMci dobrodzieja, prosząc o wiadomość"), [s.l.], 20 January 1743, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 663, fol. 143.

⁵⁷ "my uncle has fallen seriously ill with gout and does not get out of bed" ("mój stryj cienszko zapadł na podagrę y z łóżka nie wstaje"), F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 13 March 1731, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 659, fol. 54.

⁵⁸ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, [s.l.], 11 May 1742, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 663, fol. 8.

⁵⁹ As a result of the epidemic that occurred in 1745, two of Franciszka Urszula's maids died in the castle. See: F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 20 January 1745, ibidem, fol. 221.

⁶⁰ In one of her letters to M.K. Radziwiłł, she wrote what follows: "Here I have enough mortification, sick children in town die of bloody dysentery, Karusia with her throat got sick" ("ja mam tu dość umartwienia, kiedy dzieci chore w mieście umierają na dyseterie krwawe, a moja Karusia na garło

The studied source material allows us to conclude that health issues were a part of the daily concerns of the described women. We may even be tempted to state that the physical well-being of family members was the subject of "gossipy" reports, which all the relatives were lively interested in. In one of Franciszka Urszula's letters we read that "about [...] health I am concerned greatly because Her Highness Castellana announces to me weakness of our mother [Anna Radziwiłłowa née Sanguszkó], so I am humbly begging to report more to me, because I feel strangely anxious"⁶¹. The "anxiety" mentioned by the Princess was probably related to the then perception of illness – a potential cause of death, a punishment for sins or the God's wrath⁶². However, an immediate turning to God in prayer could restore His favor, resulting in recovery or even a "miraculous healing"⁶³.

In their correspondence, both the mother and daughter devoted much interest to the problems their husbands faced. Lack of information about their health caused anxiety and fear in those women, contributing to their numerous weaknesses. It is confirmed by the words of Franciszka Urszula to Michał Kazimierz: "for three Sundays in a row without news about your health, and I felt very turbulent, which probably contributed to my weakness"⁶⁴. On another occasion, the affectionate and tender-hearted Princess confessed, "Protect your well-being for the one who cares for nothing but you and who does not want to live but only for you"⁶⁵.

zachorowała"), F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 16 August 1742, *ibidem*, fol. 71. In subsequent letters, she continued the subject of this epidemic, F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, [s.l.], 30 August 1742, *ibidem*, fol. 82; and next F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 4 September 1742, call no. 633, fol. 85; F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Zaturyi, 7 September 1742, call no. 663, fol. 89–90; F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Zaturyi, 21 September 1742, call no. 663, fol. 101; F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 17 January 1743, call no. 663, fol. 149. It is worth noting that Andrzej Karpiński did not record an occurrence of epidemics in Nesvizh in the reviewed years, see A. Karpiński, *W walce z niewidzialnym wrogiem. Epidemie chorób zakaźnych w Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku i ich następstwa demograficzne, społeczno-ekonomiczne i polityczne*, Warszawa 2000.

⁶¹ "o [...] zdrowie niezmiernie się turbuje ponieważ WXMci ksztelanowa oznajmuje mi o słabości matki naszej [Anny z Sanguszków Radziwiłłowej], więc upraszam pokornie donieść mi, bom dziwnie niespokojna", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 10 June 1725, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 657, fol. 23.

⁶² B. Rok, *Metafizyczne widzenie choroby w polskim piśmiennictwie religijnym czasów nowożytnych*, "Medycyna Nowożytna", 1, 1994, 2, pp. 17–30, at pp. 17–18, 20; idem, *Człowiek wobec śmierci w kulturze staropolskiej*, Wrocław 1995, pp. 32–33.

⁶³ J. Węglorz, *Postrzeganie choroby w mentalności szlachty w Rzeczypospolitej w XVII i XVIII w.*, in *Sic erat in fatis. Studia i szkice historyczne dedykowane Profesorowi Bogdanowi Rokowi*, 2, ed. E. Kościak, R. Żerelik, P. Badyna, F. Wolański, Toruń 2012, pp. 13–30, at pp. 24–25.

⁶⁴ "bez trzy niedziela nie mając wiadomości o jego zdrowiu bardzom się turbowała co może bym bardzi słabości mojej przymnożyło", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Biała, 19 August 1727, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 658, fol. 58.

⁶⁵ "ochraniaj zdrowia dla tej, która o nic nie dba tylko o Ciebie y która żyć nie chce, tylko dla Ciebie", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Olyka, 10 May 1730, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 659, fol. 4.

It should be remembered, however, that the words of care and affection the described women addressed to their partners belonged to a specific communication pattern and expressed politeness resulting from their status and cultural position⁶⁶. On the one hand, the above letter quotation can be seen as a part of the convention of that time and on the other hand, a threat of the loss of what was most precious, namely one's health aimed at causing "remorse" in the spouse and prompting him to return home sooner or at least to send an awaited letter.

Among numerous and varied health reports, we find information about the symptoms of several disease entities and their potential causes. In 1733, Franciszka Urszula, in one of her letters written to Anna Radziwiłł, née Sanguszkó, passed on information about the physical condition of "Rybeńko". She noted that the Prince did not suffer from eye problems as often as he used to because "he has no time to smoke tobacco⁶⁷, for which reason, as I understand, he comes back to health"⁶⁸. As noted by Andrew Dziubiński, in the eighteenth century, smoking was widespread among members of various social groups. However, at this stage of research, it is difficult to determine whether "Rybeńko" purchased tobacco or grew it himself. According to the findings of the researcher mentioned above, there were plantations of this stimulant in some magnate estates (following the Saxon model)⁶⁹. Katarzyna Meyza indicates the existence of a tobacco plantation in Warmia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries⁷⁰. However, we should remember that tobacco had quite a wide range of uses. It was treated as a cure for migraines, and the Prince suffered from them since his early childhood. Additionally, this plant was also applied as a disinfectant⁷¹ or in aromatherapy⁷². It was used in a form of fumigation together with wet gunpowder, pitch, tar, sulfur, incense, juniper, or bay berries⁷³. Radziwiłł's wife noted, however, that the tobacco smoke must have significantly irritated the mucous membranes of the Prince's eyes, which was a nuisance to him.

On another occasion, she expressed her understanding of her spouse suffering from headaches. Still, she did not forget to comment on what she thought his ailment came from, and she addressed the following words to "Rybeńko": "Please, my Dear

⁶⁶ K. Sicińska, *Wierność, powinność*, p. 164.

⁶⁷ The word comes from the Turkish language, see more A. Dziubiński, *Z dziejów nalogu tytoniowego i produkcji wyrobów nikotynowych w Rzeczypospolitej w XVII i XVIII wieku*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", 105, 1998, 2, pp. 33–51, at p. 38.

⁶⁸ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłł, from Prague, 9 September 1733, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 659, fol. 201.

⁶⁹ A. Dziubiński, *Z dziejów nalogu*, p. 39.

⁷⁰ K. Meyza, *Fajki gliniane z XVII w. i pierwszej połowy XVIII w.: z badań archeologicznych Zamku Królewskiego i Starego Miasta w Warszawie*, "Almanach Muzealny", 1, 1997, pp. 31–44, at p. 32.

⁷¹ K. Zuba, *Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł*, p. 57.

⁷² B. Popiołek, *Medykamenty roślinne*, p. 133.

⁷³ W. Szczęsny, *Aseptyka i antyseptyka w dziejach, czyli „pus (non) est bonum et laudabile”*, "Wiadomości Akademickie. Pismo Akademii Medycznej im. Ludwika Rydygiera w Bydgoszczy", 76, 2019, pp. 18–20, at p. 18.

Heartfelt, do not get drunk there, so that you do not get sick again even worse"⁷⁴. Michał Kazimierz, similarly to other men who devoted themselves to the service of their motherland, participated in lavishly drunken gatherings in royal rooms or during meetings with other state dignitaries or military comrades⁷⁵. On such occasions, "Rybeńko" tasted various drinks not only "for the improvement of health"⁷⁶. Based on an analysis of the entries into Prince Radziwiłł's diary, Krzysztof Zuba concluded that its author generally did not abuse alcohol. However, as the researcher points out, occasional consumption of alcoholic beverages caused Radziwiłł to suffer from attacks of headaches, which Michał Kazimierz tried to relieve mainly by resting. The recalled words of his concerned wife confirm the existence of this problem, as a result of which the Prince was plagued by many other ailments, such as unspecified "weakness" or problems with his digestive system⁷⁷.

Franciszka Urszula was also keenly interested in her beloved father's well-being. She awaited information from her mother about Janusz Antoni's progressive illness. From the women's letters, we obtain information that Wiśniowiecki was struggling with gout, also known as chiragra⁷⁸. Teofila supported her spouse in the advanced stages of the disease. The attacks of joint pain that Janusz Antoni was experiencing often forced him and his wife to resign from participation in public events, as well as their family life. Such a poor condition of the Castellan of Krakow forced Teofila to become involved in various affairs. This and the need to care for her ailing husband often made it difficult for Teofila to meet her family obligations. The Castellan's state of health often made it impossible for the mother to meet her daughter. According to Teofila's correspondence, the Castellan of Krakow had frequent problems with walking, especially at night. He experienced acute attacks, combined with swelling of particular joints, mainly the knees⁷⁹. She wrote in one of her letters: "Gout fits already slightly went away, and my husband could walk yesterday, but at night again the sickness cruelly attacks his knees with swelling"⁸⁰. In another letter, she

⁷⁴ "proszę serdecznie nie upijaj się tam, aby znowu gorzej nie chorować", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 11 April 1736, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 660, fol. 232.

⁷⁵ Similarly, B. Popiołek, *Kobiety świat*, p. 173.

⁷⁶ K. Zuba, *O tym, jak "Rybeńkę" leczono*, p. 104. Beneficial effects of wine were indicated by Pliny the Elder, among others. See: Pliniusz Starszy, *Historia naturalna. Wybór*, 2, ed. and transl. I. and T. Zawadzcy, Wrocław 2004, pp. 212–213.

⁷⁷ K. Zuba, *O tym, jak "Rybeńkę" leczono*, p. 76.

⁷⁸ *Compendium medicum auctum to iest: krotkie zebranie i opisanie chorob ich różności, przyczyn, znakow, sposobow do leczenia także różnych sposobow robienia Wodek, Oleykow, Julepow, Syrupow, Konfitur, Maści, Plastrow, &c...*, Częstochowa 1789, p. 15. See: R. Ragauskienė, *Śmierci nie udało się pokonać*, pp. 218–219.

⁷⁹ The symptoms of the disease have been described by Thomas Sydenham, *Tractatus de Podagra et Hydrope*, London 1683.

⁸⁰ "Podagra jusz memu mężowi była sfolgowała że mógł chodzić wczora, dziś znowu w nocy z puchliną kolana okrutnie napastuje", T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, [s.l.], [s.a.], AGAD, AR, sec.V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 34.

reported to her daughter what follows: "My husband does not get out of bed, terribly sick, suffering from gout"⁸¹. The pain attacks experienced by Janusz Antoni were chronic in their nature and could last even "several Sundays". According to the information included in one of the letters, his physical suffering must have become so severe that it was difficult for the wife to bear her spouse's behavior. In her letter, Teofila lamented to Franciszka Urszula: "The gout has returned, for me it is unbearable, but in God we have hope"⁸². Castellan's wife revealed that the disease attacked her husband's other joints, including his hands. Reporting on Janusz Antoni's weakness, she informed that: "for several Sundays he suffered from gout and chiragra"⁸³.

In Teofila's correspondence, we find confirmation of the fact that Franciszka Urszula, the heroine of our text, struggled with the same illness as her father. As a consequence, she experienced swelling of her arms and legs, which made it very difficult for her to function normally. We can read about the first symptoms of her sickness in her letters written to Anna Radziwiłł née Sanguszkó at the beginning of March 1731. A 26-year-old Franciszka wrote about pains she felt in her legs and arms, for which she could not walk without help⁸⁴. In her late thirties, we see an increase in the intensity of both the symptoms and the effects of the ailment. In February 1737, in one of the letters sent to "Rybeńko", we read what follows: "due to severe pain in my hands I have been barely able to hold a pen for nearly a week now, I almost cannot make a step if not for the help of two people"⁸⁵. According

⁸¹ "mój mąż z łóżka nie wstaje okrutnie na podagrę chorując", T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U Radziwiłłowa, [s.l.], [s.a.], ibidem, fol. 77.

⁸² "wróciła pedagra, dla mnie jest nieznośny, ale w Bogu nadzieja", T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U Radziwiłłowej, from Biała Krynysia, 28 June [s.a.], ibidem, fol. 110.

⁸³ "kilka niedziel chorował na pedagrę y hieragrę", T. Wiśniowiecka to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Ivanec, [s.a.], ibidem, fol. 30–31.

⁸⁴ In a letter from 7 March, she wrote what follows: "After my husband's departure I was already in complete despair and additionally to these terrible pains such sudden unbearable fever struck me and I was laying three days long without any senses, but on the fourth day it changed into *frybra tercianna* of which I still suffer and with my own strength I cannot make a step, so they lift me, sit me down and then I make a few steps" ("Jam po wyjeździe mego męża, już w cale była zdesperowana, gdysz do tych bólów nieznośnych gorączka tak nagle przypadła, żem trzy dni bez żadnych zmysłów leżała, ale ta dnia czwartego odmieniła się, *frybre tercianne*, którą dotychczas cierpię, y lubo o swojej mocy stąpić nie mogę, jednak mnie podnoszą, sadzają y dopiero kilka kroków uszła"), F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Chuchevice, 7 March 1731, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 659, fol. 50. Two days later, she sent a message from Nesvizh to her mother-in-law, writing to her what follows: "Before the evening I arrived in Nesvizh, still very weak, however, I felt some significant improvement. In addition to the fact that I have pains in my legs and hands but thankfully incomparably smaller now, still without help I am unable to walk" ("przed wieczorem stanęłam w Nieświeżu bardzo dotąd słaba, jednak za poprawę znacznie czuje. Oprócz tego, że mam bóle w nogach y rękach lubo nieporównanie mniejsze, ale o swojej władzy chodzić nie mogę"), F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Nesvizh, 9 March 1731, ibidem, fol. 52.

⁸⁵ "dla ciężkiego bólu rąk ledwie włożyć pióro mogę już blisko od tygodnia, ledwie stąpię i to za pomocą dwóch osób", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Lachawa, 20 February 1737, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 661, fol. 14.

to the correspondence, the illness was often accompanied by fever, not infrequently headache, and overall body weakness, making it impossible to write and meet with loved ones⁸⁶. Franciszka Urszula was a woman involved in, among other things, economic affairs and in the process of creative writing. Thus, her ailments were particularly troublesome to her. A considerable number of noblewomen from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth struggled with similar problems. A good example is Ludwika Koźmińska née Skaławska, who was unable to write creatively because of gout affecting her hands⁸⁷.

As we can guess, all this was neither helpful to Franciszka Urszula in her trials to get pregnant, nor in her deliveries. It constituted a fundamental problem in the first years of her marriage to Michał Kazimierz. It should be remembered that bearing a child was the paramount task placed on a woman by the society of the time⁸⁸. Her persistent state of illness and general weakness probably affected Radziwiłł's procreative capabilities⁸⁹. At the current research stage, it is hard to determine the causes of Franciszka Urszula's health problems. This sickness is caused by a metabolic disorder and the entry of urate or oxalate into the blood; it results in painful arthritis⁹⁰. Its occurrence is related to a poor diet, that is, consuming foods rich in purines (meats, offal, seafood) and fructose (fruits). However, it should be remembered that there may be many more factors causing it⁹¹, such as excessive physical exertion, hypothermia, mental stress, trauma, surgery, dehydration, or infections⁹². An analysis of Franciszka Urszula's correspondence allows us to conclude that in her daily life, she must have been experiencing most of them. An interesting observation regarding the described sickness was made by Teofila, who in one of her letters explained to her daughter that "gout is a hereditary sickness present among my noble family members"⁹³. Franciszka Urszula likely saw a similarity between her ailments and what her father struggled with. The mother, however, looked at her daughter's health problems from a broader perspective. She linked them to general excessive strain on the body, resulting from Franciszka Urszula's numerous duties that fell on the Princess during her husband's frequent absences. From the very beginning of her marriage, she tried to be a wife who not only supported her politically

⁸⁶ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Nesvizh, 22 February 1738, *ibidem*, fol. 81–82.

⁸⁷ A. Jakuboszczak, *Rodzina i rodzinność*, p. 136.

⁸⁸ M. Liedke, *Rodzina magnacka*, p. 119.

⁸⁹ Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł noted in his "Diary" that his wife was pregnant as many as 34 times. See *ibidem*, p. 137. Also see fn. 161.

⁹⁰ K. Zuba, *Bogusław Radziwiłł (1620–1669) – portret psychofizyczny magnata w świetle listów i pamiętników*, "Medycyna Nowożytna", 5, 1998, 1, pp. 113–136, at p. 124.

⁹¹ Z. Kuchowicz, *Z badań nad stanem biologicznym społeczeństwa polskiego od schyłku XVI do końca XVIII wieku*, Łódź 1972, pp. 39–40.

⁹² Idem, *Z dziejów zapadalności na dnę moczanową (podagrę) w Polsce*, "Zdrowie Publiczne", 81, 1970, 8, pp. 762–763. See also: idem, *Z badań nad stanem biologicznym*, pp. 39–40.

⁹³ "pedagra jest dziedziczną chorobą daną xiążąt moich", T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 72.

active husband but wished to be involved on many levels. Therefore, she looked after Radziwiłł's estate, supervised construction works commissioned by "Rybeńko", took care of the home, received visitors to Nesvizh, mediated in political affairs, and made numerous trips to see her husband. Finally, when the longed-for children appeared, she took care of their development and upbringing.

The analyzed letters show that Franciszka Urszula struggled with various ailments from the beginning of her life journey with "Rybeńko". As already mentioned, some of these were probably the result of multiple pregnancies. Health problems such as nausea, general weakness, tormenting headache, vomiting, gastrointestinal problems, and diarrhea are just some of the symptoms we read about in the pages of the Princess's correspondence. In addition, she mentioned experiencing severe chest pain, which also affected the stomach and even gave a sense of "pressure under the heart". The attacks eventually ended in nausea and vomiting⁹⁴. Perhaps the described symptoms were the result of the stress experienced by the Princess especially during the first years of her marriage (due to a series of miscarriages, fertility problems, or the death of her infant son Mikołaj Krzysztof⁹⁵) as well as the stress added by her mother-in-law who was exerting pressure on her and expecting numerous grandchildren⁹⁶. As Agnieszka Słaby's research shows, women of the time struggled with such symptoms quite often. To take an example, similar problems were experienced by Tekla Róża Flemmingowa née Radziwiłł (d. 1747), the wife of Jakub Henryk Flemming (1667–1728), the younger sister of "Rybeńko"⁹⁷, and a later soulmate of Franciszka Urszula. The Princess's words allow us to conclude that it was frequently the result of mental stress she was experiencing, especially when it came to her offspring. In one of her letters, we read: "God sees that I am seriously sick with the headache after crying all night with misery [...] so I can hardly write with this pain"⁹⁸. It is difficult to determine its nature. However, the source material analysis shows that it often went hand in hand with "great" sacral pains, pain in the body sides, especially the left one⁹⁹, pain in the eyes, or dizziness. Sometimes it also appeared with rhinitis as a symptom of general body weakness. In one of her letters, the Princess wrote: "Now I shaved my head against

⁹⁴ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, [s.l.], 31 May 1725, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 657, fol. 10. About pressure, see A. Słaby, *Macierzyństwo*, p. 124.

⁹⁵ AGAD, AR, VI, call no. II-80a, p. 312. See also B. Judkowiak, *Słowo inscenizowane. O Franciszce Urszuli Radziwiłłowej – poetce*, Poznań 1992, pp. 69–82.

⁹⁶ M. Liedke, *Rodzina magnacka*, p. 266.

⁹⁷ A. Słaby, *Macierzyństwo*, pp. 116–117.

⁹⁸ "Sama, zaś Bóg widzi, że ciężko na głowę choruję po całonocnym płaczu y nieszczęściu [...] więc z bólu głowy ledwie pisać mogę", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 26 April 1739, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 661, fol. 172–173.

⁹⁹ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 19 August 1735, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 660, fol. 201; eadem to idem, from Korelicz, 5 May 1736, *ibidem*, fol. 236; eadem to idem, from Mir, 3 September 1745, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 663, fol. 249.

dizziness, as my condition was such that I could barely live and was almost losing my mind [...]”¹⁰⁰. At this point, the question should be raised about the meaning of her statement: “I shaved her head”. Nevertheless, such a drastic decision must have cost her a lot. Moreover, the Princess’s letters allow us to conclude that the pain appeared due to additional factors, such as the stench lingering in the Nesvizh castle. As a result, in 1742, one of her twin sons, Janusz Tadeusz (1734–1750)¹⁰¹, fell seriously ill, as did our heroine¹⁰².

At the moment, it is worth highlighting that Teofila attempted to support her daughter in her efforts to become a mother. In Teofila’s letters written in the first years of the Radziwiłłs’ marriage, the dominant subject is pregnancy and childbirth¹⁰³. Therefore, the mother not only bestowed parental blessings and sent good words to her daughter but also, in a womanly manner, shared her experiences and even practices that helped her to get pregnant¹⁰⁴. Her advice came, on the one hand, from a loving and concerned mother, distressed by her daughter’s decisions, which she felt had a great impact on Franciszka Urszula’s miscarriages¹⁰⁵. On the other hand, from an experienced woman who seemed to have decided to step out of her parental role to share some knowledge with her daughter¹⁰⁶. The precocious and forward-looking wife of the Governor of Krakow wanted to avoid more sad stories of the loss of her “Franusinka’s” “God’s gift”¹⁰⁷. Therefore, she supported her daughter with a great deal of advice and ideas to prevent another baby’s loss – “so that it did not happen in the third month”¹⁰⁸. She suggested treatments to strengthen “Franusinka’s” health and avoid the “turbulence” of straining journeys with her husband or trips to see him¹⁰⁹. She underlined the importance of rest or the necessity to use various treatments, especially blood-letting¹¹⁰. Furthermore, in one of the

¹⁰⁰ “teraz głowem ogoliła dla cienszkiego zawrotu, gdysz tak mi się kręciło żem ledwie żyć mogła od rozumu prawie odchodząc”, F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 20 June 1740, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 662, fol. 53.

¹⁰¹ AGAD, AR, VI, call no. II-80a, fol. 632–633.

¹⁰² F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 4 April 1742, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 662, fol. 201.

¹⁰³ A. Jakuboszczak, B. Manyś, *Interesa światowe*, pp. 159–165.

¹⁰⁴ J. Janicka, *Ciąża w opiniach mieszkańców Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w XVIII wieku*, “Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 75, 2020, 1, pp. 73–92, at p. 76.

¹⁰⁵ For more see A. Jakuboszczak, B. Manyś, *Interesa światowe*, pp. 159ff.

¹⁰⁶ B. Manyś, “Moje dziecko”. *Relacja Teofili z Leszczyńskich Wiśniowieckiej (1680–1757) z Franciszką Urszulą w świetle korespondencji*, “Klio. Czasopismo Poświęcone Dziejom Polski i Powszechnym”, 72, 2024, 3, pp. 57–85.

¹⁰⁷ J. Janicka, *Ciąża w opiniach*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁸ “aby to się nie stało w trzecim miesiącu”, T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłła, [s.l.], [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 72.

¹⁰⁹ More on this topic, see B. Popiołek, *Kobiety świat*, pp. 183–185.

¹¹⁰ This issue was analyzed in detail by Jakub Węglorz in his literary work, see J. Węglorz, *Zdrowie, choroba i leczenie*, pp. 135–178. See A. Bryłka, “[...] w koziorożcu, krew puszczać złe, purgacja brać”, czyli rzecz o zabiegach medycznych, które należy czynić. *Obraz wiedzy medycznej*

letters, we can read about using a “fetus-maintaining”. Teofila recommended this remedy to Franciszka Urszula in “the most risky month in which she miscarried”, that is, as her mother noted, in the third month¹¹¹.

In Teofila’s opinion, who seemed to have used this remedy once before, it was “reliable” and “nourishing”. To prepare it, she recommended using: “no other but dark blue sugar paper on which a fried pulp must be spread”¹¹². It should be prepared from a honeycomb¹¹³, i.e., a dough made with the use of honey, which was finely crushed, with an addition of sweet malvasia wine, some “uterine” cloves, cinnamon, unleavened honey (i.e., “not melted from wax”). At the end, two egg whites had to be added, probably to stick the ingredients together, and finally, a well-mixed and fried pulp was laid out on paper. Teofila suggested that the specifics should be worn “on the womb” and advised her daughter that when it falls off, “another one should be made, and if applied throughout the whole time, the pregnancy will stay healthy and safe”¹¹⁴.

In the eighteenth century, such patches were used for numerous ailments, including headaches, chest pains, swelling, gout, or spleen¹¹⁵. Most probably, medical handbooks contributed to their spread as we find them on the pages of *Compendium medicum auctum*, whose first copy was published in 1703, and the tenth and last in 1789¹¹⁶. So far, it has not been possible to determine the author of the handbook, a compilation of the works of more than twenty European medics. According to the prevailing view in Polish historiography, the author of the handbook was a Franciscan, Apolinary Wiczorkowicz (1661–1728)¹¹⁷. Perhaps this work was known, if not entirely then at least in part, to Teofila or Wiktoria Potocka, the aunt of Franciszka Urszula and the Voivodesse of Kiev, who was interested in maintaining the marriage of Radziwiłłowa.

In the eighteenth century, the reasons for miscarriages were associated with malfunctioning of the uterus, and the patch mentioned above was supposed to stimulate blood supply to the uterine muscle as well as to “warm it up and dry it”. According

w świetle śląskich wydawnictw kalendarzowych do połowy XVIII wieku, in *Zdrowie i choroba. Wpływ jakości życia na kulturę w Europie Środkowej*, ed. A. Barciak, Katowice–Zabrze 2013, pp. 70–90.

¹¹¹ T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, from Czartorysk, [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 23.

¹¹² “papier modry od cukru nie inszy na nim rozsmarować usmażoną masę”, T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, from Czartorysk, [s.a.], ibidem, fol. 23.

¹¹³ Z. Krótki, *Staro- i średniopolskie nazwy ciast*, “Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Linguistica”, 11, 2016, pp. 75–86, at p. 77.

¹¹⁴ “inszy robić i tak gdyby całe brzemię to zdrowo i bezpiecznie [będzie]”, T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, from Czartorysk, [s.a.], AGAD, AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 23.

¹¹⁵ *Compendium medicum*, p. 131; ibidem, pp. 364–365; ibidem, pp. 292–293.

¹¹⁶ The research of Barbara Bacler and Jacek Drobnik concerns a copy from 1752, see B. Balcer, J. Drobnik, *Rośliny lecznicze w osiemnastowiecznym polskim poradniku medycznym Compendium medicum auctum. Część I*, “Annales Academiae Medicae Silesiensis”, 63, 2009, 1, pp. 35–50, at pp. 36–38.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, pp. 36–37.

to *Compendium medicum auctum*, into the uterus "comes a lot of phlegm which is cold and slimy, for which reason the uterus cannot keep the fetus"¹¹⁸. This remedy stems from the humoral theory, which was still dominant in the eighteenth century and was based on the existence of four substances in the body (the so-called humors). These liquids were related to the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Here we can speak of red blood (*sanguina*) – warm and moist, white phlegm (*phlegma*) – cold and moist, bile (*chole*) – warm and dry, and black bile (*mela chole*) – cold and dry. To maintain good health, it was necessary to keep the balance between these substances¹¹⁹.

The ingredients, such as cinnamon and cloves, all have warming and drying properties and improve tissue blood circulation. Among others, they were used to make a potion used to stop excessive labor bleeding (cinnamon, red wine, verben, and/or beer), or to prepare a powder which could be applied to women's crotches torn during childbirth (along with comfrey and daisies)¹²⁰. The ingredients for patches "external [...] preventing from miscarriage"¹²¹ could be modified, and instead of honeycomb, the inside of bread could be used, while the bouquet of herbs was expanded to include nutmeg or mint¹²². The above example shows that for healthiness, in this case, successful delivery of pregnancy, women tried to maintain the balance between the humors but, above all, wanted to keep the inside of their bodies dry and warm. It was therefore necessary to remove all the "damp", "cold", and "viscous" humors with the use of the aforementioned patch¹²³.

Teofila advised her daughter to seal the navel with the pulp, but in such a way as to "make a hole [in it] for the baby's breath"¹²⁴. As we can see, the umbilicus was described as a "link" between a mother and a child¹²⁵. However, the words of Princess Wiśniowiecka point out the existence of a general misconception that babies "breathe" through their navels¹²⁶. Such thinking stemmed from the belief that the navel was regarded as one of the orifices of the female body. Agnieszka Jakuboszczak's research and the umbilical cords of the children of Barbara Sanguszko née Dunin (1718–1791), which she found, show that this organ may have had

¹¹⁸ "wiele zlewa się humoru flegmistego, który jest zimny i śliski, dla czego macica płodu zatrzymać nie może", *Compendium medicum*, p. 494.

¹¹⁹ J. Węglorz, *Zdrowie, choroba i leczenie*, pp. 66–67.

¹²⁰ A. Licencs, *W łóżu z Tudorami. Intymne życie dynastii*, transl. M. Loska, Kraków 2014, pp. 257–258.

¹²¹ *Compendium medicum*, p. 500.

¹²² Ibidem.

¹²³ J. Węglorz, *Zdrowie, choroba i leczenie*, p. 67.

¹²⁴ "wystrzyc [w nim] dziurkę dla tchu dziecięcia", T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, from Czartorysk, [s.a.], AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 23.

¹²⁵ D. Żołędz-Strzelczyk, *Wokół ciąży, porodu i położu w okresie staropolskim*, "Nowiny Lekarskie", 79, 2010, 2, pp. 98–107, at p. 99.

¹²⁶ B. Duden, *Historia ciała. Lekarz i jego pacjentki w osiemnastowiecznym Eisenach*, transl. and ed. J. Górny, Warszawa 2014, p. 173.

a special significance for this particular woman and a mother¹²⁷. It is not known for what reason the Princess took care to preserve them. Perhaps they were treated as a “peculiar” amulet to protect her or her children from “casting a spell” on them¹²⁸. It is known that such a practice was used in the territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth¹²⁹. Bożena Popiołek, another Polish researcher, gives an example of Teofila Lubomirska (d. 1709), the Court Marshal of the Crown, who gave friendly advice to the aforementioned Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłłowa to keep her umbilical cord after one of her child deliveries in case of having some serious skin problems. However, it is not clear what particular effect it was supposed to have on the user’s skin¹³⁰. The examples cited here confirm source accounts according to which the umbilical cord and the blood that flowed through it supposedly possessed both magical features and health benefits¹³¹. Special care was also given to the objects with which the umbilical cord was cut off. The aforementioned Anna née Mycielska *primo voto* Radziwiłłowa, Prince Radziwiłł’s second wife, reported to “Rybeńko” on the pages of one of her letters that the “the Major’s wife” should be especially rewarded due to the fact that she was the one who held the scissors, “on which a considerable amount of blood remained and which she used to cut off the umbilical cord by Weronisia’s navel”¹³². The above examples confirm that in the eighteenth century, this unique cord connecting a mother and a child was treated as a kind of amulet, which was supposed to ensure health and happiness (?) to both the mother and the child in their earthly living.

There were multiple ideas on how to prevent pregnancy loss and protect against diseases during this special time of pregnancy¹³³. Another piece of advice from Teofila, just as interesting as the ones already mentioned, concerned carrying the so-called “eagle stone” (*lapis aquilae*)¹³⁴, included in the group of aethites, that is, stones supposedly coming from eagles’ nests. Healing and magical powers were attributed¹³⁵

¹²⁷ A. Jakuboszczak, *Sarmacka dama. Barbara Sanguszkowa (1718–1791) i jej salon towarzyski*, Poznań 2008, Figs 11 and 12.

¹²⁸ W. Malinowski, *Placentofagia*, “Ginekologia i Położnictwo”, 16, 2021, 1, pp. 70–79, at p. 74.

¹²⁹ H. Biegeleisen, *Matka i dziecko w obrzędach, wierzeniach i zwyczajach ludu polskiego*, Lwów 1927, p. 64.

¹³⁰ B. Popiołek, *Kobiety świat*, pp. 183–184.

¹³¹ Witold Malinowski studied the phenomenon of placentophagia. In his findings, he pointed out the importance of the placenta and the umbilical cord (to a lesser extent) after giving birth. The researcher notes that in recent decades the interest in the placenta, especially in its consumption, has been experiencing “a real renaissance” among the Western societies, see W. Malinowski, *Placentofagia*, pp. 76–77.

¹³² A. née Mycielska *primo voto* Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, form Nesvizh, 23 October 1754, AR, IV, call no. 613, fol. 61.

¹³³ D. Żołędz-Strzelczyk, *Wokół ciąży*, p. 99. See also H. Biegeleisen, *Matka i dziecko*, pp. 64–65.

¹³⁴ *Compendium medicum*, p. 500.

¹³⁵ A. Ryś, *Aetyt – dzieje magicznych i medycznych właściwości kamienia*, in *Paradoksologia w starożytności i średniowieczu*, ed. M. Wolny, M. Chudzikowska-Wołoszyn, Olsztyn 2017, pp. 53–66, at pp. 53–54.

to such stones already in ancient times due to the existing bond between aethite and eagles, as it was believed necessary for these birds to deliver their offspring¹³⁶. The "eagle stone" was characterized by its spherical or rounded shape, while in its hollow center was a smaller loose pebble, which made a rattling sound when shaken. As Anna Ryś points out, as a rule, these stones are minerals known today as iron oxide – the brown and the red ferric¹³⁷. Supernatural properties attributed to them meant they were treated as magical amulets and were used primarily in obstetrics. Anna Tatarkiewicz points out that Roman women in a blessed state were advised to keep several aetites nearby. Each worn as an amulet was supposed to protect the fetus in the womb, prevent miscarriage, and facilitate childbirth¹³⁸. It gained popularity through the works of ancient and medieval authors. However, numerous literary works from the early modern period also described its properties and magical powers. This, as well as the tradition passed down orally, caused it that as late as the eighteenth century, it was still regarded as an amulet that protected women from miscarriage¹³⁹. Teofila, with her own experience in mind, advised her daughter to carry it under her left shoulder blade. According to her, "it is supposed to pull the fetus upward from the sacrum"¹⁴⁰. Carrying it on or under one's left shoulder was supposed to prevent miscarriages but also, when the time came, speed up labor, and ease the pains of pregnancy and childbirth¹⁴¹.

According to the research conducted by Katarzyna Brzezina, the "eagle stones" were a part of the collection gathered in the cabinet of curiosities belonging to Hieronim Florian (1715–1760), a younger brother of Michał Kazimierz. The collection was located in the Prince's residence in Biała. It must be mentioned here that most magnates of the time collected paintings, sculptures, works of artistic craftsmanship, numismatics, books, weapons, relics, as well as *artificialia* (works of human hands), *antiquitates* (objects from ancient times), *naturalia* (natural curiosities), and *mechanae* (technical devices), i.e., "curiosities" of various kinds¹⁴². In the list of *Interesting objects – living and miscellaneous*, under number 33, there was a note: "I possess eagle stones of various colors, one of which, of a white color, was lent to a lady for the time of her child delivery"¹⁴³. Unfortunately, the source material does not provide

¹³⁶ Ibidem, pp. 53–54.

¹³⁷ Ibidem, p. 54.

¹³⁸ A. Tatarkiewicz, *The 'cursus laborum' of Roman Women. Social and Medical Aspects of the Transition from Puberty to Motherhood*, London 2023, p. 115.

¹³⁹ C.N. Bromehead, *Aetites or the Eagle-stone*, "Antiquity", 21, 1947, 81, pp. 16–22; A.A. Barb, *Birds and Medical Magic. 1. The Eagle-Stone; 2. The Vulture Epistle*, "Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes", 13, 1950, 3–4, pp. 316–322.

¹⁴⁰ T. Wiśniowiecka to F.U. Radziwiłłowa, from Czartorysk, [s.a.], AR, V, call no. 17514/XIV, fol. 24.

¹⁴¹ A. Ryś, *Aetyt*, p. 60.

¹⁴² K. Brzezina, *Gabinet osobliwości Hieronima Floriana Radziwiłła w Białej*, "Studia Podlaskie", 7, 1997, pp. 5–20, at p. 7.

¹⁴³ Ibidem, p. 15.

information about the person to whom the amulet went. Perhaps it was used by the heroine of our text? This question, however, must remain unanswered. What is known is that the younger Prince Radziwiłł did not receive his stone back, which he complained about. His regret was expressed in his words: “an object voluntarily lost but of an unappreciated value”¹⁴⁴. The cited examples confirm that even in the eighteenth century, despite people’s deep faith in God, magnates still used magical healing¹⁴⁵.

Childbirth and the postpartum period belonged to a separate issue. During this time, it often turned out that excessive effort associated with giving birth to a child resulted in significant deterioration of the mother’s and the child’s health, and sometimes even led to the death of both of them¹⁴⁶.

One of the most difficult deliveries occurred on 19 January 1740, when Franciszka Urszula gave birth to a daughter, Katarzyna Karolina (1740–1789). In written sources, we can generally find laconic information, such as the Governor of Trakai writing in his diary that the labor was taking place all night. It began on 18 January and ended the next day at half past eight in the morning¹⁴⁷. However, there must have been severe complications, which we can conclude from his words: “the girl was barely brought back to life as she remained without hope for living almost for a quarter of an hour, and my wife herself was close to death”¹⁴⁸. None of the analyzed sources provides information about what happened; only Franciszka Urszula’s letters shed some light on this event.

Let us note that in one of the first epistles written to Michał Kazimierz, on 7 February, after the childbirth, she informed her husband about her “extraordinary weakness” and the fact that “I cannot rise from bed and take a step and I have not been walking yet; the doctor is healing me, you know where, and for the second day I am not in such pain anymore”¹⁴⁹. This letter, written almost three weeks after delivery, shows us a woman in postpartum, convalescing after, as we can guess, a difficult childbirth, possibly ending with a torn crotch, as evidenced by the content of the second half of the letter. The reason for such a situation was often the size of a newborn, the position of a child’s head, or prolonged labor¹⁵⁰. It is known

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁵ See: J. Węglorz, *Naukowy wymiar nowożytnych teorii medycznych i ich postrzeganie przez pryzmat racjonalności badacza jako problem poznawczy*, “Klio. Czasopismo Poświęcone Dziejom Polski i Powszechnym”, 53, 2020, 2, pp. 3–18, at pp. 7–8.

¹⁴⁶ W. Kocela, *Trudna sztuka babienia*, pp. 102–103.

¹⁴⁷ AGAD, AR, VI, call no. II-80a, fol. 1032–1033.

¹⁴⁸ “dziewszczyninę ledwo oddechuali y już ledwo nie kwadrans bez nadziei życia była y żona moja sama nie umarła”, ibidem, fol. 1032–1033.

¹⁴⁹ “stąpić nie mogę dla cieskiego poruszania, y dotąd jeszcze cale nie chodze, goji mnie Pan Doktor wiesz gdzie y przecie już drugi dzień nie tak wielki ból czuję”, F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 7 February 1740, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 661, fol. 217.

¹⁵⁰ K. Czajkowski, R. Dębski, U. Markowska et al., *Rekomendacja Zespołu Ekspertów Polskiego Towarzystwa Ginekologicznego dotyczące zapobiegania śródporodowym urazom kanału rodnego oraz struktur dna macicy*, “Ginekologia Polska”, 5, 2011, 82, pp. 27–31, at p. 28.

that the six-week postpartum period was a special time for a woman, due to her sensitivity and overall body fatigue after a great physical effort, during which a significant amount of blood was lost. Therefore, it was not uncommon for women to struggle with various ailments at that time, mainly inflammations and an extremely dangerous puerperal fever¹⁵¹. Such complications must have also occurred during Franciszka Urszula's postpartum. On 20 February, she wrote to her mother-in-law that "I still cannot get out of bed, I have unbearable pain in my womb, one side of my body is very swollen, and I still have not felt any relief from the hard labor of giving birth"¹⁵². These words of the wife of the Governor of Trakai prove that the healing process, which is determined mainly by the extent of the wound and results from the patient's predispositions (e.g., being prone to heal the wound), most probably did not proceed properly. Moreover, the Princess reported an unidentified pain in her body side, which, according to a letter written seven days later, developed "into a lump in the side" and made her unable to move her legs out of bed. The letter shows that she was also struggling with recurring bleeding, which would indicate a still-shrinking uterus or certain unspecified complications¹⁵³. Franciszka Urszula was an experienced woman aware of the dangers associated with child labor. She also knew how the postpartum period should proceed and what possible complications could occur. However, this time, the situation overwhelmed her; as she informed in her letters, she did not understand what was happening.

Franciszka strived to regain health as quickly as possible. In an epistle from 12 March, she wrote about her first attempts, "not very big ones", though, to starting walking again, and not more than over a week later, she was expressing joy at being able to move around the room¹⁵⁴. Two months had passed since the delivery, and Franciszka Urszula "got back on her feet". It was an overwhelmingly hard period for her, and she could not count on her husband's support. Instead, she had her children to care for, for whom she was responsible. Unfortunately, as she reported in the same letter, the "defect" she suffered recurred and caused "extraordinary" pain in her left body side¹⁵⁵, which she had to struggle with in the upcoming weeks¹⁵⁶. According to her correspondence, certain surgical procedures, mainly bloodletting, which were risky due to the possibility of hemorrhage¹⁵⁷ and caused severe pain afterwards, did not bring her the expected relief. Nevertheless, according to the Princess, it confirmed

¹⁵¹ W. Kocela, *Trudna sztuka babienia*, pp. 108–109.

¹⁵² "ruszyć się dotąd z łóżka nie potrafię, mając ból nieznośny w żywocie, y bok bardzo zpuchły, od ciężki pracy rodzenia dotąd żadny folgi nie czując", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Nesvizh, 20 February 1740, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 662, fol. 9.

¹⁵³ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 27 February 1740, *ibidem*, fol. 13.

¹⁵⁴ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 12 March 1740, *ibidem*, fol. 16.

¹⁵⁵ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 20 March 1740, *ibidem*, fol. 21.

¹⁵⁶ In her letter dated 6 April 1740, she wrote to her husband that she was only moving around the room, F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 6 April 1740, *ibidem*, fol. 33.

¹⁵⁷ K. Zuba, *O tym, jak "Rybeńkę" leczono*, p. 92.

some medical condition because “my blood is not like before, now there is more phlegm than blood”¹⁵⁸.

Most probably, numerous pregnancies caused Franciszka Urszula to suffer from hemorrhoidal disease, manifested by periodic bleeding from nodules that “opened”¹⁵⁹. According to the belief at the time, there was “moisture” coming out of the body, and therefore, blood was contaminated¹⁶⁰. Therefore, in addition to bleeding, the Princess experienced itching, burning and constipation¹⁶¹. All this contributed to significantly painful experiences, because as she wrote in one of her letters to “Rybeńko”: “what torments me the most is *des douleur des hemorrhoidale* [hemorrhoidal pain] so much that I almost scream”¹⁶².

Numerous activities and constant efforts to expand the family are reflected in Franciszka Urszula’s letters, where we repeatedly find evidence of her fatigue, as a result of which various paroxysms tormented her, sometimes more frequent and more violent, sometimes less. In one of the letters written in 1740, we can find very emotional words which she addressed to her husband, showing her tiredness and a certain helplessness in her illness: “save us Your Highness Benefactor, I swear that I am dying myself because I am very sick, I have a thousand and more alterities and desperations; my father is dying of fever in Biały Kamień, and I can no longer walk in the room, I have guests every day, tomorrow I am starting decoction, I am sending a messenger to my father today in a minute, I am not writing much as I suffer from head and throat ache”¹⁶³. This confession, full of pain and suffering, shows us a woman tormented not only physically but also mentally. On the one hand, she was facing her physical weakness; on the other, she was worried about the health of her beloved father, who, apart from all the ailments listed above, was struggling with cancer and his gallstone sickness¹⁶⁴ in the last months of his life. What is more,

¹⁵⁸ “nie taka krew jak pirwy, gdysz teraz więcy flegmy jak krwi”, F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 7 May 1740, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 662, fol. 35.

¹⁵⁹ M. Ciesielska, P. Ciesielski, *Historyczne metody leczenia hemoroidów*, “Nowa Medycyna”, 24, 2017, 4, pp. 171–176, at p. 172.

¹⁶⁰ B. Duden, *Historia ciała*, pp. 173–174.

¹⁶¹ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 1 XII 1741, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 662, fol. 153.

¹⁶² “najbardzi mnie dręczy *des douleur des hemoroide* [ból hemoroidalny] tak, że gwałtu prawie krzyczę”, F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 4 April 1742, ibidem, fol. 201.

¹⁶³ “ratuj nas WXMci dobrodzieju, poprzysięgam, że sama umieram, bo bardzo choruję, mam tysiąc alterancyi y desperaciej: mój ojciec umiera na frybrę w Białym Kamieniu, a ja już y po pokoju chodzić nie mogę, codziennie goście, jutro dekokt zaczynam, do ojca mego umyślnego zaraz dziś posyłam, siła nie piszę bom bardzo chora y na głowę y na garło”, F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 9 October 1740, ibidem, fol. 81.

¹⁶⁴ I. Czamańska, *Wiśniowieccy. Monografia rodu*, Poznań 2007, p. 383. Franciszka Urszula worried about her father’s health condition and often because of the saddening news about Janusz Antoni’s deteriorating health, she was weakening. In a letter written on June 20, 1740, she reported to “Rybeńko” that “when I heard the news about my father’s poor health, I fell from bad to worse

she suffered not only from the absence of her husband but also from the fact that she could not fully perform her duties as the hostess of Nesvizh. In the same letter, she explained to her husband, "I have countless guests who I receive lying in bed"¹⁶⁵. These words may indicate not only Franciszka Urszula's serious health condition but also prove her willingness to fulfill the duties assigned to her, even if it meant paying the price of her own health. Accepting guests in bed, a private space reserved for the Princess and the Prince, was certainly neither easy nor pleasant. In this way, Franciszka Urszula allowed her comfort zone to be "violated" to some extent.

At this point, we can ponder upon the causes of such dedication, and we find the answer in the same epistle. Franciszka Urszula wrote to her husband as follows: "*a tout Mon Cher Coeur pour l'amour de Die[u] et soyez, que je vous adorez seul et que le seul Amour [?] je pour vous m'aidez a supporter mes Malheur avec patience, la seul mort me rendra temoigniez que j'ay vous aimez et que je pour vous et vos enfant que je voulu vivre* [for My Dear Heart, out of love, for God and for You, I adore only You and the only Love [?] that I have for you helps to endure my suffering patiently and only death will make me testify that I loved you and that I wanted to live only for you and your children]"¹⁶⁶. The quoted words clearly show the woman's feelings for both her spouse and their children. She proved that they were her greatest love, and "Rybeńko" was her only beloved one, and he was the one for whom she tried to go through her physical pain, patiently sacrificing herself for the interest and good of her family.

Weakness and poor physical condition meant that the Princess had to give up meetings with her loved ones and, in accordance with her doctors' recommendations, was supposed to rest more and undergo various therapies recommended for the ailments that tormented her. Her medical treatments included: drinking decoction, soaking in bathtubs (especially taking formic baths that provided relief from muscle pain)¹⁶⁷, bloodletting, taking purifying medicines, or drinking *medicatum* wine. At the beginning of her married life, she did not allow herself long rest, and she was making attempts to meet "Rybeńko" as often as possible. The closeness of her husband not only gave her hope for the birth of a child but also gave her

again" ("[...] jak mi zaszła relacja o słabym zdrowiu ojca mego znowum z alternayi w recydywę gorszą wpadłam"), F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 20 June 1740, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 662, fol. 52.

¹⁶⁵ "mam gości co niemiera, których w łóżku przyjmuję", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 9 October 1740, *ibidem*, fol. 82.

¹⁶⁶ "dla całego Mojego Drogiego Serca z miłości do Boga i Ciebie, że uwielbiam tylko Ciebie i że jedyna Miłość [?], którą mam dla Ciebie, pomaga mi cierpliwie znosić moje cierpienia, tylko śmierć sprawi, że będę świadczyć, że Cię kochałam i że dla Ciebie i Twoich dzieci chciałam żyć", F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 9 October 1740, *ibidem*, fol. 81–82.

¹⁶⁷ M. Nartowski, *Kąpiele domowe*, Kraków 1902, p. 15. Elżbieta Nowosielska described the process of creating such a bath, see E. Nowosielska, *Melancholia, szaleństwo i inne "choroby głowy" w Rzeczypospolitej w XVII i XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 2021, p. 204.

a chance to build marital relations. Those were based on spending time together or sharing similar interests, as in the case of hunting, in which Franciszka Urszula took part. Her fascination with this activity is interestingly reflected in the message sent by her “Rybeńko”, which took place on 6 February 1737. Here we read what follows: “Yesterday I went to the fields and caught a living rabbit which I wanted to preserve until my Master’s arrival, but today it is *fatis cessit*”¹⁶⁸.

In another letter, Prince Radziwiłł’s wife openly wrote that “I am not looking for any other entertainments than the ones I know will be admired by Your Grace and every day I make use of a firearm and a bow and with shotguns, fusil rifles and bird-hunting rifles, therefore no one hits the target better than me and I swear to Lord that I write nothing but the truth”¹⁶⁹. This interesting record shows us a picture of a wife seeking her husband’s attention and a woman who, at least to a small extent, tried to enter the “world of male pastimes” and did all this to draw attention to herself. Interestingly, in her later years, she treated hunting and riding as a form of relaxation, which also aimed at bringing her relief from physical suffering.

Franciszka Urszula was struck with fear and uncertainty when she heard about her children’s illness, especially her sons’ health problems, and her children’s physical well-being filled her with concern and had a significant impact on her health. The Princess tried to be a mother involved in the upbringing process, however, based on one of her letters we can conclude that children’s care was a big challenge for her, especially after the death of a woman named Maliewska who was her children’s childminder: “God sees, Your Highness Mother Benefactress that I am almost losing my mind from all the trouble, especially now, after Maliewska’s death when I look after my children by myself”¹⁷⁰. From that moment on, Radziwiłłowa looked after her sick children on her own. It frequently involved having sleepless nights, taking actions to fight dangerous states of fever, curing other symptoms of various diseases, and risking contracting multiple infections, which could have been transmitted to her.

The correspondence analysis allows us to conclude that Franciszka Urszula, like her mother, easily fell ill with colds and respiratory infections. Indeed, various factors contributed to this, including unfavorable living conditions in the Nesvizh castle, especially in winter, due to its expansion during the described period. Low temperatures outside and problems with heating in the rooms in autumn and winter time must have contributed to the fact that the Princess permanently wrote about her physical weakness, various ailments, various “catarrhs”, “fevers”, or “febris”.

¹⁶⁸ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Lachwa, 6 February 1737, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 661, fol. 6.

¹⁶⁹ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Olyka, 17 May 1730, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 659, fol. 9.

¹⁷⁰ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to A. Radziwiłłowa, from Nesvizh, 3 April 1738, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 661, fol. 93. See also B. Manyś, *Being a Mother of Two Sons. Duchess Franciszka Urszula Wiśniowiecka-Radziwiłłowa’s Relationship with Her Twin Sons in the Light of Her Correspondence*, “Lietuvos istorijos metraštis”, 2024, 2, pp. 7–39, at p. 25.

It should be borne in mind that writing in a complaining manner about one's ailing health may have resulted from a specific "fashion", which was popularized among Polish noble ladies by the French aristocrats. When reporting on their suffering, they drew attention to themselves and emphasized the femininity and delicacy of their sex¹⁷¹. It is difficult to say unequivocally whether Franciszka Urszula followed these trends. We can see that it was pretty easy for her to write, at times even in great detail, on the physiological ailments that tormented her¹⁷². Such a state of affairs certainly resulted from the relationship between the spouses, which gradually took on the characteristics of a partnership.

It is worth noting that Franciszka was also struggling with some unspecified lung problem. In one of the letters she wrote: "But for the pleura that attacked me for more than a week, and almost sealed me with death the other day, I had to let blood"¹⁷³. The words of the Princess clearly show that whatever was happening to Franciszka was very dangerous. She might have been suffering from pneumonia; however, we are unable to confirm this at this stage of research.

Among various physical problems she suffered from, it is also worth noting the one from July 1740. It probably affected the upper part of her digestive tract, as evidenced by her letters written at that time when she reported that: "I am seriously ill both inside and in my throat, I have ulcers in my mouth which, when they break, blood and pus go out"¹⁷⁴. Those long-term ailments must have been extremely troublesome, as she wrote that she would rather "die than live like this"¹⁷⁵. The ulcers in her throat and mouth also contributed to a shortness of breath.

The findings presented in this article give only a partial picture of all the health issues described by one of the most important representatives of the eighteenth-century noble social class. The wealth of information contained on the pages of the correspondence written by Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłł née Wiśniowiecka reveals the multiplicity of topics related to the physical health and mental condition of the Princess and her relatives. Because we could only glimpse at them in this article, the research presented here should be treated as a starting point for further consideration of the broadly understood health of eighteenth-century magnates.

It is worth noting that Franciszka Urszula was a woman aware of her body and the ailments that were affecting it, and for her health and illness had a concrete dimension. The former she perceived as a gift of God, which had to be taken care of, while the latter she interpreted as a consequence of God's wrath, and caused anxiety

¹⁷¹ A. Jakuboszczak, *Sarmacka dama*, p. 52.

¹⁷² Cf. K. Łachacz, (...) *Pokaż całemu światu*, p. 125.

¹⁷³ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Olyka, 24 May 1730, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 659, fol. 12.

¹⁷⁴ F.U. Radziwiłłowa to M.K. Radziwiłł, from Nesvizh, 25 July 1740, AGAD, AR, IV, call no. 662, fol. 63.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, fol. 67.

and fear of possible death. Such perception often motivated the “Lady of Nesvizh” to take actions such as asking God for mercy, but also using the support of medics. The Princess always wrote about the illness of her loved ones with concern. Such a state of affairs stemmed from her worries about the future and the family’s well-being. After all, an illness “stopped” her and prevented her from performing her family and public duties, which caused various repercussions.

In the context of herself, the Princess reported on health and illness through the prism of the blessed state, which she had the opportunity to experience dozens of times¹⁷⁶. It conditioned her well-being and carried several consequences, becoming the cause of the ailments that afflicted her (both during its duration and after the deliveries). In the period we analyzed, she experienced a permanent struggle to bring children into the world. It was often the pretext for writing about her well-being, health, or ailments to her husband and mother-in-law, who took a keen interest in it. We can conclude that Princess Radziwiłł knew well that a body free of pain and weakness, in which there is a balance of fluids, is a fertile body, and this was what she cared most about¹⁷⁷.

Descriptions of good health or specific ailments which tormented her, growing in number with each passing year, should be read as a kind of code that constituted an assurance of readiness to give birth to a child, or as the efforts made to bear and bring forth alive the “God’s gift” or the “fruit of life”. Hence, both the Princess and, as it turns out, her mother tried to prevent the misfortune by praying to God and all the Saints, as well as using the knowledge and support of doctors (mainly surgeons from Leipzig, Danzig, and Dresden) or even reaching out for magical and supernatural forces.

The state of medical knowledge at the time emphasized the balance of fluids circulating through the body – the so-called humors. In this context, the priority was removing the moisture, which was understood as harmful. The procedures to which the Princess was subjected (usually phlebotomy) and various types of medicine she took were intended to cleanse and remove the bad fluid which was spreading through the body, which could lead to its “clogging” and result in rhinitis, nodules, or rashes. Its presence caused the onset of ailments, which the Princess had to deal with almost daily. As she struggled with her illnesses, she fought not only for her well-being but, which was even more important, for her body that would enable her to fulfill the responsibilities of a wife, a host, and a mother.

Translated by Julia Łapińska

¹⁷⁶ See I. Maciejewska, *Niespełnione marzenie o potomku Magdaleny i Hieronima Radziwiłłów. Jak opisać bolesny problem*, “*Analecta. Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Nauki*”, 29, 2020, 2, pp. 97–113, at p. 98.

¹⁷⁷ B. Duden, *Historia ciała*, p. 49.

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