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NICOLAUS COPERNICUS – A CLERGYMAN IN THE TIMES OF BREAKTHROUGH

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On 19th February 1473 in Toruń, undoubtedly in the Old Town but arguably in an impressive tenement house situated at the eastern frontage of the Old Market Square, the fourth and youngest child of Barbara Watzenrode and Cracow merchant, Nicolaus Copernicus was born.¹ The boy, who was called after his father, was later a student of the city school at the church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist and also both The Cracow Academy and The University of Bologna before eventually becoming a canon of Ermland (Warmia), physician, cartographer, economist and astronomer, the author of the famous *De revolutionibus*.² It is no coincidence then, that the best known portrait of Nicolaus Copernicus is on display in Toruń Town Hall.³ If one were to embark upon a detailed inspection of Copernicus' life and its clerical side one would be struck by the fact that neither in the Toruń picture nor any other widely known of his portraits can one spot a tonsure which was required even among clergymen of minor orders⁴ and indeed these were the only orders

¹ All the issues connected with Nicolaus Copernicus' birthplace and his genealogy are discussed by Krzysztof Mikulski in his book, *Mikołaj Kopernik. Środowisko społeczne, pochodzenie i młodość*, Toruń 2015, pp. 253–285, 314–321. This is where you can find a more detailed study. See also the latest book of Janusz MAŁĘK, *Mikołaj Kopernik. Szkice do portretu*, Toruń 2015, pp. 53–55.

² Teresa BORAWSKA with the cooperation of Henryk RIETZ, *Mikołaj Kopernik i jego świat. Środowisko – przyjaciele – echa wielkiego odkrycia*, Toruń 2014, pp. 7–24.

³ Comp. Friedrich SCHWARZ, *Kopernikus-Bildnisse*, [in:] *Kopernikus-Forschungen*, hrsg. v. Johannes PAPRITZ, Hans SCHMAUCH (Deutschland und der Osten, Bd. 22), Leipzig 1943, pp. 143–171; Karol GÓRSKI, *Mikołaj Kopernik: środowisko społeczne i samotność*, Toruń 2012 (2th ed.), pp. 261–266; Józef FLIK, *Portret Mikołaja Kopernika z Muzeum Okręgowego w Toruniu: studium warsztatu malarskiego*, Toruń 1990.

⁴ On the tonsure comp. Edward GÓRSKI, *Święcenia niższe i wyższe. Studium liturgiczno-*

that Nicolaus Copernicus as Canon of Warmia, Nicolaus Copernicus had under him. This will be discussed in more detail later on in this piece.

Nicolaus Copernicus lived to the age of 70 and lived at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, at a time when many significant or even key events for Europe were taking place, especially in Poland and his homeland of Prussia. My intention is not to portray Copernicus solely as a clergymen, which a number of books have recently concentrated upon.⁵ In my article I would like to concentrate on some issues linked to Copernicus as a clergyman but also to delve into the times he lived in as it is worth gaining a wider perspective by viewing the life of this well-educated Canon of Warmia in the light of events taking place first in Europe and then in his “small homeland” of Prussia but also in Toruń, his birthplace.

The turn of the 15th and 16th centuries is undoubtedly an interim period between the Middle-Ages and Early Modern period which brought reformation as well as changes to the way people thought and perceived different spheres of life. Dynamic processes which led to a break with Middle Age tradition began to be noticeable in fields such as science, culture and art. A case in point which can be discussed is the area of disseminating information in the form of the invention of printing and its distribution in the second half of the 15th century. In 1500, when Copernicus was only 27 years of age, printing was in its infancy but numerous printing places existed in Europe at that time such as Basel, Rome, Czech Plzen, Paris, Cracow and Westminster. The invention of printing impacted also on Copernicus’ collection of books and manuscripts from which only two manuscripts were saved along with 54 printed documents, among which can be found 37 incunables and 17 printed documents from the 16th century.⁶ The results of the printing breakthrough apart from the obvious processes of developing literacy also led to unexpected repercussions. One of them was the appearance of censorship as the church felt obliged to take action against the dissemination of heretical texts. As early as 1475, the University of Cologne was granted the Pope’s privilege which enabled the university authorities to censor the printers, publishers, authors and even the readers of such publications. In turn, in 1486, Berthold von Henneberg, the Archbishop

historyczne, Sandomierz 1954; Józef FLIK, *Najstarsze portrety Mikołaja Kopernika jako kanonika fromborskiego i astronoma*, [in:] *Warmińska kapituła katedralna. Dzieje i wybitni przedstawiciele*, ed. Andrzej KOPICZKO, Jacek JEZIEŃSKI, Zdzisław ŻYWICA, Olsztyn 2010, pp. 37–62; comp. Jerzy SIKORSKI, *Prywatne życie Mikołaja Kopernika*, Olsztyn 1985, pp. 7–21.

⁵ See for example: K. GÓRSKI, *Mikołaj Kopernik: środowisko społeczne i samotność*, passim; T. BORAWSKA with the cooperation of H. RIETZ, op.cit., passim; K. MIKULSKI, *Mikołaj Kopernik*, passim; J. MAŁŁEK, op.cit., passim.

⁶ Teresa BORAWSKA, *Księgozbiór Mikołaja Kopernika*, [in:] T. BORAWSKA with the cooperation of H. RIETZ, op.cit., pp. 332–333.

of Moguntia, on the basis of a papal bull issued by Pope Innocent VIII appointed two clergymen of his cathedral and two doctors to conduct research on books. Ten years later he forbade any books being published unless granted the archbishop's permission. Censorship flourished in the 16th century mainly thanks to the activities of Popes Alexander VI and Leo X. The anxiety of the church which accompanied the invention of printing may be best exemplified by the censorship edict issued against the diffusion of the Bible in people's native tongue.⁷

Copernican times in Europe brought the development of humanist thought, Protestant theology, scientific discoveries and overseas exploration. Among the intellectuals of the era, new ways of thinking about the world they lived in were rife and such traces of modern ways of thinking can also be traced to Copernicus and are exemplified, for example, by the selection of books saved from his private library. Not entirely without reason are these mostly mathematical-astronomical works, medical treatises and legal works, with just a few on theology such as the famous *The Four Books of Sentence* by Peter Lombard with St. Bonaventure's comments.⁸ However the key interdisciplinary manifesto of humanism became a treatise by Pico della Mirandola entitled *Oration on the Dignity of Man* in which he depicted the Renaissance concept of a human being as a free, creative and versatile individual. He also understood the concept of history as a science concentrating on processes of changes along with progress.⁹ Christian humanism was also avowed by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/1467–1536), the author of the famous *The Praise of Folly*, a satire on the society of that time. He was a clergyman yet with a strong anti-clerical approach, a vicious critic of the church who did not however participate in the reformation.¹⁰

Early humanism was marked by a cult for classical authors with an accompanying rise in the intensive development of Biblical studies based on critical research of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. However, some significant achievements by Europeans of that time spread to other spheres too. A clear case in point is the application of perspective in paintings which can be observed in the works of Piero della Francesca (circa 1415–1492) in his picture, *The Flagellation of Christ*, in a set of pictures by Paolo Uccello (1397–1475)

⁷ Lucien FEBVRE, Henri-Jean MARTIN, *Narodziny książki*, transl. Anna KOCOT, Maria WODZIŃSKA-WALICKA, Warszawa 2016, pp. 366–367, 478.

⁸ T. BORAWSKA, *Księgozbiór Mikołaja Kopernika*, p. 356.

⁹ Giovanni PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Oratio de hominis dignitatis. Mowa o godności człowieka*, translated by Zbigniew NERCZUK, Mikołaj OLSZEWSKI, introduction by Danilo FACCA, Warszawa 2010.

¹⁰ ERAZM Z ROTTERDAMU, *Pochwała głupoty*, transl. Edwin JĘDRKIEWICZ, introduction by Henryk BARYCZ, Wrocław 1953.

The battle of San Romano and also in Albrecht Durer's (1471–1528) treatises for example: *Four Books on Measurement or Instructions for Measuring with Compass and Ruler*.¹¹ Accurate depictions of perspective dominated realism in the arts for the next 400 years. An artist of singular importance and incomparable in the era was Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), the illegitimate child of a lawyer, Pier da Vinci and a peasant girl called Catherina, who grew up to be one of the most versatile geniuses of the era. He gained fame mainly thanks to his painting ability and in this context it is worth mentioning his famous *Gioconda* (*Mona Lisa*), *Lady with an Ermine* and *The Last Supper*.¹² The era which is under discussion brought also changes to music which started to be recognized as an art form. Although the main genres of religious music (the holy mass, *officium* and motet) remained, in secular music simple pieces based on chord technique and often in dancing rhythm (for example *baletto*) gained popularity. It should be added that dance was viewed by the church in the Middle Ages as entertainment for the lower groups of society but became visibly ennobled at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries.¹³

The first secular dance performance was staged in 1489 in the Italian city of Tortona, to celebrate the wedding of Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the Prince of Milan to Isabel of Aragon. After that, the performance dance, *baletto*, reached the French court during the reign of Catherine de' Medici and in the 17th century became one of the basic genres of the art of music.¹⁴

The Copernicus era was also a time of serious attempts to reform the Church, initially with no intention of dividing it. It was unsurprising that a young German Augustine, Martin Luther, was deeply upset by what he had seen in Rome during his visit there in 1509 as he had come across Pope Julius II whose main interests were wars and conquests. The Pope financed his rather expensive so called "passion" with the money he raised from selling indulgences in Germany. In addition to this, Luther saw clergy of dubious morality trading off the holy sacraments.¹⁵ The famous 1517 *Ninety-Five Theses* of

¹¹ Vilmos TÁTRAI, *Piero della Francesca*, transl. Agnieszka KILIJAŃCZYK, Warszawa 1982, picture no. 22; Paolo Uccello, Einführung v. Paolo D'ANCONA, Wien–München 1962, tab. 47–52; Albrecht. *Dürer jako pisarz i teoretyk sztuki*, ed. Jan BIAŁOSTOCKI, Wrocław 1956, pp. LXIII–LXXXV.

¹² Comp. Frank ZÖLLNER, *Leonardo da Vinci. Dzieła wszystkie*, transl. Anna CICHOWICZ, Köln 2011.

¹³ See for example: Sylwia KONARSKA-ZIMNICKA, *Taniec w Polsce średniowiecznej*, Kraków–Kielce 2009, *passim*.

¹⁴ Maria DRABECKA, *Tańce historyczne. Basse dans, Ballo, Branle*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 77–83; Bożena BEDNARZOWA, *Wybrane zagadnienia historii tańca*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 96–97.

¹⁵ John TODD, *Marcin Luter. Studium biograficzne*, transl. Tadeusz SZAFRAŃSKI, Warszawa 1970, pp. 70–72; Franz LAU, *Marcin Luter*, transl. Janusz NARZYŃSKI, part 1, Warszawa 1966, pp. 27–28.

Wittenberg was nothing more than a document including most of Luther's objections against these church practices. Only later after further public disputes and treatises became more widely distributed did a split take place in German society to be followed in other European countries. At the time when Copernicus was already an ageing canon of the Warmia church, Niccolio Machiavelli (1469–1527), a historian, dramatist, and Florentine diplomat, the author of the infamous *The Prince* written in 1513, was initiating new political thought and becoming its chief advocate. In *The Prince* he advocated an apparent separation between politics and morality thus creating the blueprint for a Renaissance prince. The truth is that he was an advocate of definite power and the rule of law and his real novelty was in perceiving a country as a solemn human creation and not a divine one.¹⁶

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Bearing in mind the exponential changes taking place in Europe, attention will now be turned to Copernicus' "small homeland", Royal Prussia. Copernicus was born seven years after the Thirteen Years' War which resulted in important changes taking place in both political and territorial matters in the State of the Teutonic Order. By virtue of the Second Peace of Toruń of 1466, the Teutonic Order ceded the territories of Eastern Pomerania including Gdańsk, Chełmno land with Chełmno and Toruń, the mouth of the Vistula with Elbląg and Malbork and the Bishopric of Warmia with Olsztyn to the Polish King, Casimir IV Jagiellon. The order also acknowledged the rights of the Polish Crown to Prussia's western half, subsequently known as Polish or Royal Prussia. This area of 24 thousand kms, was one of the most developed both culturally and economically of the multicultural territories of the Polish Republic and was Copernicus' "small homeland".¹⁷ The cities that existed in the territory such as Gdańsk (35 000 inhabitants), Toruń (10 000–12 000) and Elbląg (9000) were among the biggest urban centres in Poland. The governing elites of cities was however mostly German and they were also the repositories of intellectual thought.¹⁸ As a result, the main language on the territory was German which was also the official language although over half of Royal Prussia's population was of Polish origin and only a small group of Prussian heritage. The inhabitants of the Prussian district, including Copernicus himself, regardless of their ethnical and social heritage or language spoken were aware of their country's distinctiveness, even though it lay within the Polish Republic. It was a com-

¹⁶ Niccolò MACHIAVELLI, *Książę: Cel uświęca środki*, transl. Zdzisław PŁOSKI, Gliwice 2010.

¹⁷ Marian BISKUP, *Polityka zewnętrzna zakonu krzyżackiego. Główne etapy wojny trzydziestoletniej*, [in:] *Państwo zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach. Władza i społeczeństwo*, ed. Marian BISKUP, Roman CZAJA, Warszawa 2008, pp. 273–275.

¹⁸ Roman CZAJA, *Mieszczanństwo. Struktura etniczna*, [in:] *Państwo zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach*, pp. 447–448.

munity strengthened by sharing a common tradition and historical awareness. Warmia (Ermland) played an important role in Prussia, where in the years 1467–1479, Bishop Nicolaus Tungen was trying to turn it into an autonomous territorial county under the protection of the Polish king.¹⁹ At the beginning of the 16th century, at a time when Copernicus returned to Warmia after his graduation and became a member of The Warmia Chapter, there were 90 000 inhabitants and he was one of 240 clergymen operating in the diocese. There were also around 200 monks and nuns resulting in the clergy of the diocese making up 5% of the population of the dominium. One of the reasons for the small number of clergymen in Warmia was a dearth of big urban centres which would attract them to serve the numerous benefices, prebendaries, schools, brethren or guilds. What needs to be stressed is the fact that the clergy were quite frequently recruited from Prussian circles which allowed them to be employed in pastoral work.²⁰

The elite of Warmia clergy were naturally from the Frombork cathedral chapter, which Copernicus had been officially a member of since 1497 but in reality from 1501. In the historiography available there is a prevailing opinion that in 1495 he was designated to the Warmia canon and ultimately he was to gain the position before 10th October 1497, which is clearly indicated in a notary's document issued in Bologna by which he himself, as Warmia canon established his own prosecutors.²¹ Nobody has offered an explanation as to what the designation meant and what other arguments might have been put forward for Copernicus to be let enter the chapter prior to 8th November 1495.²² To find an answer to this, one needs to explain how canon law regulated the manning of canons in cathedral chapters. Initially, the person had to be appointed to hold a church post. And for Nicolaus Copernicus all necessary requirements were taken care of by his uncle, Lukas Watzenrode most probably before 8th November 1495.²³ This resulted in Copernicus gaining *ius in re*, which made him only a title holder.²⁴ Awarding a canon the beneficiary title ("mission in possessionem") was another dual element legislative act: reception, which meant

¹⁹ Marian BISKUP, *Polityka zewnętrzna zakonu krzyżackiego. Realizacja traktatu toruńskiego (1466–1497)*, [in:] *Państwo zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach*, pp. 276–277.

²⁰ Gerhard MATERN, *Die kirchlichen Verhältnisse in Ermland während des späten Mittelalters*, Paderborn 1953, pp. 33–36, 39–40.

²¹ Marian BISKUP, *Regesta Copernicana* (Studia Copernicana, vol. 7), Wrocław 1973, p. 57, no. 30; comp. K. GÓRSKI, *Mikołaj Kopernik: środowisko społeczne i samotność*, p. 105; J. MAŁŁEK, op.cit., p. 102. Comp. J. SIKORSKI, *Prywatne życie*, pp. 36–37.

²² M. BISKUP, *Regesta Copernicana*, p. 55, no. 24.

²³ This is the first mention of Copernicus owning a "pro cappa" payment, comp. *ibid.*

²⁴ On commission for church benefices comp. Edward RITTER, *Prawo kościelne katolickie*, vol. 1, Lwów 1907, pp. 327–335.

admission to the chapter, and installation, which meant owning a prebend, a form of benefice held by a prebendary. Only installation gave a new canon the right to vote, possession of benefice and a place in the choir.²⁵ The question arises as to what stage of the process Copernicus was before 8th November 1495 when in Warmia custody there are books of accounts indicating that he owed some charges “pro cappa”. According to the Warmia Chapter statute of 1384 which stated very clearly that prelates and canons who were to own a particular benefice for the first time were obliged to pay a particular fee: prelates – of 10 units and canons getting a bigger prebend – of 8 units. The key point to keep in mind is the fact that the charge which was used to prepare a special choir robe for a canon known as “pro cappa”, was to be paid within 5 years from a canon’s reception.²⁶ These provisions in the statutes given to the chapter in the years 1485–1489 by Bishop Nicolas Tungen and which still were valid in Copernicus’ times were only changed with respect to the reason and amount of the charge. It was written down that each new canon would have to pay 10 units “ad fabricam” (for renovation of the cathedral) and 8 units for the vestment to celebrate “officium divinum”. What was not changed was the date of payment which was still 5 years from the day of a canon’s reception.²⁷ Decisions contained in later statutes show quite clearly that Nicolas Copernicus was accepted by the chapter before 8th November 1495 and became a canon but without holding the most important rights of a chapter member as those were granted only after installation. These were undoubtedly granted at a later date and the reason for the delay might have been an argument over a prebend with another candidate to become Warmia canon or indeed a member of the chapter. Such a course of events could have been the most likely state of affairs as it seems to be implied in the notary’s instrument from 10th October 1497 in which Copernicus entitles all his plenipotentiaries to take possession of all incomes belonging to him as Warmia canon.²⁸ If Karol Górski is right in stating that on the basis of this document, Copernicus established his plenipotentiaries as a result of some argument over a prebend which he thought he

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 346–358.

²⁶ *Codex Diplomaticus Warmiensis oder Regesten und Urkunden zur Geschichte Ermlands*, hrsg. v. Carl P. WOELKY, Bd. 3, Braunsberg–Leipzig 1874, no. 165, point 4, p. 121 (“Item statuimus, quod Prelati et Canonici de novo intrantes, pro comparacione ornatum ad diuinum officium spectantium, Prelatus decem marca et Canonicus maiori prebenda prebendatus octo marcas, infra quinquennium a die receptionis sue computandum soluere teneatur”).

²⁷ *Monumenta Historiae Warmiensis oder Quellensammlung zur Geschichte Ermlands*, Bd. 4, hrsg. v. Franz HIPLER, Braunsberg–Leipzig 1872, p. 250, point 11 (“Item Statuimus, quod Canonicus de nouo intrans ad fabricam Decem et pro ornatibus ad diuinum officium spectantibus Octo marcas infra Quinquennium a die receptionis sue computandum soluere teneatur”).

²⁸ M. BISKUP, *Regesta Copernicana*, p. 57, no. 30.

was going to lose in 1496, the fact that a “pro cappa” payment was demanded of him in the same year implies he was still a clergyman being groomed for the Warmia chapter, most probably with no certainty of keeping the prebend.²⁹ In the light of these arguments, defining Copernicus’ status in Lukas Watzenrode’s notary instrument of 22 February 1496, as a Chełmno seminary student suggests that Copernicus was regarded as chosen and being groomed for the chapter.³⁰ What is more, Copernicus as Warmia canon like all the other members of the chapter would be expected to take an oath to his bishop and also to the Polish king.³¹

In Copernican times, the Warmia chapter was dominated by the sons of Prussian middle-class citizens, mainly from Gdańsk which was blossoming at that time.³² There were also a significant group of middle-class canons who came like Copernicus from Toruń.³³ At the time when he was in the possession of a Warmia prebend it was more frequent for clergymen from Poland to become members of the corporation. A Collegiate Chapter consisted of clergy who usually had university degrees but one should keep in mind that Copernicus was not the only one who held a PhD in canon law. At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries a large group of prelates and Warmia canons studied at various universities, usually law, which was undertaken by 18 clergymen. A significant number managed to acquire PhD degrees, most frequently in canon law. Others studied for shorter or longer periods at the universities of Cracow, Bologna, Leipzig, Rome, Frankfurt, Cologne, Padua, Vienna and other institutions all over Europe.³⁴ Warmia canons would not often write about the problems of the contemporary world as their interests lay in religious writings, mainly concerning polemics with Lutheran followers. A case in point being Copernicus’ friend, Tiedemann Giese who in 1525 published in Cracow his work *Anthelogikon* in which he expressed religious tolerance, belief in moral renewal of both individuals and the church. He also believed that there

²⁹ Karol GÓRSKI, *Objęcie kanonii we Fromborku przez Mikołaja Kopernika*, *Zapiski Historyczne*, vol. 38: 1973, no. 3, pp. 41–44.

³⁰ M. BISKUP, *Regesta Copernicana*, p. 55, no. 25 (“Nicolao Copernick [...] clerico Colmensi”).

³¹ *Protokoły z posiedzeń warmińskiej kapituły katedralnej z czasów Mikołaja Kopernika (1499–1543)*, comp. by Alojzy SZORC, developed by Irena MAKARCZYK, Olsztyn 2015; the words of the oath to the bishop are given by J. SIKORSKI, *Prywatne życie*, p. 46.

³² Teresa BORAWSKA, *Gdańszczanie w kapitule warmińskiej w XIII–XVI w.*, [in:] *Duchowieństwo kapitulne w Polsce średniowiecznej i wczesnonowożytnej. Pochodzenie i funkcjonowanie elity kościelnej*, ed. Andrzej RADZIŃSKI, Toruń 2000, pp. 117–132.

³³ Krzysztof MIKULSKI, *Mieszczanie toruńscy w kapitule chełmińskiej i warmińskiej*, [in:] *Duchowieństwo kapitulne*, pp. 101–116.

³⁴ T. BORAWSKA, *Gdańszczanie w kapitule warmińskiej*, pp. 124–125.

was an opportunity available to cooperate with Lutherans mainly through mutual compromise. In his view, he was following in the footsteps of Erasmus of Rotterdam.³⁵ Giese was also the author of a treatise which he finished in 1535 entitled *De regno Christi*, in which he discussed Christian beliefs, still hoping for the church to stay unified. What the reading material of the clergy in Copernicus' environs was, is an interesting question. Apart from religious texts and books on the reformation, they undoubtedly read works of the great philosophers, starting with Aristotle and finishing with books on law, medicine, pharmacology and astronomy. Seldom in their libraries were books on history, geography, literature or poetry to be found. Among the people closest to Copernicus was his uncle, Lukas Watzenrode, the Bishop of Warmia, who introduced him to the Frombork cathedral chapter. Copernicus stayed in the Bishop's castle in Lidzbark in the years 1503–1510 which afforded him the opportunity to find out more about the ins and outs of Watzenrode's policies towards the clergy, Prussian estates, the Teutonic Order and the Polish kings. In the light of the latest research, it can be said that Copernicus in Warmia cooperated with a group of 30 canons, some of whom he met at universities or at the bishop's court. One of the aforementioned was Henry Snellenberg, the son of a Toruń merchant, whom Copernicus met quite early as they both enrolled to study in Cracow in 1491. Later on, they both worked in the Warmia chapter however not always free of conflict, as was the case in 1524 when Copernicus accused him of stealing the non-trivial sum of 10 units.³⁶ At the University of Bologna, Copernicus studied with Fabien Luzjański, a later canon, Warmia chapter chancellor and in the years 1512–1523 Warmia bishop. This acquaintanceship also ended in an unpleasant incident when Luzjański tried to steal a map of the Prussian borders compiled by Copernicus.³⁷ One of the most devoted of Copernicus' friends was the aforementioned Tiedemann Giese, Warmia canon and later Chełmno bishop. He was the person most interested in Copernicus' research and he was also the one who encouraged him to publish his work *De revolutionibus* becoming as a result seriously engaged in the defence of the heliocentric concept even after Copernicus' death. It was his name together with the name of Cardinal Nicolas Schonberg that Copernicus put in his dedicational letter to Pope Paul II and in the preface to *De revolutionibus*.³⁸

³⁵ Eadem, *Tiedemann Giese (1480–1550) w życiu wewnętrznym Warmii i Prus Królewskich*, Olsztyn 1984, pp. 305–310.

³⁶ His biogram was developed by Teresa Borawska in: *Słownik biograficzny kapituły warmińskiej*, ed. Jan GUZOWSKI, Olsztyn 1996, pp. 226–227.

³⁷ Comp. his biogram done by Jerzy Sikorski in: *Poczet biskupów warmińskich*, ed. Stanisław ACHREMCHYK, Olsztyn 2008, pp. 105–114.

³⁸ T. BORAWSKA, *Tiedemann Giese*, pp. 339–366.

Nicolas Copernicus spent 18 years in total in Toruń (1473–1491). A closer look at some aspects of the city's history at that time may help in answering the question whether that period can be considered a turning point in the city's history. Socio-topographical research shows that there were many interesting events taking place at that time. The Thirteen Years' War and the enormous financial involvement of Toruń merchants in it gradually led to the decline of the whole social elite of the city. It was predominantly the townspeople who were involved on the side of the Polish king and the Prussian Confederation. The old, so called patrician families, ceased and new ones rose up to take their place. The financial crisis affected some of the most prominent Toruń families such as the Wegens and Beckers but also the astronomer's family – the Watzenrodes. At the same time, some significant old merchant families: the von Loes, the Russes and the Theudenkus simply died out. From the 1580s, the new elite became engaged and indeed gained a monopoly as grain brokers which initiated open warfare with the richest personages centred in food guilds. This conflict dominated the city's life resulting in a riot in 1523. The new elite were largely comprised of families coming from Western and Northern Germany, Lower Silesia, and to a lesser extent the northern parts of the Kingdom of Poland. Among them were some notable families such as the Krugers, the Beults, the Seuses, the Eskens, the Koys and the Strobands. The elite constituted the city council and in the years 1500–1523 there were only 38 families in it, all with very strong genealogical ties. Even though the Polish ethnic group was growing in number in Toruń, they belonged to the poorer circles of society.³⁹

Religious life in Toruń at this time concentrated around parishes, monastic churches existing fraternities and religious associations.⁴⁰ The townspeople's religious life centered around taking part in masses and contemplating icons and church decorations.⁴¹ One of the most important aspects was fund raising among the elite of the townspeople.⁴² Amongst all the churches of Toruń,

³⁹ The issues are discussed in detail by Krzysztof MIKULSKI, *Wymiana elity władzy w Toruniu w drugiej połowie XV w. (przyczynek do badań nad mechanizmami kształtowania się elit)*, [in:] *Elity mieszczańskie i szlacheckie Prus Królewskich i Kujaw w XIV–XVIII w.*, ed. Jacek STASZEWSKI, Toruń 1995, pp. 51–93. Comp. idem, *Przestrzeń i społeczeństwo Torunia od końca XIV do początku XVIII w.*, Toruń 1999, pp. 163–175.

⁴⁰ Roman CZAJA, *Życie religijne mieszczaństwa toruńskiego w XV wieku*, *Rocznik Toruński*, vol. 18: 1988, pp. 217–240; religious associations in big teutonic cities were discussed by Ireneusz CZARCIŃSKI, *Bractwa w wielkich miastach państwa krzyżackiego w średniowieczu*, Toruń 1993.

⁴¹ Monika JAKUBEK-RACZKOWSKA, *Tu ergo flecte genua tua. Sztuka a praktyka religijna świeckich w diecezjach pruskich państwa zakonu krzyżackiego do połowy XV w.*, Pelplin 2014 (especially the second part: *Religio et civitas. Sztuka a praktyka religijna w miastach państwa krzyżackiego*).

⁴² These issues for Prussian cities are discussed by Piotr OLIŃSKI, *Fundacje mieszczańskie*

a predominant role was played by the parish church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist with its excellently educated clergy with close connections to the Chełmno chapter and bishopry.⁴³ Of lesser importance was St. Jacob's church whose parsons were appointed by the city council and with the consensus of the abbess of the Holy Spirit Convent.⁴⁴ Around the Old Town there was a Franciscan monastery next to St. Mary the Virgin Church, which belonged to the Saxony province and was held under Prussian custody but at the end of the 15th century there was an attempt to reform it as discipline was failing however this was only partially successful.⁴⁵ The Dominican monastery next to St. Nicolas church was of interest to tertiaries, and in 1469 Nicolas Copernicus (senior) with his wife Barbara and children could be encountered there.⁴⁶ The aforementioned Benedictine convent of the Holy Spirit was very successful at the beginning of the 16th century under the leadership of Angelica von Allen and functioned well attracting 53 nuns, mostly daughters of the townspeople.⁴⁷

The fact that the Catholic church predominated Toruń city life at the beginning of the 16th century did not help it in avoiding criticism mainly directed at the clergy. The critical comments directed at the city's clergy highlighted their secularity, alcohol abuse and abuse of canon law in conflicts with the townspeople. The influence of Luther's works must have reached Toruń at

w miastach pruskich w okresie średniowiecza i na progu czasów nowożytnych (Chełmno, Toruń, Elbląg, Gdańsk, Królewiec, Braniewo), Toruń 2008, passim; comp. also: Marian BISKUP, *U schyłku średniowiecza i w początkach odrodzenia (1454–1548)*, [in:] *Historia Torunia*, ed. idem, vol. 2, pt. 1, Toruń 1992, p. 210.

⁴³ Andrzej RADZIMIŃSKI, *Kościół p. w. św. Jana Chrzciciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty w topografii sakralnej średniowiecznego Torunia*, [in:] *Dzieje i skarby Kościoła Świętojańskiego w Toruniu*, ed. Katarzyna KLUCZWAJD, Michał WOŹNIAK, Toruń 2002, pp. 25–40; por. Krzysztof MIKULSKI, *Dzieje parafii świętojańskiej w XIII–XVIII w.*, [in:] *Bazylika katedralna Świętych Janów w Toruniu*, red. Marian BISKUP, Toruń 2003, pp. 15–18; on this parish church and its clergy comp. Marcin SUMOWSKI, *Duchowni diecezjalni w średniowiecznym Toruniu. Studium prozopograficzne*, Toruń 2012, pp. 21–30, 70–81 (more on the subject available).

⁴⁴ M. SUMOWSKI, *Duchowni diecezjalni*, pp. 31–36, 70–81; idem, *Duchowieństwo parafialne Nowego Miasta Torunia i jego społeczne oddziaływanie w średniowieczu*, [in:] *Nowe Miasto Toruń. 750 lat od lokacji*, ed. Krzysztof MIKULSKI, Piotr OLIŃSKI, Waldemar ROZYNKOWSKI, Toruń 2014, pp. 85–99.

⁴⁵ Marian BISKUP, *Średniowieczna sieć klasztorów w państwie Zakonu Krzyżackiego w Prusach (do 1525)*, [in:] *Zakony i klasztory w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej X–XX w.*, ed. Henryk GAPSKI, Jerzy KŁOCZOWSKI, Lublin 1999, pp. 59–60.

⁴⁶ Łukasz MYSZKA, *Dominikanie w Toruniu: od fundacji do kasaty*, [in:] *Nowe Miasto Toruń*, p. 184. Comp. Rafał KUBICKI, *Miejsce klasztoru toruńskiego w prowincji polskiej dominikanów w średniowieczu*, [in:] *Klasztor dominikański w Toruniu. W 750 rocznicę fundacji*, ed. Piotr OLIŃSKI, Waldemar ROZYNKOWSKI, Juliusz RACZKOWSKI, Toruń 2013, pp. 25–42.

⁴⁷ M. BISKUP, *U schyłku średniowiecza*, p. 207.

quite an early stage if King Sigmund the Old, had already on 24th July 1520 issued an edict forbidding the bringing of Luther's works into the kingdom. A year later, in the King's presence, during a mass in St. Johns' Church, the Franciscan, Bernard of Grabow, made a powerful speech pointing out Luther's mistakes. The Papal legate, Zachariasz Ferreri, who was also present at the mass burnt Luther's works in public and even tried to burn a life-like effigy of Luther shaped as a devil at the local cemetery.⁴⁸ The incident caused some anti-religious reactions among some Toruń townspeople. The religious situation in Toruń is presented in the famous document *Reformatio Sigismundi* of 22nd August 1523 but any Lutheran reference is absent.⁴⁹ Despite this, Toruń city council was quite careful about the religious novelties reaching town in an effort to suppress open anti-catholic reactions. This did indeed work for some time and as a result Toruń remained Catholic up to the late 1620s and Lutheranism took root in Toruń no earlier than from the beginning of the next decade.⁵⁰ Nicolas Copernicus, as canon of the Frombork chapter, could only observe these very strong and upsetting for himself processes, taking place in his hometown from a distance.

* * *

In attempting to discuss Nicolas Copernicus' activities as a clergyman it is necessary to define the role clergy played in the medieval and early modern periods. It is worth remembering that the final split and the formal categorisation of Christians into clerical and secular was carried out by a monk of Bologna, Gracian, who in the 12th century codified canon law in *Concordantia discordantium canonum*. Nicolas Copernicus should be perceived as a man who devoted his life to God and prayer. The key point to remember is that the clergy of that time were really diversified in terms of both their position in the church hierarchy and in society itself (for instance, bishops, abbots, prelates of chapters and cathedrals, canons of the chapters, parish priests of parish churches, vicars of the churches and so on) but also in terms of the holy orders they received. In Copernicus' time, there were two kinds of holy orders: lower (which included: ostiarius, reader, exorcist and acolyte) and higher (sub-deacon, deacon and presbyter). A separate category were bishop's orders. The higher one's position was the more possible it was for a clergyman to serve at

⁴⁸ Max TÖPPEN, *Die älteste Thorner Stadtchronik*, Zeitschrift des Westpreußischen Geschichtsvereins, Bd. 42: 1900, p. 171; *Thorner Denkwürdigkeiten von 1345–1547*, hrsg. v. Albert VOIGT (Mitteilungen des Copernicus-Vereins für Wissenschaft und Kunst zu Thorn, H. 13), Thorn 1904, p. 151. More on the subject: M. BISKUP, *U schyłku średniowiecza*, p. 214.

⁴⁹ Text on: *Reformatio Sigismundi* published and discussed: Richard JACOBI, *Die Reformatio Sigismundi vom J. 1523*, Mitteilungen des Copernicus-Vereins für Wissenschaft und Kunst zu Thorn, H. 18: 1910, pp. 2–26; comp. M. BISKUP, *U schyłku średniowiecza*, p. 215.

⁵⁰ M. BISKUP, *U schyłku średniowiecza*, pp. 218–223.

the altar whilst those of a lower position were kept away from it. Ostiariuses were obliged to watch church possessions and to let the faithful into the church. Readers read the Words of God, and sang lessons. Exorcists would prepare a catechumen for baptism and pray with them, saying special prayers called exorcisms. Acolytes accompanied the bishop and helped him during ceremonies at the altar.⁵¹ It needs to be pointed out that receiving higher holy orders did not automatically translate into obtaining a higher pecking order in the church hierarchy. What is more, very often having a lower position was enough to hold some personal prelature and become a canon in a cathedral and gain admittance to college chapters all over Europe. The latest research shows that prelates and canons who belonged to chapters did not have higher holy orders. And such was the case with the Warmia chapter.⁵² In 1531, Maurice Ferber, the Warmia bishop reprimanded his canons for not taking higher holy orders at a time when only one clergyman residing at the cathedral had them.⁵³ A few years later, in 1549, during the election of Bishop Tiedemann Giese, there were two canons with holy orders and the remaining six all had higher orders – at the minimum of sub deacon level.⁵⁴ An absence of holy orders had two serious ramifications; 1) clergymen could not fully conduct mass which meant looking for replacements, usually vicars, 2) clergymen of lower orders found it easier to return to secular life which some of them availed of. Nicolas Copernicus was a member of one of the lower orders (but unfortunately it is not known which one) which in accordance with canon law entitled him to hold the post of canon in the Warmia chapter. He received this entitlement most probably in the autumn of 1494 and kept it until his death in 1543.⁵⁵ It appears however that Karol Górski, who wrote that Copernicus did not have higher orders as he did not have a clergyman's vocation was not right. The reasons behind him not obtaining higher orders were more to do with the rules of canon law which allowed such situations to occur in regards to prelates and canons and was

⁵¹ For more details on the subject comp. E. GÓRSKI, op.cit., passim.

⁵² Radosław KRAJNIAK, "Prażacy i kanonicy warmińskiej kapituły katedralnej do 1466 roku. Studium prozopograficzne", Toruń 2017 (a typewritten copy of a PhD thesis written under my supervision, University Library, UMK, Toruń).

⁵³ Franz HIPLER, *Die Ermländische Bischofswahl vom Jahre 1549*, Zeitschrift für die Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ermlands, Bd. 11: 1897, p. 85; Hans SCHMAUCH, *Um Nicolaus Kopernicus*, [in:] *Studien zur Geschichte des Preussenlandes. Festschrift für Erich Keyser zu seinem 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern*, hrsg. v. Ernst BAHR, Marburg 1963, pp. 422–426; in recent literature comp. J. MAŁŁEK, op.cit., pp. 102–103.

⁵⁴ F. HIPLER, op.cit., p. 85 ("Reverendissime Praesul, duo sunt sacerdotes solum apud Ecclesiam Canonici, fateor; nemo tamen ibidem est, qui non ad minus sit Subdiaconus, ex quibus ex quibus etiam canones admittunt eligi Episcopus"). Comp. J. MAŁŁEK, op.cit., p. 102.

⁵⁵ Comp. Zofia WARDĘSKA, *Problem święceń kapłańskich Mikolaja Kopernika*, Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki, vol. 14: 1969, no. 3, p. 455–473.

indeed a general European trend.⁵⁶ What is more, Copernicus was a very well educated intellectual with varying interests and theology was undoubtedly not top of his interest list.⁵⁷ The previously mentioned analysis of his library showed him to be in possession of only a small number of books on theology. What is more, lower orders made it possible for him to get benefice in the College Church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław, which he held from 1503–1538.⁵⁸ Copernicus was primarily a Warmia canon and member of the cathedral chapter at the Bishop's Cathedral in Frombork which played a very important role in the religious life and system of organisation of the whole Warmia diocese. Its prelates and canons were obliged to celebrate everyday *officium divinum* and played important roles managing the diocese with the bishop. The Warmia chapter held independently of the bishop quite an extensive demesne. As has been mentioned, Copernicus had to have a tonsure which cannot be seen in his known portraits. Most probably then he did not have one although it was against church law but was in accordance with the customs holding sway among the clergy at that time. All that is left to discuss is the matter of celibacy which is again not made explicit. As early as in the 5th century, The Council of Chalcedon in canon 14 did not forbid clergy from getting married but did explicitly ban mixed marriages with gentiles. In the Council's writings can be found such terms as "episcopia" – a wife of a bishop, "presbutera" (a wife of a priest) and "diaconissa" (a wife of a deacon). The rule of thumb was however that a clergyman could get married only once. His wife had to be a virgin and not one who had been married before. In contrast to ecumenical councils, the diocese ones, such as for example in French Arle (314) forbade the clergy from indulging in sexual intercourse with their wives as they had holy duties to fulfil.⁵⁹ In the Middle Ages, for example, in the work of Reginon of Prum *De ecclesiasticis disciplinis* (906) it can be read that priests and deacons who took part in the holy sacraments should stay away from their wives. They could live together in matrimony but could not get married after receiving holy orders. Similar instructions can be found in *Decretum* by Burchard of Worms (around 1008–1012).⁶⁰ The 11th century in the western church marked the beginning of

⁵⁶ K. GÓRSKI, Czy Kopernik był kapłanem?, [in:] *Mikołaj Kopernik: studia i materiały Sejsji Kopernikańskiej w KUL 18–19 lutego 1972 roku*, ed. Marian KURDZIAŁEK, Jerzy REBETA, Stefan SWIEŻAWSKI, Lublin 1973, p. 66. Comp. Andrzej RADZIŃSKI, *Duchowieństwo kapituł katedralnych w Polsce XIV i XV w. na tle porównawczym. Studium nad rekrutacją i drogami awansu*, Toruń 1995, pp. 86–90.

⁵⁷ T. BORAWSKA, *Księgozbiór Mikołaja Kopernika*, p. 348.

⁵⁸ Comp. Nicolaus Copernicus' biogram, compiled by Teresa Borawska [in:] *Słownik biograficzny kapituły warmińskiej*, pp. 123–124.

⁵⁹ Grzegorz Ryś, *Celibat*, Kraków 2002, pp. 36–38.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

Gregorian reform. The legal solutions offered in regards to celibacy dated from the 1st Lateran Council (1123) under two canon regulations, number 7 and 21. The second canon regulation condemned marriages as well as concubinage but only for priests, deacons and subdeacons. Complete celibacy was not required as of yet because if a clergyman got married before getting higher orders his marriage remained valid.⁶¹ Such issues were given more attention and were clarified at the 2nd Lateran Council in 1139, in canon regulations 6 and 7, in which the marriage of clergymen was called a service to “bed and lust”. Married clergymen, again from the subdeacon category orders were to be deprived of all benefits and their marriages were recognised as invalid. The faithful were called to boycott the masses they would conduct.⁶² As a result, the Third Council of the Lateran (1179) did not mention wives but only the concubines of the higher order priests⁶³ and the Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215) talked about clergy commitment to abstinence and purity and if they failed to abide, punishment would ensue.⁶⁴ Celibacy was not yet either a common law or regulation even though the necessity to observe it was unquestioned by canonists (i.e. *Decretum Gratiani*). Some legislative novelties can be found in papal decrees from 12th–14th centuries which put together with *Decretum Gratiani* constituted the so called *Corpus iuris canonici*, standardizing Catholic church law up to 1017. From Pope Gregory’s IX *Decretales*, it can be ascertained that as early as from the times of Pope Alexander III (1159–1181) the rule was not to grant married clergy any church benefices.

Nicolas Copernicus as Warmia canon and of low orders could not get married and also at the same time, in accordance with the Council of Basel (or Basle) of 1431–1437 had no right to have a concubine.⁶⁵ The severe punishments for clergy who would have taken concubines were decided by the Lateran Council of 1512–1517 (the one held during Copernicus time as canon).⁶⁶ It should be however stressed out that he could have returned to secular life but did not. Nicolas Copernicus should be viewed as a clergyman who was much more engaged in temporal matters than in church services, contempla-

⁶¹ *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, vol. 2: (869–1312), compiled by Arkadiusz BARON, Henryk PIETRAS, Kraków 2002, p. 122 – canon VII (“Ut presbyteris, diaconis, subdiaconis, interdicta sint mulierum contubernia”); p. 132 – canon XXI (“Ut presbyteri etc. Concubinas non habeant, nec matrimonium contrahant”).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 144 – canon VI (“Ut subdiaconi uxorati aut concubinariis a beneficio careant”); pp. 144–145 – canon VII (“Ne quis Missas sacerdotum uxorum vel concubinariorum audiat”).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 184 – canon XI (“Ne clericis in sacris ordinibus constituti focarias habeant”).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 250–252 – canon 14 (“De incontinentia clericorum punienda”).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 350–352 – canon I, 2 (“Decretum de concubinariis”).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

tion or prayer. He was not only an excellent intellectual but also an exceptional organiser, who was entrusted administrative duties over the Warmia chapter. However one of his most significant duties was *officium divinum* in the Frombork cathedral presbytery, where he had his place among sixteen stalls for prelates and other canons. From this position, for many years, his eyes were fixed upon one of the altars funded by Bishop Lukas Watzenrode, presenting the Virgin Madonna with Child. After becoming canon he got his own altar of St. Vaclav.⁶⁷

Three times a year Copernicus as canon would lead the prayers and fulfil altar duties during the Christian liturgy such as keeping an eye on the bell-ringers and altar boys, maintaining the appropriate way of praying during canon hours when the psalms were sung and celebrating holy mass.⁶⁸ As is known Nicolas Copernicus was not ordained which excluded him from the duty of celebrating holy mass. So as was done by many cathedral chapter houses in Europe a vicar had to be hired to perform the aforementioned duties. At the same time, this vicar was paid or rewarded in other ways a number of times a year. Cases in point being that such a vicar would get two units for Christmas and to celebrate Pentecost some wood and chickens.⁶⁹ Nicolas Copernicus just like all other Warmia prelates or canons had to wear appropriate attire. On his way to the cathedral he would wear a long black cassock over which he would put on a red sleeveless jacket with thin fur and a leather belt. In winter, he would add a fur coat. To celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours he would wear a loose white alb and a special cape with a hood called an almutium which in winter was made of fur and topped off with a hat which was made of leather in summer and fur in winter called a pileus.⁷⁰

To sum it up, Nicolas Copernicus was a clergyman of lower holy orders who had an excellent university education which he used in a variety of spheres such as astronomy, economics and medicine and he was assisted in these endeavours because as a Warmia canon as well as a member of the Wrocław chapter he was entitled to certain benefits. At that time, in Europe, the rulers of Christian countries funded a lot of church institutions such as cathedral chapters, which in the later Middle Ages and Modern times provided them with clergymen who were perfectly well educated to serve the country by working

⁶⁷ J. SIKORSKI, *Prywatne życie*, pp. 66–69.

⁶⁸ Teresa BORAWSKA, *Obowiązujące reguły a codzienne życie kanonika warmińskiego*, [in:] T. BORAWSKA przy współudziale H. RIETZA, op.cit., pp. 111–118; comp. J. SIKORSKI, *Prywatne życie*, p. 71.

⁶⁹ J. SIKORSKI, *Prywatne życie*, pp. 71–73; T. BORAWSKA, *Obowiązujące reguły*, pp. 117v–120.

⁷⁰ Eugen BRACHVOGEL, *Die Chorkleidung der ermländischen Dom- und Kollegiatstiftsherren*, *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ermlands*, Bd. 21: 1923, pp. 103–129; comp. J. SIKORSKI, *Prywatne życie*, pp. 69–70; T. BORAWSKA, *Obowiązujące reguły*, pp. 126–131.

as royal chancellors or diplomats. Nicolaus Copernicus was one such clergymen who supported themselves through the church but devoted their hearts solemnly to science.

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NICOLAUS COPERNICUS – A CLERGYMAN IN THE TIMES OF BREAKTHROUGH

Summary

Key words: the Church, the chapter of Ermland [Warmia], the culture and art of the Renaissance, Royal Prussia, Toruń, Reformation

The article presents Nicolaus Copernicus as a clergyman against the background of the momentous epoch in the history of Europe – the transition period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It depicts the great astronomer, lawyer and economist against the background of the substantial cultural and religious event which took place in connection with the Reformation. In the text the author justifies why Copernicus, as a canon of Ermland, had a lower ordination, even when he took over the canonry of Ermland. The author also presents the context of Copernicus' origin in Toruń and Royal Prussia.

NIKOLAUS KOPERNIKUS – GEISTLICHER IN ZEITEN DES WANDELS

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselwörter: Kirche, ermländisches Kapitel, Kultur und Kunst der Renaissance, Königliches Preußen, Thorn, Reformation

Der Artikel präsentiert Nikolaus Kopernikus als Geistlichen vor dem Hintergrund einer Wendezeit in der Geschichte Europas, dem Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Renaissance. Er zeigt die Gestalt des großen Astronomen, aber auch des Juristen

und Ökonomen vor dem Hintergrund der großen und bedeutenden kulturellen und religiösen Ereignisse, die im Zusammenhang mit der Reformation eintraten. Aus der im Text vorgenommenen Analyse geht hervor, warum Nikolaus Kopernikus als Kanoniker von Ermland nur die niederen Weihen besaß. Endgültig geklärt wird auch, wann er dieses ermländische Kanonikat übernahm. Außerdem geht es um die Herkunft von Kopernikus aus Thorn und im weiteren Sinn aus dem Königlichen Preußen.



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