

Tomasz Wiślicz  
Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute  
of History  
Polish Academy of Sciences  
ORCID: 0000-0001-9621-457X

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# The Life and Legend of Zelman Wolfowicz<sup>1</sup>

## Historiography

Zelman Wolfowicz is one of those wealthy and powerful Jews from the times of the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, who drew historians' attention as early as in the nineteenth century. However, the figure of Wolfowicz stands out from others, such as Szmul Zbytkower and Mendel Izaakowicz, in two respects: firstly, nobody had a single good word to say about him<sup>2</sup>, and secondly, the memory of his exploits probably survived in local folk legend until he came to the attention of historians. Perhaps it was the influence of this folk legend, or perhaps the fact that interest in Zelman was too early and too non-critical, that caused him to function in historiography in a mystified way, so it is not straightforward now to distinguish between legendary and historical elements in his biography. We must also not forget that the story of Zelman Wolfowicz, a bad tenant of the Drohobycz starostess, supported by source materials found in the municipal archives, not only shaped the image of Drohobycz's history at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century, but also contributed to the construction of Polish, Ukrainian and to some extent also Jewish ethnic identity. The contemporary historian is therefore faced with the task of distinguishing historical threads from the fictional narrative about the man.

As far as literature on Zelman Wolfowicz is concerned, the first publication about him appeared as early as 1856 in *Przewodnik*, a supplement to the *Dziennik*

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- 1 This article has been prepared as part of a grant project by the National Research Centre of Poland (NCN) 2015/17/B/HS3/02850 "Zelman Wolfowicz and his rule in the Drohobycz demesne in the mid-eighteenth century."
  - 2 In this respect, Zelman Wolfowicz most closely resembles Icek Ognisty, a factor from Międzybóž, who became the hero of Moshe Rosman's studies: M. Rosman, "»Przywódcy«, »Elita« i »Lud« w Międzybożu około roku 1730", [in:] *Żydzi w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. by A. Link-Lenczowski, Tomasz Polański, Wrocław 1991, pp. 170–179.

*Literacki* journal published in Polish in Lviv<sup>3</sup>. This anonymous publication reflected an unequivocally negative interpretation of Zelman's history, and contained editions of two judicial documents related to his trial at Drohobycz's joint castle and reeve court in June 1755, including his death sentence. A decade later in 1867, a slightly fuller version of the story of Zelman was included in a description of Drohobycz, presented by Venedykt Ploshchansky in the Russian-language scientific journal of the Galician-Ruthenian Society (*Galitsko-ruskaia matitsa*), published in Lviv<sup>4</sup>. Important additions to our knowledge were also made by Izydor Szaraniewicz in his 1875 book entitled *A glimpse at the benefices of the Ruthenian Church in the times of the Polish Commonwealth* (*Rzut oka na beneficja Kościoła Ruskiego za czasów Rzeczypospolitej polskiej*)<sup>5</sup>. Since that time, Zelman has appeared quite regularly in local historical studies on Drohobycz, published both in Polish as well as Ukrainian and Russian.

The first publication devoted exclusively to this figure was an article by Dmytro Vinckovskij entitled *Zelman Wolfowicz*, which was published in Russian by the abovementioned Ploshchanskij in his series entitled *Prikarpatskaia Rus'* in 1885<sup>6</sup>. This chapter consisted mainly of source editions, including of course Zelman's death sentence in 1755. In 1896, the Polish-language, Lviv-based newspaper *Gazeta Narodowa* published the most extensive study to date (44 pages long) on Zelman Wolfowicz, written by a teacher from the high school in Drohobycz, Franciszek Zych, which later appeared as a separate print<sup>7</sup>.

Twelve years later, Zelman became the subject of a fictionalised historical sketch by the prominent historian Majer Bałaban entitled *Zelman, burmistrz kahału w Drohobyczu*, which first appeared in the Lviv illustrated weekly magazine *Nasz Kraj* in 1909, and later also in translations into Hebrew and Yiddish<sup>8</sup>. Comprehensive research on Zelman Wolfowicz was carried out by Bałaban's student Jakub Wikler, who in 1936 wrote his master's thesis entitled *Z dziejów Żydów w Drohobyczu (Od roku 1648 do upadku Rzeczypospolitej)*<sup>9</sup>. Extensive excerpts from this work were

3 "Zelman drohobycki", *Przewodnik*, 1856, No. 47, 48, and 49.

4 Venedykt Ploshchanskii, "Drohobych, po chasti istorii, topografii i statistiki", *Naukovyi sbornik, izdavaemyi literaturnym obshchestvom Galitsko-ruskoï Matitsy*, Y. 3, Nos. 1–4, 1867, pp. 172–173.

5 Izydor Szaraniewicz, *Rzut oka na beneficja Kościoła Ruskiego za czasów Rzeczypospolitej polskiej pod względem historyi, a przedewszystkiem o stosunku świeckiego duchowieństwa ruskiego w Galicyi do ziemi w tym okresie*, Lvov 1875, pp. 55–57.

6 Dmytro Vinckovskii, "Zel'man Vol'fovich" [in:] *Prikarpatskaia Rus'*, ed. by V. Ploshchanskii, Lvov 1885, Vol. 2, pp. 30–47.

7 Franciszek Zych, *Zelman Wolfowicz*, Lwów 1896.

8 Majer Bałaban, "Zelman, burmistrz kahału w Drohobyczu. Szkic historyczny", *Nasz Kraj*, 1909, No. 1–2; Majer Bałaban, *Z historii Żydów w Polsce*, Warszawa 1920, pp. 129–146.

9 Jakub Wikler, "Z dziejów Żydów w Drohobyczu (Od roku 1648 do upadku Rzeczypospolitej). Promotor: Prof. Majer Bałaban", Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, master's thesis written before 1939, Vol. 117/36.

only published in 1969<sup>10</sup>, but it was consulted by Nathan Gelber when he prepared the historical part of Drohobycz and Borislav's memorial book, published in 1959<sup>11</sup>.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, local interest in the figure of Zelman Wolfowicz was renewed in Drohobycz, which was reflected in the articles on Zelman Wolfowicz and his legend published by Igor Smolskyi, Leonid Tymoshenko and Oleh Stetsiuk in the Drohobycz and Lviv journals<sup>12</sup>.

It should also be mentioned that ethnographic research on the ritual song "Jedzie, jedzie Zelman", which had been erroneously linked to the figure of Zelman Wolfowicz, developed simultaneously with the historiography. A summary of this trend was recently outlined by Zbigniew Jasiewicz<sup>13</sup>.

Despite the apparently large number of studies on Zelman Wolfowicz, historical research on him requires considerable deepening. Above all, existing studies are based almost exclusively on the repeatedly published Zelman's death sentence of 1755, ignoring other types of quite numerous archival records about this figure.

These other sources were obviously known to researchers, but they were not fully utilised, apparently as unattractive or as not bringing anything new to the constructed image of Zelman. Additionally, it cannot be concealed that historians also played a role in the creation of Zelman's legend, as they lovingly and not always disinterestedly focused on sensational threads in his history, frequently confirming directly anti-Semitic stereotypes. Moreover, even in the archival record about Zelman, it is occasionally difficult to separate the truth from gossip and fantasy, so it is necessary to approach them with particular precaution and with the methodological tools that have developed during the last few decades of analysing pre-modern, judicial sources.

This article is intended to provide an initial overview of a new approach to the historical narrative of Zelman Wolfowicz, with which I will try to reconstruct Zelman's biography on the basis of a critical analysis of historical sources, and then show the modes in which his legend was created, both during his lifetime and in later writings about him. Finally, I will outline a systemic explanation of his role in the social history of the Drohobycz region.

- 10 Jakub Wikler, "Z dziejów Żydów w Drohobyczu (od r. 1648 do upadku Rzeczypospolitej)", *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, No. 71-72, 1969, pp. 38-63.
- 11 Nathan Michael Gelber, "The History of the Jews of Drohobycz" [in:] *Memorial to the Jews of Drohobycz, Borislav*, ed. by N.M. Gelber, Tel Aviv 1959. English translation by Dov Youngerman and Yocheved Klausner, ed. by Valerie Schatzker, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/drohobycz/dro011.html#f11-48> (accessed, 5 I 2020).
- 12 Ihor Smol's'kyi, "Zel'man Vol'fovych (shtrykhy do biohrafii)", *Drohobyts'kyi kraïeznavchyi zbirnyk*, Vol. 3, 1998, pp. 234-240; Leonid Tymoshenko, "Opysy Drohobycha 19 st.", *Drohobyts'kyi kraïeznavchyi zbirnyk*, Vol. 7, 2003, pp. 552-561; Oleh Stetsiuk, "Zel'man" [in:] *Drahanivs'ki chytannia VIII*, Drohobycz 2013, pp. 5-18; idem, "Lehenda pro drohobyts'koho upyra", *Nezalezhnyi kul'turolohichnyi chasopys „I”*. Vol. 7, 2013.
- 13 Zbigniew Jasiewicz, "Pieśń i gra obrzędowa »Zelman« u Oskara Kolberga i innych. Materiały i interpretacje", *Lud*, Vol. 101, 2017, pp. 279-303.

## Biography

Who was Zelman Wolfowicz? His Jewish name was Zalman ben Ze'ev. He was born in the town of Drohobycz probably around 1680, although some sources incorrectly claim 1711<sup>14</sup>. He died in 1757, of which we can be certain. Historical sources describe him as a furrier from a poor family, although furriery was one of the most profitable crafts of that period. In any case, he was unlikely to have come from Drohobycz's Jewish elite.

It is not known how he gained the trust of the Starost of Drohobycz, Stanisław Chomętowski, the Field Hetman of the Polish Crown, and his wife Dorota from the Tarło family. In the 1720s, he became a factor of the Starost and supervised the production of salt in some of the Starost's salt mines.

Zelman first appeared in the archival records of Drohobycz in 1728 as a factor of the Starost<sup>15</sup>; however, it should be noted that the Drohobycz court books only go back to 1725. A year later, in 1729, he was reportedly tried for the first time before Drohobycz's criminal court, which sentenced him to be expelled from the town in shame and his property confiscated<sup>16</sup>. We do not know the text of the verdict, nor are we sure of the reasons for it. However, we know why the verdict is lost and this will be discussed later.

Nevertheless, a record from the beginning of the following year has survived, in which Zelman, who then lived in the Drohobycz demesne, had been subject to an attack by other Jews from Drohobycz, and was beaten in the forest in an attempt, he claimed, to deprive him of his life<sup>17</sup>. In 1732, the new Starost of Drohobycz, Adam Tarło, who had become the new husband of the recently widowed Dorota Chomętowska, passed sentence on the assailants. In his verdict, Zelman was again described as a factor and leaseholder of Drohobycz, which means that he had returned to the town with his previous standing<sup>18</sup>.

From then until the end of his rule in 1755, Zelman Wolfowicz was the most powerful non-nobleman in the town and indeed the entire demesne. He supervised the production of salt, collected taxes, enforced various charges, and intervened in local government and the functioning of the town's trade. In this he was able to count on the support of the Starostess Dorota Tarło and her administrators in the town. His ruthlessness in enforcing taxes and other financial charges, as well as striving to dominate all economic activity in the demesne, brought him into conflict with both the Christian and Jewish populations of the estate. He was particularly disliked by his fellow believers, who since the memorable attack of 1730 tried to get rid of him by various means: by arranging an armed ambush and by hiring Ukrainian witches

14 N. M. Gelber, *op. cit.*; Oleh Steśiuk, "Zel'man Vol'fovych" [in:] *Drogopedia* 4 VIII 2012, [https://dro-e.blogspot.com/2012/08/blog-post\\_8210.html](https://dro-e.blogspot.com/2012/08/blog-post_8210.html) (accessed, 5 I 2020).

15 Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine in Lviv (henceforward as: CDIAUL), fond 29/1, Vol. 7, fol. 67v.

16 V. Stefanyk Lviv Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (henceforward as: LNNB), fond 5/1, Vol. 2901/II, p. 105.

17 CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 7, fol. 135v–136.

18 CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 11, fol. 91v–92v.

to kill him with magic<sup>19</sup>. Zelman himself tried to subjugate the Jewish community by violently settling his son as the rabbi of Drohobycz, and then taking the post of an elder of *kahal*, for whom he was elected in 1752 with pressure from the administrator of the demesne<sup>20</sup>.

The conflict with the burghers of Drohobycz (or at least some of them) lead to the townspeople accusing him before the royal court, the Court of the Assessors. According to this court's practice, a special commission was sent to the demesne to examine the case on the spot. Awaiting its proceedings in 1753, riots broke out among the local Jews in Drohobycz<sup>21</sup>. The causes of the violence are unclear, although it is likely that the patience of the local Jews with Zelman and his supporters was tested to destruction in the face of the investigation by the royal court.

Unfortunately, we do not know the findings of the Court of the Assessors because all of its records were destroyed during the Second World War, including the Zelman case, but the royal verdict undoubtedly agreed with Zelman's adversaries and ordered his arrest. He was then brought before the joint court of the Starost and the reeve of the town, his accusers being the burghers of Drohobycz, represented by the town's elite. Almost all of our knowledge of the abuses that Zelman was supposed to have committed comes from the surviving justification of his death sentence, which this court passed on 9 June 1755<sup>22</sup>. This document was edited and published several times by local historians over 100 years ago<sup>23</sup> and is still the most frequently quoted source of information about the various crimes that Zelman was supposed to have committed. Even without a detailed historical analysis, it is evident that the justification of the judgment repeated many mere rumours that were circulating about Zelman, his activities and his alleged wealth.

However, the death sentence against Zelman was not carried out. Zelman saved himself by converting to Christianity (Roman Catholicism) and, newly baptised under the name Jędrzej Obaczyński, he was imprisoned in the Carmelite monastery in Drohobycz, where he died two years later.

This is how his biography can be reconstructed on the basis of judicial and administrative sources from the era.

### Legend

From the very beginning of his biography, both during his lifetime and after his death, Zelman Wolfowicz, an undoubtedly existent historical figure, was the hero of numerous legends. Some were created during his lifetime, others after his death, in which the authors who had written about him since the end of the nineteenth century, including Majer Bałaban, also had an unquestionable share. Below I describe some of the most interesting of these legends.

19 CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 11, fol. 69–71v.

20 I. Szaraniewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–56.

21 CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 10, pp. 735–738.

22 LNNB fond 5/1, Vol. 2901/II, pp. 106–111.

23 Among others by D. Vintskovskii, *op. cit.*, and F. Zych, *op. cit.*



Let us start with the mysterious trial before the town court in 1729, when Zelman Wolfowicz was expelled from Drohobycz. All of the details we know about this case come from the above-mentioned hearing against Zelman, which ended with the death sentence passed upon him in June 1755<sup>24</sup>. This verdict reminded everyone that in 1729, Zelman had already been tried for poisoning the Starost of Drohobycz, Stanisław Chomętowski, who actually died in this town in 1728. Later, after Zelman returned to power, the sentence was to be removed from the town records on his order and destroyed. The town records from that period were fortunately preserved, but they do not show any trace of this type of damage, nor do they show any interruption in the continuity of the records kept. Perhaps, however, there also existed other town records at that time which did not survive to the present. However, if Zelman Wolfowicz were really convicted of poisoning the Starost before the court of Drohobycz, such a mild sentence—exile from the town—would seem very unlikely. A Jew who had been accused of killing a nobleman, his own master and the army leader of the entire Crown of the Kingdom of Poland, would have had no chance of survival. In addition, the reason why Zelman would wish to kill his employer, protector and guarantor of his position in the demesne remains wholly unclear. The later legend made Zelman the lover of Chomętowski's wife, Dorota<sup>25</sup>. This adds to the romantic tension in the entire story, and may somehow explain Zelman's deed, but it does not find any confirmation in the sources, and it is also simply highly improbable. Nevertheless, it might explain not only Zelman's alleged assassination of Chomętowski, but also Zelman's attachment to Dorota Tarło, who supported him continuously, both after her first husband's death and during her second marriage to Adam Tarło, as well as later, when after her husband's premature death in a duel, she ruled Drohobycz demesne as a widow for more than a decade<sup>26</sup>. This support might be more simply—and less romantically—explained: perhaps Zelman ensured the efficient collection of income from the domain for Dorota Tarło? Zelman's fall, his trial before the royal court, and his death sentence, however, chronologically coincide with Dorota's loss of the domain to Wacław Rzewuski (1754) and her death only two years later in 1756. She seems to have been a special protector of Zelman, and the new Starost decided to satisfy his opponents in both the Christian and Jewish communities of the town and the district.

Another legend about Zelman—to the creation of which historians and ethnographers undoubtedly contributed—is to identify Zelman Wolfowicz with a certain personage called Zelman who appeared in a popular Ukrainian *Haivka* song called *Jedzie, jedzie Zelman* ("Zelman is Coming, Coming"). A *Haivka* is a type of folk song accompanying a ritual game, and in the nineteenth century many recorders of Ukrainian folklore, including Oskar Kolberg, found and noted the *Haivka* about Zelman. At that time, the song was interpreted as proof that the Polish nobility rented Orthodox or Uniate churches to Jews, who were supposed to earn income from making them available to the faithful (Ukrainian peasants) for godly

24 LNNB fond 5/1, Vol. 2901/II, p. 105.

25 See: N. M. Gelber, *op. cit.*, M. Bataban, *Z historii Żydów w Polsce...*, p. 134.

26 Urszula Kosińska, "Adam Tarło", *PSB*, Vol. 52, 2017–2019, pp. 256–261.

service<sup>27</sup>. This problem aroused lively discussion among Ukrainian historians, although Mykhailo Hrushevsky considered it a myth<sup>28</sup>. At the same time, due to the discovery of Zelman Wolfowicz, who became the hero of the above mentioned publications in Polish and Ukrainian, the Zelman of the ritual song was conflated with the historical Zelman Wolfowicz, and the *Haivka* is still quoted as evidence of the transition of the historical figure into Ukrainian folklore<sup>29</sup>. The debate on this subject was recently summed up by Zbigniew Jasiewicz<sup>30</sup>, who demonstrated again that there are no grounds to associate the Zelman from the *Haivka* with Zelman Wolfowicz. The song probably appeared before Wolfowicz upset the inhabitants of the Drohobycz demesne, and several variants of the song can also be found in the folklore of other Slavic countries. In addition, from the end of the nineteenth century comes a fantastic concept developed by Omelian Partytskyi, who sees in this folkloristic Zelman a pre-Christian deity taken over by the Pra-Ukrainians from the ancient Getae people, and in the accompanying game (which has the character of social or wedding entertainment, according to ethnographic records), reminiscences of a pagan sacrificial ceremony<sup>31</sup>. This concept was recently recalled by Viktor Davydiuk<sup>32</sup>.

Another legendary theme of Zelman Wolfowicz is his relationship with the supernatural world. During his trial, Zelman was accused of exploiting magic for his own benefit. He was said to have kept witches or diviners hidden in his house, with whose help he secured his prosperity and tried to harm other people<sup>33</sup>. It should be added that Zelman's Jewish opponents also hired a Ukrainian witch from the mountain village of Libuchora to harm Zelman after their failed attack on him with firearms<sup>34</sup>. However, we have no evidence that either Zelman or his enemies were considered to have achieved their goals with witchcraft. Zelman once again became a hero, or rather an object of magical practices, after his demise. Soon after his death (after conversion to Catholicism, he was called Jędrzej Obaczynski), a rumour spread in Drohobycz that Zelman had become a vampire and roamed the town in the night. Scared townspeople supposedly exhumed his body and drowned it in a salty pond in Drohobycz. We do not know what the source of this story is, but Venedykt

27 See: D. Vin̄tskovskii, *op. cit.*, p. 46; Raimund Friedrich Kaindl, *Kleine Studien*, Czernowitz 1893; Il'ya Galant, "Arendovali li evrei pravoslavnye tserkvi na Ukraine?", *Evreiskaia starina*, Vol. 1, 1909, pp. 81–87; Włodzimierz Reszetucha, "O znaczeniu i pochodzeniu haiki »Zelman«", *Sprawozdania Towarzystwa Naukowego we Lwowie*, Vol. 10, 1930, No. 1, pp. 11–14.

28 Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Istoriia Ukraïny-Rusy*, Vol. VIII, chapter VIII, p. 5, footnote 28, online edition <http://litopys.org.ua/hrushrus/iur80805.htm> (accessed, 5 I 2020).

29 For example, Mykola Andriichuk, "Ukraïns'kyi fol'klor pro ievreïstvo", *Ukraïnoznnavstvo*, 2012, No. 1, p. 144.

30 Z. Jasiewicz, *op. cit.*

31 Omelian Partytskyi, "Verkhovni bozhestva nashoho kraïu (Z ystorychnykh studiï)", *Dilo* 11 VI 1890; 12 VI 1890; 13 VI 1890; 14 VI 1890, online <https://zbruc.eu/node/37562> (accessed, 5 I 2020).

32 Viktor Davydiuk, "Mifolohichni personazhi v ihrovomu fol'klori Ukraïntsiiv", *Literatura. Fol'klor. Problemy poetyky*, Vol. 35, 2011, pp. 155–170.

33 LNNB fond 5/1, Vol. 2901/II, p. 108.

34 CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 11, fol. 69–71v.

Ploshchansky was the first to write it down in 1867, referring to “folk beliefs”<sup>35</sup>. This way of dealing with the body of a hated tyrant, however, seems quite probable in 1757. At that time, information about the desecration of the bodies of alleged vampires in southern Poland appeared frequently in source records, and in 1754 vampires were published on the pages of a very popular old Polish encyclopaedia called *Nowe Ateny* by Benedykt Chmielowski<sup>36</sup>. It was not until 1762 that the synod of the Catholic diocese of Kyiv issued the first ban on the desecration of the corpses of alleged vampires<sup>37</sup>. In 1768, the personal physician of Empress Maria Theresa, Gerard Van Swieten, after thorough empirical research in Moravia, completely rejected claims of the real existence of vampires<sup>38</sup>, and a few years later his opinion was transferred to Poland by Jan Bohomolec<sup>39</sup>.

### Zelman’s system of power

What lies between legend and historical fact is a phenomenon that can be called Zelman’s system of power. Zelman’s informal rule over the entire demesne, as described by authors who dealt with the figure of Zelman, was not subjected to any criticism in their descriptions. Practically, they limited themselves to rewriting the charges from the death sentence issued by the court on 9 June 1755, in which Zelman was described, in accordance with the requirements of the death sentence justification, as an omnipotent individual, and at the same time abhorrent, who enjoyed breaking all laws. The lack of reflection on the credibility of these accusations is, in my opinion, due to the justification of the sentence being in line with the anti-Semitic stereotype of the insidious and power-hungry Jew, which functioned freely at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The figure of Zelman seemed to confirm this stereotype historically, in a similar manner as Joseph Süß Oppenheimer for Germany<sup>40</sup>. An additional reason for accepting the accusations as true was that the authors knew that Zelman had finally been baptised, i.e. became, in an anti-Semitic stereotype, the most deceptive type of Jew.

What were the particular elements of this legend? Firstly, Zelman allegedly subordinated all legitimate authorities in the demesne to himself: the noble administrators of the estate depended on him; it happened that they held courts in his house and consulted Zelman before passing a sentence. He also took control of

35 V. Ploshchanskiĭ, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

36 Benedykt Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny*, Vol. 3, Lwów 1754, pp. 247–256.

37 *Decretales Summorum Pontificum pro Regno Poloniae et constitutiones Synodorum Provincialium et Dioecesarum Regni ejusdem ad summam collectae*, ed by. Z. Chodyński, E. Likowski, Vol. 2, Posnaniae 1882, p. 228.

38 Gerard van Swieten, *Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster: nebst einem Anhang vom Vampyrismus*, Augsburg 1768. See also: Gabor Klaniczay, “Decline of Witches and Rise of Vampires in 18th Century Habsbourg Monarchy”, *Ethnologia Europea*, Vol. 17, 1987, pp. 165–180.

39 Jan Bohomolec, *Diabeł w swojej postaci z okazji pytania Jesli są upiory, Ukazany przez Xiędza Jana Bohomolca Soc. Jesu, Nauk wyzwolonych Doktora y Teologii Professora*, Warszawa 1772.

40 See: Yair Mintzker, *The Many Deaths of Jew Süß: The Notorious Trial and Execution of an Eighteenth-Century Court Jew*, Princeton 2017.



establishing municipal, guild and rural authorities, and those who wanted to become members of local authorities had to pay Zelman a bribe. In the positions of the reeves of suburban and rural communities, he kept the worst drunkards, in order to make it easier to charge the communities for the costs of propination (the right to distil and distribute spirits). Secondly, a serious statement Zelman made against the feudal order was the enforcement of the suburban dwellers to do the corvée work for his benefit, both in agricultural as well as in artisanal work and transport. Another breach of the feudal norm was Zelman taking over the leadership of the city's military defence when it was threatened by a gang of robbers under the leadership of a certain Oleksa Dovbush. In organising the defence of Drohobycz, Zelman introduced military discipline, gave orders to armed townsmen and punished citizens for negligence. Finally, he supposedly also set up his own armed guard, composed of Jews, whose task was to intimidate resistance and collect outstanding debts, not only from other Jews but also from the Christian population of the demesne<sup>41</sup>.

However, all of these accusations contain little specific information, which occasionally gives the impression that we are dealing with the repetition of anonymous rumours. Evidence of Zelman's real influence on the local administration, however, is provided by two verdicts of Drohobycz's municipal court. The first is when Zelman led a nobleman named Lewandowski to be sentenced and executed, for he stole a few metres of silk from Zelman's son-in-law's shop. It is said that Zelman insisted on sending the thief to the gallows despite petitions from the administrators of the demesne, the town council and the clergy of both rites<sup>42</sup>. The second case is a verdict issued by the municipal court of Drohobycz on the guilt of two Jews from one of the villages of the demesne for ritual murder in 1752<sup>43</sup>. At a time when blood libel accusations were flourishing in Poland<sup>44</sup>, and when everyone accused of it could expect at least torture at court, the magistrate of Drohobycz released the defendants, citing a papal decree prohibiting Catholics from blaming Jews for such crimes<sup>45</sup>, and severely punished the accusers as a warning to all who thought of making similar accusations. The course of this case clearly differs from other judgements of that time in cases of blood libel. It might be suspected that the final shape of the court proceedings and judgment in this case was influenced by Zelman himself.

However, from reading all of the preserved documents from the town of Drohobycz during the nearly 30-year period of Zelman Wolfowicz's rule in the demesne,

41 All this was a part of his accusation: LNNB fond 5/1, Vol. 2901/II, pp. 106–111.

42 *Ibidem*, p. 110.

43 CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 11, fol. 73–73v.

44 Zenon Guldón, Jacek Wijaczka, *Procesy o mordy rytualne w Polsce w XVI–XVIII w.*, Kielce 1995; *Ritual Murder: Legend in European History*, ed. by S. Buttaroni, S. Musiał, Kraków 2003; Michael Ostling, "Imagined Crimes, Real Victims: Hermeneutical Witches and Jews in Early Modern Poland" [in:] *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond. New Histories of an Old Accusation*, ed. by E. M. Avrutin, J. Dekel-Chen, R. Weinberg, Bloomington 2017, pp. 18–38.

45 It is not clear what decree was referred to, because it took place several years before Jakub Selek's delegation to Rome and before the Cardinal Lorenzo Ganganelli's Memorandum was issued.

it can in fact be concluded that Zelman's power did not rely on behind-the-scenes influence on official authorities or demonstrations of power, but on the skilful corruption of influential members of local communities. This is shown by the quite unique practice, introduced in the town during Zelman's rule, of regulating the places where stalls were set up during fairs in the town. The location of a stall was very profitable for the owner of the house in front of which the stall was placed. In Zelman's death sentence in 1755, the inhabitants of Drohobycz complained that Zelman ordered stallholders to place themselves under his houses and those of his relatives<sup>46</sup>. However, we have annual decisions to set up the stalls, as they were entered in the town records under Zelman's rule. They show that many of the inhabitants of Drohobycz also benefited from the fact that the stalls were rearranged every year<sup>47</sup>. We can suspect that the town elite, if enjoying good relations with Zelman, also benefited from his powerful rule in the demesne and was willing to turn a blind eye to his abuses.

This seems to be confirmed by the circumstances of Zelman's trial at the royal court. In the oft-quoted death sentence on Zelman, the elite of the town appeared as a party and unanimously represented the town in the dispute with him. However, shortly after Zelman's death, a trial took place between the town and one of its significant citizens, Kazimierz Wróblowski. The town council accused him of being the engine of opposition against the omnipotence of Zelman Wolfowicz and of exposing the town to high costs when conducting the case before the royal court, to which Wróblowski personally travelled as a delegate of Drohobycz. Not wanting to compensate him for his expenses, the town council found him guilty of social unrest (i.e. the overthrow of Zelman's authority), unnecessary expenses, and of being disobedient to the authorities. Ultimately, however, the town court decided not to punish him "by exhorting him to behave better in the future"<sup>48</sup>.

This strange verdict proves that Zelman could count on the support, or at least on the indifference, of the town's elite and that, contrary to the arguments in the justification for the death sentence, the townsfolk did not necessarily feel his rule to have been a nuisance. It was the obstinacy of Kazimierz Wróblowski that led to the overthrow of Zelman's rule, probably in alliance with the new Starost. Thus, the image of Zelman Wolfowicz as evil incarnate, which dominates the works on the subject, should be treated critically and the wider social phenomena and systems of dependencies which enabled his rule in the domain for several decades should be analysed more closely.

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46 LNNB fond 5/1, Vol. 2901/II, pp. 110.

47 For example, regulations from 1737, 1741, and 1748: CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 9, pp. 131–132 and pp. 290–291; CDIAUL, fond 29/1, Vol. 11, fol. 27–29v.

48 LNNB, fond 5/1, Vol. 2901/II, pp. 270–271.

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### **Tomasz Wiślicz – Life and Legend of Zelman Wolfowicz**

This article focuses on the legend of Zelman Wolfowicz in *statu nascendi*; that is, in the case files of his hearing at the royal commissioners' court, as well as in other judicial records. Those documents provide us with many details about Zelman's life, but also contain stereotypes and fantasy. It is not possible to definitively sort fact from fiction in the life story of Zelman Wolfowicz, but we can analyse how his legend was created during his life as well as in later years, in ethnography, historiography, and the popular press of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. This article discusses the existing historiography of Zelman Wolfowicz and then tries to reconstruct his biography on the basis of historical sources, by separating legendary threads from historical data. The legendary aspects are the subject of a separate analysis in the subsequent section. Finally, an attempt is made to explain the way in which Zelman Wolfowicz came to his position in the royal estate and how he succeeded in exercising his informal power for such a long time.

**Keywords:** Early Modern Drohobycz, Zelman Wolfowicz, folklore, vampirism