

<https://doi.org/10.18778/1644-857X.25.01.05>

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Michał Radziwiłł – a Biographical Sketch of the Last Owner of the Przygodzice and Antonin Estates

STRESZCZENIE

Ostatni ordynat przygodzicki Michał Radziwiłł – szkic biograficzny

Artykuł przybliży losy Michała Radziwiłła, ostatniego ordynata na Przygodzicach, postaci tyleż intrygującej, co kontrowersyjnej. Jego poczynania, szeroko opisywane w prasie okresu międzywojennego, doprowadziły do trwającego przez większość życia konfliktu z resztą arystokratycznego rodu oraz polskimi władzami państwowymi. Na podstawie źródeł archiwalnych (w tym akt Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej i korespondencji w sprawach prawnych) autor analizuje kryzys finansowy ordynacji przygodzickiej, skutkujący wprowadzeniem sądowego zarządu przymusowego, oraz kulisy spraw o bigamię i próby ubezwłasnowolnienia księcia. Ważnym elementem artykułu jest ukazanie postawy Michała Radziwiłła podczas II wojny światowej – jego jednoznacznego opowiedzenia się po stronie niemieckiej, próby zapisu majątku Adolfowi Hitlerowi oraz starań o uznanie jego niemieckiej narodowości. Tekst weryfikuje dotychczasowe ustalenia biograficzne, ukazując proces marginalizacji i narastania negatywnej oceny społecznej działalności ostatniego ordynata Przygodzic.

Słowa kluczowe: Michał Radziwiłł, Ołyka, Przygodzice, Radziwiłłowie, historia arystokracji, ziemiaństwo, zarząd przymusowy, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, II wojna światowa, okupacja niemiecka



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Funding information: not applicable. **Conflicts of interests:** none. **Ethical considerations:** the authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication. **Declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** not used

Received: 2025-08-29. Verified: 2025-09-01. Reviewed: 2026-03-14. Accepted: 2026-04-13

ABSTRACT

This article examines the life of Prince Michał Radziwiłł, the last holder of the Przygodzice entail, a figure as compelling as he was controversial. His conduct, widely documented by the press of the interwar period, left him estranged from members of his aristocratic family for the greater part of his life and in constant conflict with the Polish state authorities. Utilizing archival sources (including records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Second Polish Republic and legal correspondence), the author analyzes the economic decline of the Przygodzice entail, which resulted in the judicial imposition of compulsory administration, alongside the prince's bigamy law proceedings and family-led incapacitation attempts. An important element of the study is Radziwiłł's conduct during World War II – notably his unequivocal siding with Nazi Germany, his attempts to bequeath his estates to Adolf Hitler, and his efforts to be officially recognized as a German national. The paper revisits and expands existing biographical data, contextualizing the social marginalization and ultimate negative public assessment of the last *ordynat* of Przygodzice.

Keywords: Michał Radziwiłł, Olyka, Przygodzice, the Radziwiłłs, history of the aristocracy, landowners, compulsory administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, World War II, German occupation

The biography of Prince Michał Radziwiłł (1870–1954), known as ‘Rudy’ (‘the Red’) is already relatively well documented. His life, punctuated with scandals, attracted intense press scrutiny during the interwar period and was subsequently chronicled in several accounts¹. Therefore, the purpose of this text is to supplement this existing body of literature with finer details derived from newly discovered archival records, press reports, and memoirs² to clarify the facts of his personal life. Although he remained detached from political affairs during those years, his high social standing and unconventional lifestyle brought him widespread recognition, along with much censure. He frequently became embroiled in disputes with both close and distant relatives³, while

¹ For example: W. Banach, *Radziwiłłowie. Burzliwe losy słynnego rodu*, Poznań 2018, pp. 433–479; D.J. Peśła, *Antonin i Radziwiłłowie* [unpublished typescript of the book], Dębica 2002, pp. 86–91; E. Wanke, *Ferdynand książę Radziwiłł (1834–1926). Życie i działalność*, Warszawa–Bellerive-sur-Allier 2021, pp. 66–68, 70, 72, 74, 77, 104, 107–110, 112–118, 122–124, 128–129, 132 *et al.*

² As discussed in: J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł 1880–1967. Biografia polityczna*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 252–265; *idem*, *Perypetie małżeńskie ostatniego ordynata przygodzickiego księcia Michała Radziwiłła*, “Rocznik Kaliski” 2006, vol. XXXII, pp. 203–210.

³ In addition to the disputes described below, the legal dispute between Michał Radziwiłł and Władysław Radziwiłł of Bagatela may serve as an example; see case

his exploits also led to persistent friction with the Polish authorities. Furthermore, his extravagance often compromised his financial stability. The purpose of this article is therefore to recount the life of a member of the Radziwiłł family who deviated from the conventions of the Polish aristocracy, and who consequently faced intense criticism and marginalisation within his own social circle. The expanded source base, notably the inclusion of administrative documents, facilitates a far more nuanced assessment of Michał Radziwiłł's conduct relative to previous studies.

Michał Władysław Karol Jan Alojzy Wilhelm Edmund Robert Radziwiłł was born on 8 February 1870 in Berlin, at the family residence at Wilhelmstrasse 77⁴. He was the son of Ferdynand Radziwiłł (1834–1926) and Pelagia née Sapieha (1844–1929)⁵, who represented the first generation of the Berlin-based Radziwiłłs to adopt Polish as their primary language for daily communication. Previous generations, namely his great-grandfather Antoni Henryk (1775–1833)⁶ and his grandfather Bogusław (1809–1873), had predominantly used German – a linguistic preference largely attributable to their respective wives⁷. However, the transition back to the Polish language was a gradual one, as Ferdynand and Pelagia continued to reside in Berlin. Michał's father enjoyed a successful career as a politician in the Kingdom of Prussia and, from 1871, in the newly established German Empire. Ferdynand Radziwiłł led the Polish Circle in the Berlin Parliament, opposing the Germanisation and anti-Catholic policies of Otto von Bismarck⁸. Ferdynand's brother Edmund (1842–1895), a priest, upheld similar values, just

file of Władysław Radziwiłł v. Michał Radziwiłł, Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu (State Archives in Poznań) [hereinafter: APwP], Wojewódzki Urząd Rozjemczy do Spraw Majątkowych (Voivodeship Arbitration Office for Property Matters), ref. no. 683/0/2.6/17, ff. 1–48 and other unnumbered folios.

⁴ That palace was later sold, and the Radziwiłłs changed their residence in Berlin several times, *vide*: M.M. Potocka, *Z moich wspomnień*, London 1983, p. 36.

⁵ J. Dunin-Borkowski, *Almanach błękitny. Genealogia żyjących rodów polskich*, Lwów 1908, p. 29; *Materiały do biografii, genealogii i heraldyki polskiej*, vol. II, ed. S. Konarski, Buenos Aires–Paryż 1964, p. 215.

⁶ For a more comprehensive biographical study, see: J. Durka, *Antoni Henryk Radziwiłł (1775–1833) – szkic do portretu arystokraty, namiestnika Wielkiego Księstwa Poznańskiego*, [in:] *Górny Śląsk i Wielkopolska w XIX i pierwszej połowie XX wieku. Wybrane aspekty z dziejów polityki i edukacji*, ed. J. Durka, Poznań 2012, pp. 11–30.

⁷ M. Rosco Bogdanowicz, *Wspomnienia*, vol. I, Kraków 1959, pp. 210–211.

⁸ For a more detailed treatment of this subject, see: T. Nowakowski, *Radziwiłłowie*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 348–354; F. Radziwiłł, *Przemówienia parlamentarne*

as their father and Michał's grandfather, Prince Bogusław Radziwiłł (d. 1873), had done as a steadfast defender of the Catholic faith⁹.

The Radziwiłłs of the Berlin line¹⁰ derived their income from extensive landed estates. One of them, the Przygodzice entail (*Ordynacja Przygodzicka*)¹¹ – complete with its hunting lodge in Antonin, constructed by Antoni Henryk between 1821 and 1824 – was of particular importance for that branch of the family. In 1936, under the ownership of Michał Radziwiłł, the Przygodzice estate covered an area of over 11,850 hectares. It comprised the following properties: Przygodzice, Antonin, Kocięba, Krępa, Kamienice Stare, Zębców, Wysocko Małe, and Bledzianów in the southern Greater Poland, including more than 8,000 ha of woodland¹². Unlike ordinary estates, entails were strictly indivisible and designed to secure the economic survival of their successive owners.

Given the paucity of surviving documentation, the precise origins of the Przygodzice entail remain obscure. While Antoni Henryk is often regarded as its founder, this role may have been ascribed to him later to foster family tradition among younger generations. Although Antoni Henryk certainly elevated the standing of the Przygodzice estates, the entail may in fact have been established by his son, Bogusław Radziwiłł, who managed the property jointly with his brother Wilhelm (1797–1870) – an arrangement fraught with potential inheritance disputes after their deaths¹³.

1880–1919, transl. and compiled E. Wanke, Warszawa 2023; E. Wanke, *op. cit.*, pp. 148–438.

⁹ J.N. Niemojowski, *Wspomnienia*, Warszawa 1925, p. 284, 351–352; T. Żychliński, *Historia Sejmów Wielk. Ks. Poznańskiego*, vol. II, Poznań 1867, pp. 146–151; J. Feldman, *Bismarck a Polska*, Warszawa 1980, p. 430; J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł...*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁰ More on this topic in: J. Durka, *A Sketch of the History of the Radziwiłł Family Berlin Line until 1939*, [in:] *Souvenirs of the Past 1796–1945. The Berlin Line of the Radziwiłłs*, ed. R. Gromacka, Nieborów 2018, pp. 28–41.

¹¹ In English-language literature, this term is referred to as *entail* or *fee tail*. For more on this subject, see: L.J. Korporowicz, J.G. Owen, *Polish Ordynacje and the English Common Law Entail and Strict Settlement: Social, Political, and Religious Comparative Contexts*, “Comparative Legal History” 2022, vol. X, no. 2, pp. 172–203.

¹² Appendix to the letter to the Voivodeship Office for Financial and Agricultural Affairs in Poznań dated 26 June 1936, APwP, Wojewódzkie Biuro do Spraw Finansowo-Rolnych (Voivodeship Office for Financial and Agricultural Affairs in Poznań), ref. no. 682/0/5/134, ff. 98–99.

¹³ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Existing scholarship indicates that on 10 September 1840 the brothers elevated Przygodzice to the rank of a county (*hrabstwo*) and shared the hereditary seat in the provincial parliament of the Grand Duchy of Posen¹⁴. The designation Przygodzice County (*Hrabstwo Przygodzickie*) is already attested in records of the period¹⁵. However, there are many indications that the brothers may have treated the county as an entail, albeit without fully completing the requisite formalities. Leo Wegener, a German historian, dates the emergence of the entail (also known as a *fideicommissum*) in 1878¹⁶ – a timeline corroborated by the Polish historian Marian Kozaczka¹⁷.

The information that Ferdynand Radziwiłł, grandson of Antoni Henryk, was the actual founder of the county and the third holder of the entail is also supported by the memoirs of Maria Małgorzata Potocka. According to her account, the will of Bogusław Radziwiłł contained a provision to establish Przygodzice as a *majorat* (an entail based on primogeniture) and that it was only the German emperor who formally conferred the Przygodzice County title on the estates. Ferdynand, out of deference to his predecessors, reportedly designated his father and uncle as the nominal founders¹⁸. It can therefore be concluded that the status of the Przygodzice holdings changed in several stages, owing to the protracted legal procedures of the Prussian state.

In addition to their estates in Greater Poland, the Radziwiłłs owned extensive lands in the former Eastern Borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as the lineage originated from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. These territories were initially held by other branches of the family, but in the wake of political upheaval, the entails of Olyka and Nyasvizh (founded in 1586) devolved on Antoni Henryk. This transition followed the death of Dominik Hieronim Radziwiłł, a colonel of cavalry in the army of the Duchy

¹⁴ M. Motty, *Przechadzki po mieście*, Warszawa 1957, vol. II, p. 244.

¹⁵ For example: Files delivered by Woj[ciech] Lipski regarding the XX Radziwiłł 500 Tal. fund allocated [to support] students at the Gym[nasium] in Ostrów [ca. 1846], Archiwum Państwowe w Kaliszu (State Archives in Kalisz), Zespół Państwowe Gimnazjum Męskie w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim (Complex of State Male Gymnasium [grammar school] in Ostrów Wielkopolski), ref. no. 60, pp. 1–8.

¹⁶ L. Wegener, *Der wirtschaftliche Kampf der Deutschen mit den Polen um die Provinz Posen*, Posen 1903, p. 306.

¹⁷ M. Kozaczka, *Gospodarka ordynacji rodowych w Polsce*, Rzeszów 1996, p. 25.

¹⁸ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, pp. 36–37.

of Warsaw, who died in 1813 following the Battle of Hanau. Owing to his wartime allegiance, Dominik Hieronim was deemed an enemy of the tsar; consequently, the Russian Crown sequestered his estates and transferred them to Antoni Henryk, who was considered a reliable ally, having faithfully stood by the King of Prussia during the campaigns against Napoleonic France. A similar standing was enjoyed by Antoni Henryk's sons, Wilhelm and Bogusław, who both rose to the rank of general in the Prussian army.

The consolidation of the family's influence enabled the so-called Berlin line of the family to secure the vast Nyasvizh and Olyka estates alongside their Przygodzice holdings. Following the deaths of Wilhelm and Bogusław, these properties were divided: the Nyasvizh estate passed to Wilhelm's son, Antoni Fryderyk (1833–1904) – notable aide-de-camp to three emperors and husband to the French aristocrat Maria de Castellane (1840–1915) – while Bogusław's son, Ferdynand, received the Olyka and Przygodzice entails. Notably, Maria de Castellane was instrumental in fostering a renewed sense of Polish traditions and culture within this branch of the Radziwiłł family, which had been resident in Berlin for several decades¹⁹.

As is evident, Michał was raised in an exceptionally wealthy and influential aristocratic family, highly respected in Prussia largely due to its ties with the royal Hohenzollern dynasty. Louisa (1770–1836), the wife of Antoni Henryk Radziwiłł – the aforementioned governor of the Grand Duchy of Posen and progenitor of the family's Berlin line – was a niece of Frederick II the Great²⁰. Michał's parents leveraged their considerable status to secure the best possible future for him. Such efforts likely gained urgency in the wake of family tragedies. A few months before Michał was born, his sister, Maria, died of diphtheria, and when he was merely three years old, his two-year-old brother, Zygmunt, passed away. This profound loss may explain why he was so heavily doted on by his family. A central role in his upbringing was assumed by Leontyna Radziwiłł of the House of Clary-und-Aldringe, Michał's German-speaking grandmother and widow of Prince Bogusław (d. 1873)²¹.

¹⁹ M. Rosco Bogdanowicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 211–212.

²⁰ Their daughter was the love of the heir to the Prussian throne, see e.g.: D. Gersdorff, *Na całym świecie tylko Ona. Zakazana miłość Elizy Radziwiłł i Wilhelma Pruskiego*, transl. G. Prawda, Jelenia Góra 2014.

²¹ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75, 132; J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł...*, p. 26.

The young prince received his initial education at home from private tutors – a common practice at the time among families of their social standing. In 1882, a Pole, Jan Hejmanowski, was engaged in that capacity²², when Michał – known in the family by the diminutive Minio – was 12 years old. In 1885, Michał was sent to the ‘Französisches Gymnasium’ (French Gymnasium) in Berlin, later also attended by his younger brother, Karol (1874–1906)²³. Janusz Franciszek (1880–1967), the youngest of the brothers, who would prove to be the most outstanding representative of this generation of the Radziwiłłs, was 10 years younger than Michał, and 6 years younger than Karol, and consequently, his schooling began later.

Their sister, Maria Małgorzata Potocka (1875–1962), penned memoirs that provide valuable insights into Michał’s disposition and the disciplinary challenges he posed in the course of his upbringing, portraying the young prince as a difficult and wayward child whose rejection of his Polish identity particularly pained his mother, Pelagia, a devoted Polish patriot. From a young age, Michał identified as a German, and his education in Berlin only accelerated his Germanisation. The ideological rift developed when his father, who represented Poles in the German parliament, was openly campaigning against Germanisation measures and fiercely criticised Bismarck in parliamentary speeches. Despite his family’s vehement objections, Michał even went so far as to travel to Bismarck’s estate in Warcin to pay homage to the chancellor. This caused friction between father and son; consequently, Michał was removed from his school in Berlin in 1889 and transferred to the Catholic Gymnasium Carolinum in Osnabrück. The education at this school proved purely superficial, offering but a temporary improvement in family relations. The young prince developed a taste for an extravagant lifestyle, mirroring the excesses of Jerzy and Maria Róża Radziwiłł, who found themselves in severe financial distress and were ultimately forced to leave Berlin. He also preyed on his parents’ deep religiosity, demonstrating a penchant for manipulation²⁴.

²² E. Wanke, *op. cit.*, p. 74. A similar approach to education was characteristic of many landed and aristocratic families, see: J. Durka, *Mieczysław Seweryn (1895–1940) i Stanisław (1896–1939) Kwileccy – uczestnicy powstania wielkopolskiego i właściciele ziemscy*, “Polonia Maior Orientalis” 2022, vol. IX, p. 358.

²³ E. Wanke, *op. cit.*, p. 74; M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

²⁴ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 131–133; A.A. Duda, *Ordynat ołycki książę Janusz Radziwiłł i jego rodzina. Społeczno-ekonomiczny obraz polskiej rodziny*

In 1892, after graduating from the Gymnasium, the prince and his father embarked on a several-month journey through the Russian Empire, which included visits to Nyasvizh and Olyka²⁵. On their return, Michał entered military service by joining the 1st Brandenburg Uhlan Regiment²⁶, demonstrating his complete indifference to his father's political convictions. While Ferdynand continued to defend Polish rights and fiercely criticise the German authorities in parliament, Michał openly defied him. Following one such parliamentary speech, the young prince went so far as to send a letter directly to the emperor, assuring the sovereign of his loyalty. Ferdynand's reaction, with his authority severely undermined, was immediate: he rushed to the barracks, reprimanded the youth, and promptly compelled him to resign from the regiment and leave for the Russian Empire²⁷.

Now displaced from Germany, Michał went on to study law and diplomacy at the University of Dorpat. His time there was intended to distance him from the Reich while preparing him to assume management of the Olyka estates in the future. As the eldest son, he was the rightful heir to the Przygodzice entail, but he waived his rights to it in favour of his younger brother, Karol, since the Olyka entail was larger and, as it transpired, more lucrative. Michał also agreed to comply with Russian regulations stipulating that only subjects of the tsar could inherit land. In accordance with the established legal requirements, he was naturalised as a Russian subject after five years of residence in the country, thereby removing any further obstacles to his taking possession of Olyka.

After completing his studies and obtaining a doctorate in law, the prince secured a commission in a Guards Cavalry Regiment before entering the tsar's diplomatic service. A career in diplomacy proved well-suited to his disposition and his mastery of eight languages undoubtedly improved his professional prospects. Michał was initially posted as a secretary to the Russian embassy in Paris, where he would appear in a Prussian uniform – a habit that understandably provoked resentment among his peers. He subsequently served as an attaché in the French capital, and was

arystokratycznej od II połowy XIX wieku do 1939 roku, Lublin 2024, p. 159; J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł...*, p. 26; E. Wanke, *op. cit.*, pp. 107–108.

²⁵ E. Wanke, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

²⁷ *Wielkopolski Maharadża*, "Kurier Poznański", 14 XI 1937, p. 15.

later likely appointed to a similar post in Lisbon²⁸. According to his sister's memoirs, he held the position of secretary at the Russian legation in Madrid²⁹. Subsequently, he was transferred to the Russian embassy in London, where he became an imperial honorary counsellor. He earned the respect of King George V and was invited to regattas, accompanying the British monarch on the yacht 'Britania'. He travelled extensively while attached to diplomatic missions, though many of those journeys were unrelated to his official duties, as he frequented Biarritz, Cap Martin and Monte Carlo. By contrast, he visited his parents, with whom he remained on poor terms, only on rare occasions³⁰.

In 1897, during his travels in Western Europe, Michał met Marie de Benardaky (1874–1949). She was the daughter of Nicholas de Benardaky, an imperial state councillor and master of ceremonies at the Russian court, whose own father had amassed a fortune in trade. Marie lived in Paris with her parents, though she also regularly visited Biarritz, where the family owned a luxury villa. Renowned for her exceptional beauty, Marie had been the youthful love of Marcel Proust and was widely considered the inspiration for the literary character Gilberte Swann³¹. Prince Michał's relationship with the daughter of a wealthy merchant met with the staunch disapproval of his parents, not least because Nicholas was suspected of forgery – a scandal that cast a shadow over Marie as well. Moreover, her mother was herself a figure of a somewhat checkered reputation in the Parisian salon society at the time. Although the de Benardaky family lived in grand luxury and associated with the elite, they could not match the aristocratic status of the Radziwiłłs. Furthermore, Marie's Orthodox faith rendered the marriage entirely unacceptable to the Catholic family.

²⁸ B. Grigorev, *Povsednevnaia zhizn tsarskikh diplomatov v XIX veke*, <https://coollib.net/b/188059-boris-nikolaevich-grigorev-povsednevnaia-zhizn-tsarskikh-diplomatov-v-xix-veke/read> (accessed 1 October 2023); Z. Pałat, *Zespół pałacowy książąt Radziwiłłów w Antoninie. Dziedzictwo materialne*, Kalisz 2011, p. 17.

²⁹ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

³⁰ R. dell'Ombra, *Sprawa ks. Radziwiłła Rudego i p. Judyty Suchestow. Burzliwe życie przyjaciela króla Anglii i kuzyna cesarza Niemiec*, "Ilustrowany Kurier Polski", 12 XII 1937, p. 8.

³¹ G.D. Painter, *Marcel Proust. Biografia*, vol. I, transl. A. Olędzka-Frybesowa, Warszawa 1972, pp. 61–62, 272. For an extensive analysis, see: W. Banach, *op. cit.*, pp. 337–344.

Ferdynand and Pelagia, however, learned of the impending wedding only two days before the ceremony. They sought to intervene immediately, but the telegrams they dispatched to the Russian Foreign Ministry proved fruitless, while Karol, who had rushed to Saint Petersburg, failed to arrive in time to present their father's letters. Ultimately, the ceremony could not be prevented and was held on 2 September 1898. The marriage produced two children, Antoni and Leontyna³². Antoni was baptised in the Orthodox Church, while Leontyna, though initially christened a Catholic, was brought by her father to the Russian embassy in Paris a few years later to be received into the Orthodox faith. This religious conformity clearly strengthened Michał's position at the imperial court³³.

The conflict with his parents also quickly escalated into a bitter dispute over the family estates. As a Russian subject, Michał was the only sibling eligible to inherit the Ołyka entail. Now, however, he wished to exercise his priority right to the Przygodzice entail as well. It transpired that the document in which he had previously waived this right in favour of his younger brother, Karol, was legally invalid, as it directly contradicted the deed of entail. According to its terms, the Przygodzice fideicommissum descended by right of primogeniture to the eldest son of the deceased holder, whereas the Ołyka succession was determined by appointment. Infuriated by this turn of events, Ferdynand Radziwiłł reneged on his promise to Michał regarding Ołyka and began to prepare his younger son, Karol, to take his brother's place. This marked the beginning of Karol's five-year residence in the Russian Empire and his subsequent attempts to secure his claim to the estate.

The youngest of Ferdynand's sons, Janusz, also sought to become a Russian subject, as the childless Michał Piotr Radziwiłł (1853–1903), who lived in Nieborów, had resolved to bestow on him the Nieborów estate and Shpanov in Volhynia. The atmosphere

³² Wedding invitation from Michał Radziwiłł and Marie Benardaky, Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach (State Archives in Kielce), Archiwum Rodziny Radziwiłłów z Nieborowa (Archives of the Radziwiłł Family of Nieborów), ref. no. 60, unpaginated; A.A. Duda, *Ordynat ołycki...*, pp. 164–166. The full names of their children: Antoni Fryderyk Wilhelm Aleksander Alexi Expedyt Mikołaj Michał Ferdynand Alojzy Maria (born on 26 September 1899 in Paris); Leontyna Fryderyka Wilhelmina Helena Ludwika Maria Elżbieta Jadwiga Eliza Gabriela (born on 26 September 1904 in Saint Petersburg), are listed in: J. Dunin-Borkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

³³ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–135.

of intense rivalry over Olyka is vividly captured in Janusz's letter to his fiancée, Anna Lubomirska, dated 17 September 1905: "Your Father, who will take this letter to you, will tell you himself what we have endured over the last two days and the state we have all been in. Poor Mother may have been most upset by it all. The brutal openness, cynicism and insolence I faced yesterday are outrageous, but also impressive in their intent. The world has probably never seen anything like it and no one who does not know the people personally and well would believe it. We are bringing Papa here because his presence and decision are necessary. We have a choice – subjecthood and a document stating that Papa is not settling Olyka on me. Or not to sign the deed, in which case the petition for naturalisation will be rejected. These are the consequences of our brother's decision to bring his child into the Orthodox Church and it becomes evident how right we were to refuse to receive them before all the religious and other issues were fully clarified. Unfortunately, Papa made a monumental mistake in welcoming them to Antonin, one that can now only be rectified through ruthless decision-making and determination. Will he be up to it? This is the question we are asking ourselves. [...] At the same time, I am the one who personally suffers the least in this respect, since I have already been so fortunate and possess the one thing that has value in my life and that no one can take away from me! Karol is more of a 'scapegoat' and he will certainly never obtain naturalisation. Still, this injustice, this clinging to religion and faith must outrage everyone terribly"³⁴.

To finalise those arrangements, Ferdynand had to travel to the imperial court in person. When Karol died unexpectedly in 1906, the prince designated his youngest son, Janusz, as the new heir to the Olyka entail. This appointment further poisoned Ferdynand's relations with Michał, who harboured nothing but bitter resentment towards his father thereafter. The resulting family disputes persisted for decades, the most notorious of which arose when Michał filed a lawsuit against his father over what he claimed was an inadequate allowance from the Przygodzice entail, as well as

³⁴ Letter from Janusz Radziwiłł to Anna Lubomirska (his fiancée), 17 IX 1905, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie (Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw), Archiwum Rodziny Radziwiłłów z Nieborowa (Archives of the Radziwiłł Family from Nieborów), Correspondence, Series 1, ref. no. 25, part 5, no. 3.

the excessive felling of timber in the local forests. Janusz quickly emerged as Michał's primary opponent, ultimately thwarting his elder brother's claims to Olyka. This hostility was cemented in 1916 when, amidst the turmoil of the First World War, Prince Ferdynand formally confirmed Janusz as his sole successor to the Olyka estate. The feud between Michał and Janusz was never resolved³⁵.

Prince Michał's travels in Europe precipitated the collapse of his marriage. He fell in love with the Spanish aristocrat Maria Henrietta Joaquina Martinez de Medinilla de Santa Sussana (1866³⁶–1947). On 27 July 1915, his marriage to Marie Radziwiłł (née de Bernadaky) was declared invalid in Rome (following a divorce granted in Bonn on 2 March 1915)³⁷. The children, Antoni and Leontyna, were placed in the care of their grandfather, Ferdynand Radziwiłł, who rented a house for them and their mother and engaged a Catholic tutor, ensuring that the grandchildren were raised in the Catholic faith³⁸.

A year after the invalidation of his first marriage, on 15 November 1916 in Vaduz in the Principality of Liechtenstein, Michał married the aforementioned Maria Henrietta Joaquina Martinez de Medinilla. His second wife, a representative of a distinguished and wealthy Spanish family, was infatuated with and initially entirely devoted to him. Engrossed in these personal affairs, the prince seemed largely unconcerned by the ongoing world war. The prince's professional life, however, was soon upended by the October Revolution, with his diplomatic career coming to an abrupt end following the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia. Regrettably, precise details concerning the timing and circumstances of this event remain scarce.

³⁵ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–137; J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł...*, pp. 252–265.

³⁶ Her date of birth is generally recorded as 6 July 1866, but the State Archives in Poznań hold a copy of a German document, a certificate of Prussian citizenship, or '*Staatsangehörigkeitsausweis*', in which she is identified as Joaquina Marquise von Villafrancesca, born on 15 July 1868 in Puerto Rico. This document was issued on 11 June 1926. Notarised copy of the document, APwP, Trustee Office (*Urząd Powierniczy*) in Poznań, ref. no. 53/759/0/5.21/12166, f. 378.

³⁷ Correspondence on legal matters of Prince Michał Radziwiłł 1937–1938. III.2.Part 895/37, Letter from Marie Radziwiłł née Benardaky to the Civil Registry Office in Przygodzice dated 22 October 1937, Biblioteka Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu (Library of the National Ossolinski Institute in Wrocław) [hereinafter: BZNiO], Accession index: Acc. 65/98, unpaginated.

³⁸ J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł...*, p. 252.

Meanwhile, the war and revolution did not spare the Radziwiłł estates, bringing devastation to Olyka in Volhynia and leaving the family temporarily unable to reach their lands. When Janusz Radziwiłł arrived in Volhynia he discovered extensive damage caused by the First World War and the Polish-Soviet War. While Ferdynand administered the estates in Przygodzice, which remained far from the front line, evidence of Michał's involvement in the management of the family holdings during this period remains elusive.

Both Ferdynand and Janusz were also active in politics. After escaping from revolution-ridden Russia, Janusz entered public life under the Regency Council of the Kingdom of Poland, becoming head of the Department of State (the precursor to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Ferdynand, meanwhile, as senior marshal, opened the first session of the Legislative Sejm in independent Poland³⁹.

Michał, by contrast, was highly critical of the territorial configuration of the Second Polish Republic. According to the later testimony of Ryszard Biehler, a professor at the University of Poznań and former employee at the Przygodzice entail, the prince is said to have argued that the Treaty of Versailles had improperly delimited Poland's boundaries. In his view, the line should have extended from Gdynia through Kalisz to Silesia, leaving Greater Poland to Germany, while in the east, Poland should have secured larger territorial acquisitions⁴⁰.

Following the conclusion of the First World War, the prince divided his time between travel and gambling in southern Europe, with his debts settled by his wife. In 1920, this lifestyle was brought to an end by a family tragedy, when Michał's son, Antoni, was killed in an aviation accident in Cracow⁴¹. As the prince had no other male descendants, Michał Karol Radziwiłł of Nagłowice, son of Karol Radziwiłł who died in 1906, was designated as the heir to the Przygodzice entail⁴². This came as a profound shock to Michał

³⁹ Z. Girzyński, *Ferdynand Radziwiłł marszałek senior Sejmu Ustawodawczego*, [in:] *Fundamenty Niepodległej: Sejm Ustawodawczy (1919–1922)*, eds Z. Girzyński, J. Kłaczko, J. Żaryn, Toruń 2020, pp. 59–76.

⁴⁰ Correspondence on legal matters of Prince Michał Radziwiłł..., Minutes of a closed session of the Municipal Court (*Sąd Grodzki*) in Ostrów Wielkopolski in the case for the incapacitation of Michał Radziwiłł dated 15 December 1937, BZNIŃO, Acc. 65/98, unpaginated.

⁴¹ M.M. Potocka, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 138.

Radziwiłł, who, alongside his continued financial demands, began to insist that his 54-year-old wife bear him a son. Consequently, relations between the spouses deteriorated⁴³, while the prince's subsequent, failed attempts to regain custody of his daughter, Leontyna, only gave rise to further domestic discord⁴⁴.

The full extent of these family tensions became apparent following the death of his father, Ferdynand Radziwiłł, on 28 February 1926. Konstanty Potocki recalls an account provided by his sister concerning the events of the funeral (held on 24 June 1926 in Antonin) as follows: "On the morning of the funeral, Uncle Minio came out of his room dressed in the scarlet robes of the Order of Malta, a feathered hat, with a ceremonial sabre, and numerous other Maltese decorations. It was only with great difficulty that Olgierd Czartoryski, who presided over the Association of Polish Knights of Malta, persuaded him to don the obligatory black attire. During the funeral Mass and later, in the crypt, Uncle Minio was followed by his two wives, the Spaniard Joaquina de Santa Susanna and his first wife, Aunt Marie Benardaky. In those days, it was simply unthinkable for these two women to appear together in public"⁴⁵.

Under the terms of his will dated 9 August 1925, Ferdynand Radziwiłł named his wife, Pelagia, as his sole heir. Without waiting for his mother's consent, Michał immediately took possession of the securities held at Antonin. Ultimately, the broader provisions laid down by their deceased father dictated that the Przygodzice entail pass to Michał, while that of Olyka to Janusz⁴⁶. In response to this, Michał sought to dispossess his brother of the Olyka holdings, taking his claims to a court of honour, albeit to no avail, and subsequently challenging Janusz's rights to the property in public⁴⁷. Reflecting his refusal to accept this outcome,

⁴³ Correspondence on legal matters of Prince Michał Radziwiłł 1937–1938. III.2. Part 895/37, Judgement of 22 July 1929, BZNiO, Acc. 65/98, unpaginated.

⁴⁴ F. Potocki, K. Potocki, *Księga peczarska*, Łomianki 2017, p. 364.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 271–272.

⁴⁶ File in: Records of the County Court in Ostrów concerning the will of Prince Ferdinand Radziwiłł of Antonin, Archiwum Państwowe w Kaliszu (State Archives in Kalisz), Sąd Powiatowy w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim (County Court in Ostrów Wielkopolski), ref. no. 3, ff. 1–42; Response to the complaint in the case of Radziwiłł v. Radziwiłł dated 23 February 1929, *ibidem*, ref. no. 110, ff. 3–5.

⁴⁷ For more on the subject, see: J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł 1880–1967...*, pp. 253–254.

in the following years he consistently referred to himself as 'Prince of Olyka' (*Książę na Olyce*)⁴⁸.

The resulting strain within the family and Michał's scandalous lifestyle, notably during his residence in Monte Carlo⁴⁹, soon became a matter of public notoriety. In 1926, Wojciech Kossak, who was on his way to Antonin to discuss a commission for Michał's portrait, described him, in a letter to his wife, as 'the bad apple of the family'⁵⁰. Michał's disregard for family decorum was further demonstrated on 11 June 1926, when, prior to his father's funeral, he petitioned for a certificate of Prussian citizenship (*Staatsangehörigkeitsausweis*), an act he would hardly have ventured with his father alive⁵¹. This dissolute conduct must have brought profound distress to the family, particularly as it coincided with the upcoming marriage of his daughter, Leontyna, who on 15 June 1927 was to wed Zygmunt Skórzewski, the holder of extensive estates in Łabiszyn and Czerniejewo⁵².

Following the death of his father, who had been a competent manager of the family patrimony and successfully derived a substantial income from it, Prince Michał moved to Antonin and immediately set about modernising the residence to suit his personal tastes. This culminated in a major renovation of the palace in 1928, a project which, as Zenon Pałat established, included restoring the vestibule flooring, alongside the likely replacement of the existing stoves with central heating and the installation of modern electrical and plumbing systems⁵³. Generally, the prince was primarily

⁴⁸ For example: Notarial power of attorney for Władysław Borszewski dated 21 April 1928, Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw) [hereinafter: AAN], Konsulat Honorowy RP w Monako (Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Monaco) [hereinafter: KHM], ref. no. 86, f. 6; Passport report dated 27 April 1928, *ibidem*, f. 4 (here, the handwritten signature 'Michał, Prince of Olyka, Radziwiłł' was affixed). See: A.A. Duda, *Ordynat ołycki...*, pp. 174–175.

⁴⁹ According to his passport documents, he stated Monte Carlo as his permanent place of residence, see: Passport report..., *ibidem*, f. 4.

⁵⁰ *List Wojciecha Kossaka do żony z [22 X] 1926*, [in:] W. Kossak, *Listy do żony i przyjaciół 1883–1942*, vol. II (1908–1942), Kraków 1985, pp. 385–386.

⁵¹ Notarised copy of the document, APwP, Urząd Powierniczy w Poznaniu (Trustee Office in Poznań), ref. no. 53/759/0/5.21/12166, f. 378.

⁵² M. Radziwiłł, *One of the Radziwiłls*, London 1971, p. 11; R. Nowicki, *Skórzewscy właściciele dóbr łabiszyńskich. Rola w życiu społeczno-politycznym wielkopolskiego ziemiaństwa*, Toruń 2002, p. 153.

⁵³ Z. Pałat, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

concerned with improving the comfort of the palace, whereas no records of any corresponding economic initiatives exist.

The newly modernised residence soon provided the setting for the next stage of the prince's turbulent private life. While the precise origins of Michał Radziwiłł's affair with his English nurse, Mary Atkinson, remain obscure, she is known to have stayed with him at Antonin in the summer of 1929⁵⁴. It was during that period that his second marriage finally collapsed. On 22 July 1929, Michał and Joaquina Martinez de Medinilla, then resident in Biarritz, were divorced in Bayonne, France, with the court citing the husband's desertion of the marital home and the indignities he had inflicted on his wife. Although the prince argued that the marriage had foundered solely on the lack of an heir to the family estates, his notorious conduct left his wife's decision to seek divorce amply warranted⁵⁵.

Crucially, the divorce secured in France carried distinct legal ramifications for Michał, as Poland and France, which shared a reciprocal treaty governing the recognition of marriage, lacked any such convention regarding divorce. Thus, under Polish law, he was still considered married⁵⁶.

Stripped of Joaquina Martinez de Medinilla's financial support, the prince was forced to rely solely on the revenues from his own estates. His expenditure, however, remained substantial, not least due to the upkeep of his villa Aquilla in Biarritz⁵⁷. It soon became evident that he would be unable to meet his financial obligations, and beginning in 1929, he faced a succession of lawsuits in the Ostrów Wielkopolski court over mounting debts and unpaid taxes⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ Letter from the county starost (*starosta powiatowy*) of Ostrów to the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in London dated 15 November 1929, AAN, Konsulat Generalny w Londynie (Consulate General in London) [hereinafter: KGL], ref. no. 104, f. 8.

⁵⁵ Correspondence on legal matters of Prince Michał Radziwiłł 1937–1938. III.2.Part 895/37, Judgement of 22 July 1929, BZNiO, Acc. 65/98, unpaginated.

⁵⁶ J. Durka, *Perypetie małżeńskie...*, pp. 204–207.

⁵⁷ Statement from the personal account of the holder of the entail, Prince Michał Radziwiłł 9 V 1932 – 1 II 1934, APwP, Majątek Przygodzice (Przygodzice Estate), ref. no. 243, unpaginated.

⁵⁸ J. Pietrzak, A. Gibasiewicz, *Dziedzice, dwory, pałace. Właściciele dóbr rycerskich w powiecie ostrowskim wielkopolskim 1795–1945*, Ostrów Wielkopolski 2020, p. 62.

His assertion of authority over Antonin and Przygodzice found its most controversial expression on 9 November 1929, when he ordered the removal of nine coffins from the family tomb. Placed directly in the ground beside the chapel, the coffins were moved without consulting either his siblings or the priest serving as custodian, and with a complete disregard for the relevant religious prescriptions governing such matters. Michał Radziwiłł later justified this measure by claiming that the decay of the coffins had released dangerous vapours in the crypt⁵⁹. The domestic upheaval soon extended to the estate staff, whom the prince sought to replace with foreign nationals, a measure so disruptive that it prompted the intervention of the county starost of Ostrów Wielkopolski. In a letter to the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in London, the starost requested that residence visas be denied to prospective employees at Przygodzice, offering the following justification: "Michał Radziwiłł, holder of the Przygodzice entail, has been systematically dismissing Polish clerks and estate officers, while almost exclusively employing foreigners, predominantly Germans and Englishmen, which, on the one hand, is contrary to the economic and social interests of the State, and, on the other, outrages public opinion, prompting numerous articles in the national press"⁶⁰.

In 1929, the prince's nurse, Mary Atkinson (1868–1937)⁶¹, was among the foreign nationals engaged by Radziwiłł to whom a visa was initially refused. After several months of pressure from British diplomats, the Polish authorities reversed their decision in February 1930, permitting Atkinson to reside in Antonin. However, when her permit expired in 1932, the matter resurfaced, and she was again denied residency by the administration⁶². The prince presumably leveraged his connections in the British Foreign Office

⁵⁹ Correspondence on legal matters of Prince Michał Radziwiłł..., Minutes of a closed session of the Municipal Court (*Sąd Grodzki*) in Ostrów Wielkopolski in the case for the incapacitation of Michał Radziwiłł dated 15 December 1937, BZNiO, Acc. 65/98, unpaginated; E. Wanke, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

⁶⁰ Letter from the county starost (*starosta powiatowy*) of Ostrów to the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in London dated 15 November 1929, AAN, KGL, ref. no. 104, f. 8.

⁶¹ Mary Atkinson, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/261164208/mary-atkinson> (accessed 1 October 2023).

⁶² Letter from the Poznań voivode to the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated 14 February 1930, AAN, KGL, ref. no. 104, f. 40; Letter from the county starost

as Mary returned to Antonin shortly thereafter. The reluctance of the authorities to extend her stay may not have been unfounded. Numerous sources indicate that Mary Atkinson had become the prince's life partner, exerting a profound influence over him and the management of his estates. Above all, she saw to the removal of anyone who opposed her.

The employment of foreign nationals only exacerbated the precarious financial condition of the properties, and the Przygodzice entail ultimately faced seizure by bailiffs⁶³. On 30 April 1932, it was placed under receivership. This measure was only lifted by an order of the Court of Appeal in Poznań on 11 January 1936, after the receiver had reduced the debt (from 1,215,306 to 1,054,769 zlotys) and the prince had maintained that he could manage the estates independently, stating that he would secure loans more easily without court-imposed constraints. However, shortly after the receivership was terminated, the debt on Radziwiłł's estates mounted once more, eventually exceeding the original amount. Consequently, the legal heir to the entail, Michał Karol Radziwiłł of Nagłowice, and the prince's brother, Janusz Radziwiłł, applied for the re-establishment of the receivership over the Przygodzice properties. By an order of the court, it was reinstated on 10 September 1936⁶⁴.

Michał Radziwiłł was so heavily in debt that even Mary's remuneration was eventually suspended. As their relationship drew to a close, the prince exploited the fact that the Englishwoman's residence permit had once again expired and dismissed her in March 1937. She was promptly ordered to leave the country within twenty-four hours. While in Gdańsk, she made repeated, futile telephone calls to Antonin in a desperate bid to secure permission to return. Forced to pawn her jewellery to afford a ferry ticket home, she ultimately reached England with the assistance of the

(*starosta powiatowy*) of Ostrów to the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in London dated 17 May 1932, *ibidem*, f. 41.

⁶³ Correspondence on legal matters of Prince Michał Radziwiłł..., Minutes of a closed session of the Municipal Court (*Sąd Grodzki*) in Ostrów Wielkopolski in the case for the incapacitation of Michał Radziwiłł dated 15 December 1937, BZNiO, Acc. 65/98, unpaginated.

⁶⁴ Resolution of the Civil Court of Appeal in Poznań concerning the Radziwiłł Family Entail in Przygodzice of 10 September 1936, Muzeum w Nieborowie i Arkadii (Museum in Nieborów and Arkadia), library collection – manuscripts, MS 182, unpaginated; Correspondence on legal matters..., Order of the Minister of Justice of 18 November 1936, BZNiO, Acc. 65/98, unpaginated; J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł...*, pp. 254–255.

British consulate. On her return, she retreated to a modest hotel and remained unemployed. For a time, small remittances continued to arrive from Poland, but these resources, too, eventually dried up. Mired in debt, she died by a self-inflicted gunshot to the heart. Following her tragic death, the prince, besieged by inquiries from journalists and lawyers, sought to discount the significance of their relationship, dismissing any suggestion that she had been involved in the management of the estates. Paradoxically, however, he credited her with the development of Antonin as a holiday resort, attributing the idea behind both the new beach and the 'Lido' restaurant to her. He casually noted that the restaurant's tenants had gone bankrupt, omitting to mention his own substantial indebtedness to the establishment⁶⁵.

In July 1937, while in Bad Gastein, Austria, Michał Radziwiłł took a new mistress, Jeanette (Judyta) Suchestow, born in 1902 to the Jewish family of Jojne and Klara Kranz. She was a divorcee with a six-year-old son, Emanuel, known as Edzio. The affair quickly became a cause célèbre, particularly after the prince officially announced their impending nuptials. This declaration provoked a fierce reaction from his relatives, as such a union would inevitably result in a major social scandal. Consequently, a family council was promptly convened in Poznań, where Janusz Radziwiłł's lawyer contended that the prince's marriage plans amounted to bigamy. Both Janusz Radziwiłł and Michał's daughter, Leontyna Skórzewska, took legal steps to have the prince declared incompetent, a measure intended to clear the way for his successor, Michał Karol, to assume control of the entail. A prospective marriage to Jeanette, coupled with the potential adoption of Emanuel, carried the distinct risk of depriving Michał Karol of the Przygodzice estates. The religious impediment to the marriage was swiftly removed when Jeanette underwent baptism, a sacrament, however, that was unlawfully administered to her by Father Włodzimierz Wójec, a priest of the Polish-National Orthodox Church⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ *Samobójstwo miss Atkinson b. pielęgniarce ks. Michała Radziwiłła. Odebrała sobie życie z nędzy skutkiem niewypłacalności księcia*, "Dzień Dobry!", 18 December 1937, pp. 1–2. Insight into the management of the restaurant may be gleaned from documents in: Financial records of the 'Lido' restaurant, APwP, Majątek Przygodzice (Przygodzice Estate), ref. no. 243, unpaginated.

⁶⁶ Following the baptism, Father Wójec was suspended from his priestly duties and sentenced to monastic confinement, see: R. dell'Ombra, *op. cit.*, "Ilustrowany

Since such a union would have been unlawful in Poland, the prince decided to wed in France. This prompted an adequate response from the Polish consular services. When Jeanette Suchestow arrived in Marseille on 8 December 1937, and her attorney applied to the Polish Consulate in the city for a certificate of no impediment five days later, the consul requested detailed information from the district authorities in Ostrów Wielkopolski, instructing the prince to have the banns of marriage published in Antonin. An exchange of correspondence ensued between the consulate in Marseille and the Polish Embassy in Paris, with the result that the required document was withheld and other diplomatic posts were alerted should the prince seek to apply elsewhere. On 25 December 1937, the Polish Consulate in Marseille, acting on instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, notified the consulate in Monaco that it must not issue a certificate of no impediment to Michał Radziwiłł, as criminal proceedings for bigamy had been instituted against him in Poland⁶⁷. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also consulted the Ministry of Justice on the matter. Kazimierz Szwarzenberg Czerny, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, conferred by telephone with Olgierd Mirza-Kryczyński, a prosecutor of the Supreme Court, who went so far as to advise that the prince's passport be seized in the event that he presented himself at the consulate. In January 1938, the Polish government also entered into discussions with the French authorities regarding the mutual recognition of divorce decrees. The Radziwiłł case thus assumed broader significance for future proceedings of a similar nature⁶⁸.

In addition, on 29 December 1937, the Regional Court in Ostrów Wielkopolski directed the local guardianship court to appoint a temporary guardian for Michał Radziwiłł pending the resolution of the incapacitation proceedings. While rejecting arguments concerning the planned nuptials, the court took into account the prince's prodigality. The detailed statement of grounds read as follows: "If, therefore, between 1926 and 1932 the holder of the entail was able to draw an amount exceeding his income, namely

Kurier Polski", 9 XII 1937, p. 8; *Za chrzest p. Suchestow krata klasztorna*, "Gazeta Ostrzeszowska", 15 XII 1937, no. 100, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Letter from the Polish Consulate in Marseille to the Polish Consulate in Monaco dated 25 December 1937, AAN, KHM, ref. no. 86, f. 11.

⁶⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the legal complexities related to the prince's marriages, see: J. Durka, *Perypetie małżeńskie...*, pp. 203–210.

1,026,915.65 zlotys, for his personal expenses, despite the fact that between 1929 and 1931 there was a crisis in agriculture, if he was able to allocate 100,000 zlotys in fees for two attorneys, if he was able to draw 110,200 zlotys for his personal purposes, i.e. 35,300 zlotys more (in the period from 30 September 1935 to 30 April 1936) than his actual cash income at the time, if – as the Court of Appeal states – he lived beyond his means while failing to pay outstanding public dues, then such conduct by the holder of the entail can hardly be described as anything other than a reckless dissipation of assets. This wastefulness consequently leads to results such as the transfer of the ownership of personal property to Miss Atkinson in order to evade creditors, and even to criminal prosecution for breaches of the penal code”⁶⁹.

Eventually, a representative of the landed gentry sent by the prince’s family arrived in Monte Carlo and held talks with him in an attempt to reach a compromise. Michał Radziwiłł, faced with the resolute opposition of the Polish authorities and the realization that the marriage was unattainable, accepted the compromise and broke off his relationship with Jeanette Suchestow. She subsequently sued the prince, seeking damages of £50,000. The affair attracted so much media attention that it even prompted film proposals, with Alexander Korda slated to direct⁷⁰.

It was during that period in the south of France that the prince met his future third wife. Harriet Stewart Dawson (1881–1945) was the daughter of the late British stockbroker Colin Gillies Mc Nab and the widow of Australian businessman David Stewart Dawson (1849–1932)⁷¹. Since she was independently wealthy, her fortune was undoubtedly a crucial factor in light of the prince’s straitened financial circumstances. As a British subject, she was not bound by Polish regulations requiring a marriage licence. Michał Radziwiłł turned this to his advantage and married her on 23 May 1938 in London⁷². Just two days later, Harriet received a Polish passport

⁶⁹ Correspondence on legal matters, Resolution of the Regional Court in Ostrów Wielkopolski of 29 November 1937, BZNiO, Acc. 65/98, unpaginated.

⁷⁰ *Angielscy operatorzy filmowi nakręcą obraz o romansie ks. Michała Radziwiłła z p. Suchestow*, “Gazeta Ostrzeszowska”, 25 II 1939, no. 16 p. 2; Society woman to marry wealthy Polish Prince, “Truth” [Sydney], 22 V 1938, no. 2524, p. 19.

⁷¹ *Ks. Michał Radziwiłł żeni się ale – nie z panią Suchestow...*, “Kurjer Polski”, 19 V 1938, no. 136, p. 2; *Prince Radziwiłł weds rich widow. Pole Takes Mrs. Harriet S. Dawson as Bride*, “The New York Times”, 24 V 1938, p. 12.

⁷² Certified copy of marriage record dated 1 July 1938, AAN, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), ref. no. 12167, p. 39;

valid for six months. The prince, however, not only failed to secure a renewal of his passport, but effectively found himself deprived of it, as the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in London decided to seize the document. Initially, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs believed that the marriage further compounded his legal complications, but this position was later moderated. A passport was finally issued to him in January 1939. Since his wife's travel document had already expired, it was renewed for her at the beginning of March 1939. She was compelled to rely on it, having lost her status as a British national upon marriage. Significantly, amid suspicions of the prince's bigamy, the Polish authorities refused to recognise that union⁷³.

Throughout 1938, the prince remained heavily beset by financial and legal difficulties, which culminated in criminal proceedings initiated against him for failing to appear at court hearings. Although an arrest warrant was initially issued, it was withdrawn following the submission of a medical certificate asserting that his continued stay on the Riviera was necessitated by a heart condition. Nevertheless, the court ultimately sentenced the prince (along with his clerk, Jan Polski) to three weeks' imprisonment, with the sentence suspended for two years, for obstructing a bailiff in the execution of his duties⁷⁴. Eventually, his personal conduct and growing notoriety led to his expulsion from the Order of Malta, with repeated failure to pay membership fees cited as the reason⁷⁵.

The extent of the prince's debts was such that in December 1938, by court decision, a receiver was once again assigned to the estate. It remains unclear whether Michał Radziwiłł managed to secure any funds from his new wife; in any event, he was demonstrably on the verge of bankruptcy. Having returned to Poland briefly in 1939, he was staying at his Antonin estate when the Second World War broke out. His wife, Harriet, left for Australia, and reports suggesting the prince had fled to Romania and would soon join her were soon published in the Australian press⁷⁶.

S. Górzyński, J. Grała, W. Piwkowski, V. Urbaniak, T. Zielińska, *Radziwiłłowie herbu Trąby*, Warszawa 1996, family tree, tabl. IV; *Wealthy Australian Woman's Romantic Link with the KENTS*, "The Australian Women's Weekly", 25 II 1939, p. 3.

⁷³ J. Durka, *Perypetie małżeńskie...*, p. 207.

⁷⁴ *Wyrok na ks. M. Radziwiłła*, "Gazeta Lwowska", 26 III 1938, no. 69, p. 2.

⁷⁵ T.W. Lange, *Zakon Maltański w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1919–1939*, Poznań 2000, pp. 196–197.

⁷⁶ *Australian Princess in Russo-Polish Tragedy*, "The Australian Women's Weekly", 4 XI 1939, p. 4.

This narrative, however, was far removed from the truth. While in Antonin, the prince unequivocally sided with the Germans, which was widely noted as a betrayal and a stark contradiction of his family's convictions at the time⁷⁷, demonstrating this allegiance by refusing to afford shelter to a detachment of soldiers from the 60th Infantry Regiment who were retreating after the battle at Chojnik. With the arrival of the Wehrmacht troops, he organised a rally at which he proclaimed his satisfaction at the occupation of Polish territory by the Third Reich. Declaring his German identity, he renamed the Antonin estate 'Antonskrone' and went so far as to bequeath the property to Adolf Hitler. Yet, this sycophancy failed to secure his position in Antonin. Soon the occupying forces ordered him to vacate the palace, despite the fact that he held a German passport, issued on 26 September 1939 in Berlin. Although permitted to return in January 1940, he was immediately placed in protective custody (*Schutzhaft*) on his return, and following his release, he was once again ordered to leave.

The prince subsequently relocated to Berlin where he sought to be recognised as a German national. A local court upheld his claim and granted a decree of divorce by reason of his wife's misconduct, Harriet having allegedly branded him a German swine. This legal triumph, however, proved hollow: the authorities confiscated his property on behalf of the Third Reich, while Hitler declined Radziwiłł's donation due to the prince's notorious reputation. In late 1941 his status as a German citizen was ultimately denied, leaving the validity of his prior divorce in doubt. It was during that period that Michał was admitted to the St. Hedwig Hospital in Berlin.

He nevertheless continued his efforts to pursue inclusion on the Deutsche Volksliste, though these further attempts proved unsuccessful, culminating in the final rejection of his application by the German authorities in 1944⁷⁸. Nor were they willing to restore his

⁷⁷ Such a critical opinion was expressed, among others, by Michał's grandson, Leon Skórzewski, *vide*: R. Nowicki, *Hrabiego Skórzewskiego poszukiwania miejsc na ziemi. Dziennik z podróży do Australii*, Bydgoszcz 2010, p. 68.

⁷⁸ J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł...*, p. 263; A. Łuczak, *Utracone decorum. Grabież dóbr kultury z majątków ziemiaństwa polskiego w Wielkopolsce w czasie okupacji niemieckiej w latach 1939–1945*, Warszawa–Poznań 2011, pp. 106, 217, 249–250; C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, vol. I, Warszawa 1970, pp. 388–389; D.J. Peśla, "Antoniński Maharadża", "Wiadomości Ziemiańskie" 2001, no. 8, p. 30; J. Pietrzak, A. Gibasiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 163; Notarised copy of the passport, APwP, Urząd Powierniczy w Poznaniu (Trustee Office in Poznań), ref. no. 53/759/0/5.21/12166, ff. 383–386.

control over his extensive properties, opting instead to initiate the expropriation of his former estate in Ostrów⁷⁹. In 1945, fleeing the advancing Red Army, Radziwiłł made for Baden with the intention of crossing into Switzerland, only to find himself in a camp for displaced Polish nationals⁸⁰.

The prince never reunited with Harriet, who later maintained that she had not received a single communication from him throughout the war, though this assertion, appears implausible. It is far more likely that the correspondence was of such a damaging nature that she chose to conceal it from third parties. She died on 12 October 1945, with the Australian press still referring to her as Princess Radziwiłł⁸¹.

Immediately after the war, Michał Radziwiłł sought to recover the estate by soliciting the intervention of British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden with the Soviet authorities, explaining that his property had been seized by the Germans. This enterprise was inherently doomed to failure, as the Polish communist administration promptly nationalised the estate. After spending several years in Germany and France, the prince was aided by his second ex-wife in relocating to her estate in the Canary Islands, where he is believed to have died on 6 October 1954⁸².

On 25 November 1954, Janusz Radziwiłł wrote to his daughter, Krystyna, in Madrid: "The details of my brother's last days and death touched me greatly and, despite the fact that it was the end of such a terribly wasted life, which seemed to offer so many opportunities for happiness and success, there is nevertheless great consolation in the fact that his end came within a Catholic fold, where he remained open to the workings of Divine Mercy [...]"⁸³.

⁷⁹ Documents relating to the acquisition of land, APwP, Urząd Powierniczy w Poznaniu (Trustee Office in Poznań), ref. no. 53/759/0/5.21/12166, ff. 140–369.

⁸⁰ J. Pietrzak, A. Gibasiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 163–164.

⁸¹ *Sydney Princess Dies*, "The Sun" [Sydney], 13 October 1945, no. 11, p. 3.

⁸² J. Pietrzak, A. Gibasiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 163–164; Michał Radziwiłł b. 8 luty 1870 d. 6 październik 1954, <https://pl.rodovid.org/wk/Osoba:164798> (accessed 1 October 2023); Książę Michał Karol Jan Radziwiłł h. Trąby, <https://www.geni.com/people/ksi%C4%85%C5%BC%C4%99-Micha%C5%82-Radziwi%C5%82%C5%82-h-Tr%C4%85by/6000000002188456735> (accessed 1 October 2023).

⁸³ Archiwum prywatne Krystyny Radziwiłł-Milewskiej (Private archives of Krystyna Radziwiłł-Milewska), Letter from Janusz Radziwiłł to his daughter, Krystyna Potocka, dated 25 November 1954, photocopy of the letter in the author's possession.

The last owner of the Przygodzice estates, who made his home at Antonin, was as compelling as he was notorious. Until the fall of the Russian Empire, he was engaged in diplomacy, but thereafter, i.e. after the age of forty-seven, he retired from public life and eschewed all political involvement. He persistently contested the inheritance rights of his brothers, first Karol and later Janusz, never reconciling himself to the testamentary dispositions by Ferdynand Radziwiłł. A thorough cosmopolitan, the prince aligned himself more closely with Imperial Germany or Tsarist Russia than with the Second Polish Republic. His extravagant lifestyle, his affairs and his brushes with the law, as well as his ignominious conduct under German occupation, account for his overwhelmingly negative reputation. Yet, despite his lifelong ambition to move exclusively in high society, as a landowner he remained a central figure in the life of the Antonin and Przygodzice community, exerting considerable influence over them for over a decade.

After the end of the Second World War, the Przygodzice estates were nationalised⁸⁴, and in 1948 the palace was placed under state protection through its entry into the Register of Cultural Property (*Rejestr Dóbr Kultury*). In the decades that followed, the building saw a succession of institutional occupants, initially serving the 'Las' Central Production Co-operative before becoming part of the Ostrów Brewing and Malting Plant (*Ostrowskie Zakłady Piwowarsko-Słodowe*) complex in 1963. It was not until 1974–1978 that the Poznań branch of the Monuments Conservation Workshop (*Pracownia Konserwacji Zabytków*) undertook a comprehensive restoration of the dilapidated structure, converting it into a tourist hotel with a café. When administration subsequently passed to the Voivodeship Office in Kalisz, a creative arts retreat (*Dom Pracy Twórczej*) was established in Antonin. Under its auspices, the Regional Museum of the Kalisz Region (*Muzeum Okręgowe Ziemi Kaliskiej*) organised a Fryderyk Chopin Music Salon and a Music Library housing published scores of Chopin's works, a fitting tribute to the great composer, who had once stayed in Antonin at the invitation of the palace's first owner, Antoni Radziwiłł⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ The landowners and aristocracy were regarded as enemies of the new socio-political order in Poland, see: J. Durka, *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec ziemian wielkopolskich do 1957 roku*, "Zeszyty Kaliskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk" 2015, no. 15, pp. 204–226.

⁸⁵ R. Bieniecki, *Pałac Myśliwski. Dom Pracy Twórczej w Antoninie*, Kalisz 1984, p. 12; J. Durka, *Z dziejów ordynacji przygodzickiej, własności rodu*

To this day, Prince Michał remains the subject of various local stories⁸⁶, though few of these lingering tales afford him any degree of posthumous respect.

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⁸⁶ The author recorded one such oral account in 1995 from Stanisław Grzelak of Antonin. Similar anecdotal evidence regarding Michał Radziwiłł continues to surface periodically in the local press.

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