



WIVES OF MYKOLAS KLEOPAS OGINSKIS

Women had a significant place in the life of Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis. In many written sources is indicated that women paid much attention for him. He was the highborn nobleman, artist, politician and charming man – all this attracted women. It is not a secret that Mykolas Kleopas did not avoid a company of women even when he was married and pledged loyalty to the end of the centuries. Sometimes he reached for the relationship giving creative inspiration, enlighten for life, however, it could end up with an opposite result – complicating relations. As educated, polite, moral principles of society accepted person, who showed a great respect for women, Mykolas Kleopas did not expose this side of his life.

Mykolas Kleopas was married twice. His first wife was Isabel Lasocka (1764–1852), the second – Maria de Neri (1778–1851).

ISABEL LASOCKA-OGINSKIENĖ (1764–1852)

Isabel Lasocka and Mykolas Kleopas married on 17th of May 1789 in Brzezina Church (Poland). At that time, M. K. Oginskis climbed the politician career ladder, became a famous and active politician, and received the first high awards of the state.

I. Lasocka was the only daughter of Polish nobleman, Castellan of Gostiny, Voivode Ciechanow Antonio Lasocki (about 1727–1799) and Teresa Godlewska Laskowskie.

Two sons – Tadas Antonijus (1798–1844) ir Pran-

ciðkus Ksaveras (1801–1837) and one daughter (name, birth and death are unknown, of their written M. K. Oginski's mother Paula Ėembek-Oginskienė letter)¹⁷⁰ – were born in the marriage of Isabel and Mykolas Kleopas.

Officially, the marriage of Mykolas Kleopas and Isabel died on 16th of March 1804, however, informally marriage broke up in 1802 when M. K. Oginskis began to live with a widow of Samogitian nobleman Kajetonas Nagurskis (1757–1802)¹⁷¹, from Kurtuvėnai) Maria de Neri (1778–1851). She was from Italy.

Written sources indicate that the marriage of Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis and Isabela broke up because spouses had lived apart for a long time. They had also property disputes, because, "as evidenced by archival sources, the divorce with his first wife was not merely an expression of spiritual relation crisis, but had a clear material basis. Already on 8th of March 1799 in the Castle Acts of Vilnius District was recorded I. Lasocka-Oginskienė's manifesto refusing legal relation with a property of her husband – the former Great Treasurer – in order to protect her property from creditors of her husband. In order to divorce his wife, M. K. Oginskis referred to this document. On 23rd of October 1803, he prepared and on 24th of October recorded a statement in Castle Acts of Vilnius District, in which he sought to protect his property from the claims of former wife's authorized persons. M. K. Oginskis annotated the content of I. Lasocka-Oginskienė's statement (8th of

¹⁷⁰ Lithuanian State Historical Archives (LVIA), F. 1177, p. I. 1, f. 5803, p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Kajetonas Nagurskis – Samogitian and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealths politician, war figure and statesman, the ruler of Kurtuvėnai manor (Samogitia), participant of the Tadeusz Kosciuszko Uprising in 1794. Born in 1757 in Kurtuvėnai, died on April 1802 in Vienna. Marija and Kajetonas had no children. They met in Venice (Italy). Nagurskis lived there for a while after the Uprising of Tadeusz Kosciuszko. In 1796, after the death of Catherine II, Nagurskis received an amnesty and together with Marija they stayed in Warsaw, after that they came to Vilnius, where they married. This marriage lasted very briefly. In 1802 K. Nagurskis died, without leaving heirs. Marija sold the manor of Kurtuvėnai, which also had 1000 voloks of land and several folwarks. She became a very rich young widow (at that time she was at twenty six) and settled in Vilnius.

March 1799), noting that, despite the fact that his wife Isabel Lasocka, Countess Oginskienė, in the already mentioned document declared personal management of her property and stated "that she absolutely refuses and has no claims for her husband's manors and properties" [...]. Despite all the financial failures, Mykolas Kleopas still hoped to maintain good relations in the marriage and soften his wife's heart. However, Mykolas Kleopas had realized that his wife took loans and owed creditors for different needs of her life. In order to protect his property M. K. Oginskis requested, according to 1799 separation of his wife, to legitimize their property separation for the reason that his wife's debts were not calculated from his manors.

On 6th of January 1804 in Warsaw, an agreement was concluded between spouses Isabel and Mykolas Kleopas Oginskiai. The Countess agreed with her husband's proposal to divorce, but on the condition that after the divorce within the time limit M. K. Oginskis will pay 200,000 Polish golden coins, which will be left in the mortgage in favor of his sons' Tadas and Ksaveras. Oginskis also obliged his first wife to cover the expenses for education of their children. Both spouses denied the claims to the holdings of each other located throughout the country.

On 17th of February 1804, Spiritual Court of First Instance of Warsaw confirmed no longer to be valid the marriage of 17th of May 1789 in Brzeziny church between Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis and Isabel Lasocka-Oginskienė. The same year on 16th of March, the Second Instance Court of Warsaw Diocese approved the decision of Spiritual Court of First instance of Warsaw – the marriage of Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis and Isabel Lasocka was no longer valid.¹⁷² There is a reason to believe that Isabel Lasocka initiated property splitting because in 1794 Mykolas Kleopas participated in the Kosciuszko Uprising and his manors and other property was expropriated by the state, transferred to manage for other owners, while creditors sought to recover debts from the family of Isabel and Mykolas Kleopas. It is claimed that before meeting Maria de Neri Mykolas Kleopas could be have been unfaithful to his

wife. There is little known about the subsequent relations with Isabel and his sons from the first marriage, however, as evidenced by 16th of August 1818 testament of Mykolas Kleopas prepared in Vilnius, he took care of all his children, at least for their alimony and education. The second paragraph of the testament stated that all inherited and later purchased manors have to be split into equal shares to all his children (sons and daughters) from both marriages.¹⁷³

MARIA DE NERI-NAGURSKIENĖ- OGINSKIENĖ (1778–1851)

Maria Neri was born in 1778 in the Italian city of Florence, and died on 21st of September 1851 in Pisa (Italy). It is likely that she was a descendant from the famous Italian family, from which also descended Saint Philip Neri (A. Zaluski also supports this version in the book about Mykolas Kleopas¹⁷⁴), although this has not yet been proven by documents. After she became a widow of Kajetonas Nagurskis and began to live with M. K. Oginskis, the major part of Lithuanian nobility considered Maria de Neri as an ignoble and disreputable woman.

In the book "Oginskiai Gene"¹⁷⁵, I. Zaluski openly writes about Maria's youth, her acquaintance with Kajetonas Nagurski, scandalous love adventures and early life with M. K. Oginskis. By this author sought to reveal which genes of children born in the marriage of Mykolas Kleopas and Maria de Neri were inherited from Mykolas Kleopas and which are not. I. Zaluski writes that after returning to Lithuania in 1800:

"In the social life of Vilnius, Mykolas Kleopas discovered one of the most charming public figures – Maria Nagurska, with whom he perhaps first met in Venice, although such fact is not recorded. In 1795, after the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Polish refugees flooded Venice. Between them, there were two veterans of marches in Lithuania – a friend of Mykolas Kleopas Kajetonas Nagurskis and Tadeusz Visogerd. They were together all the time, even arranging dates with local girls, including the attractive 19 years old Maria Neri. Her origins are little known. Some sources

¹⁷² Ramunė Dmigelskytė-Stukienė, "Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis: politikas, diplomatas, ministras ir jo pasø kolekcija" (Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis: Politician, Diplomat, Minister and his Passports Collection), Vilnius: Edukologija, 2013, p. 158–159.

¹⁷³ Lithuanian State Historical Archives (LVIA), F. 1177, p. I. 1, f. 5803, p. 2-2v.

¹⁷⁴ A. Zaluskis, Vilnius, p. 86.

¹⁷⁵ I. Zaluskis, Klaipėda, p. 79-80.

note that she originated from the Florentine bourgeois family, others point out that her father was tavern owner from Florence. For the men her origins mattered very little, however, both of them fell in love with her.

Visogerd was smarter, seduced her and took to Florence. Nagurski did not accept such failure and chased them to the capital of Tuscany, where after persistent persecution recovered her, although Visogerd was smarter and more handsome. Although Mary Neri was extremely beautiful, she did not achieve a lot in life, mainly sang Barcarolles [...]. Nagurski lost his head over her; therefore, in a libertine atmosphere of political emigrants, where the most celebrities lived in "a breeze of the Adriatic Sea", he could flaunt his new love with no public condemnation.

In his book "Several of My Youthful years in Vilnius: Memoirs of the Hermit"¹⁷⁶ Stanislaw Morawski¹⁷⁷ gives some knowledge about Maria's life. It is hard to say if these facts are true and if author could be objective, because, as writes S. Morawski, his own father Apolinar Morawski had a long-term close relationship with Maria de Neri and his younger brother Nikolaj Morawski had close relationship with her sister; there were also various affairs with a financial shade.

In 1801, Maria Nagurska attracted the attention of General Bennigsen. The Count Levin Augustus Gottlieb Bennigsen was born in Braunschweig. His military career began in the army of Hanover. In 1764, Catherine II brought him to Russia. He fought in the war against Turkey and was very active in Poland during the third partition. He became friends with Prince Alexander, who was passionate by a questionable sense of divine mission; therefore, he desired as soon as possible to take the throne of Russia. Supported by a small circle of similar idealists, among which was Bennigsen, Alexander planned the assassination attempt on his father, ostensibly in order to force him to renounce the throne. This conspiracy [...] was not difficult to implement. If we are to believe written chronicle of S. Morawski, Bennigsen was the man who suffocated the Tsar in his bed. Alexander lawfully occupied the throne and in return, one of his first decrees

was the promotion of Bennigsen; he was awarded an office of Lithuanian Governor. Bennigsen settled in Vilnius, where Maria Nagurska lived the life of a popular and very prudent courtesan. Bennigsen became fascinated by her. [...] And like as Bennigsen, Mykolas Kleopas fell in love with Maria Nagurska. The feeling was mutual. The passionate relationship was strong until it turned out that she was pregnant. Mykolas Kleopas proposed to marry her, she agreed, and they [...] married."¹⁷⁸

Thus, in the love front, Mykolas Kleopas overcame the Governor-General of Vilnius Bennigsen, who also wanted to propose marriage for Maria Neri...

At that time, divorce among Lithuanian and Polish nobles was very frequent. However, society unfavorably estimated relations between M. K. Oginskis and Maria Neri, because they began living together even Mykolas Kleopas had not yet officially divorced Isabel Lasocka and there was none official confirmation that Maria was of a high descent. However, this disapproval did not bother Mykolas Kleopas.

From the uproar of Vilnius, he went to Zalesye with pregnant Maria. This way the new beautiful, charming and intelligent Countess Maria Oginska permanently got rid of her miserable past and had become a perfect lady of the manor house.

They settled in Zalesye near Smorhon town surrounded by lush green meadows and birch forests. Palace of Zalesye was built not as a luxurious residence, rather than building, which is convenient to live. Maria enjoyed here. "Zalesye is a pleasant place for us," she wrote for her sister Countess Kucina Scot to Italy, "we are surrounded by snow and frost, but we do not care because one is happy everywhere his heart does not feel remorse and one is admired."¹⁷⁹

When Mykolas Kleopas became a senator of the Russian Empire, his wife received an aristocratic title and had to be called Maria de Neri. As senator's wife, she often attended banquets held by the Emperor in St. Petersburg.

Maria had a sharp mind, intelligence, and financier skills. Living with Mykolas Kleopas it was neces-

¹⁷⁶ Stanislovas Moravskis (full name Jonas Stanislovas Apolinaras Moravskis) – Lithuanian nobleman, landlord, an aristocrat, doctor, ethnographer, traveler, writer, poet, lawyer, philanthropist, misanthrope, filaret, one of the sagacious 19th c. memorialist. Born on 22nd of July 1802 in Mickūnai, died on 6th of October 1853 in Ustronie.

¹⁷⁷ Stanislovas Moravskis, "Keleri mano jaunystės metai Vilniuje: atsiskyriėlo atsiminimai (1818–1825)" ("Several Years of my Youth in Vilnius (1818–1825): Hermit Memories") [translated from Polish language by Reda Griškaitė], Vilnius: Mintis, 1994, p. 100–111.

¹⁷⁸ I. Zaluskis, Klaipėda, p. 81–82.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

sary, because, as evidenced by the written sources, he was quite lavish. Maria helped her husband to manage Zalesye, Joniškis manors, Vilnius palaces and other economic issues.

In the memoirs of Stanislaw Morawski¹⁸⁰ Maria de Neri is described as a very domineering, arrogant woman, who disregarded interests of children from his first marriage; she also did not accept to allocate assets for Mykolas Kleopas' children from the first marriage even it was specified in the testament. Unfulfilled Mykolas Kleopas' promises of divorce proceedings in favor for the Duke's and Isabel Lasocka's children, shows the fact that in 1825 there was a court, which worked out the case "due to the amount of money and a part of Rietavas holdings of the Hetman Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis allocation in favor of the dukes Tadas and Ksaveras Oginskiai."¹⁸¹

There are references in literary sources about Maria's extramarital relationships, and it is questioned whether Mykolas Kleopas is a father of all children born in their marriage.

According to I. Zaluski, the relationship between Maria and Mykolas Kleopas got complicated after the death of their daughter Sophia, but it improved during their journey to Florence, Warsaw, Paris, and Venice. In Venice M. K. Oginskis wanted to meet Napoleon and discuss with him about the restoration of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland. He also hoped that this journey would be the second honeymoon for them and they would be able to strengthen the marriage. Not everything went as planned Mykolas Kleopas. During the journey, he was finally convinced that Napoleon would not help to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland. His relationships with Maria were becoming colder. I. Zaluski writes¹⁸²:

"In 1808, shortly after Italian singer Giuseppe Palliani arrival to Zalesye to teach music Amelia, the death of Sophia distracted Maria and this was forgotten with a birth Irenėjus, and the birth of Ema in the following year. At the time, true marriage between them

had actually gone, leaving only the formal side. Neither Maria nor Mykolas had any illusions about the future of their marriage. They both behaved very tactfully, maintaining the image of a normal family and social life. Both were unfaithful to each other, so both of them had chosen this arrangement as the acceptable way of life."

As claimed in various written sources, even Spanish singer G. Palliani was involved in a love affair with Maria de Neri, therefore, had to leave – he settled in St. Petersburg. I. Zaluski emphasizes that, despite increasingly disintegrating marriage, Mykolas Kleopas and Maria acted like a normal couple in front of the nobility. Even M. K. Oginskis had a reason to doubt if he was a father of children born in their marriage, with the exception of Amelia, however, he treated them kindly and brought them up with fatherly devotion. At that time, similar examples were seen across the Europe in the noblest families. The fact that he officially recognized all in the marriage with Maria born children demonstrates the testament drawn up on 16th of August 1818 in Vilnius.

After 1823, when Mykolas Kleopas lived in Florence, and although the spouses did not live together, they maintained relations and regularly corresponded. This is evidenced by their letters stored the Lithuanian State Historical Archives.

Maria de Neri mainly lived in Zalesye, even after 1822, when Mykolas Kleopas moved to Italy permanently.

In her book "Vilnius and Lithuanian Manors" Gabriela Giunterytė Puzinienė writes that Maria, in 1816 and subsequent years, was a friend of nearby (in Varnionys) living noble Bachminska-Cichotska-Abramavièiene, Sekneþinska-Mostovska. The writer tells about her visit in Zalesye in 1838¹⁸³:

"The residence was in Aïmena County, the Duke Senator Mykolas has built it a long time ago. The manor had a shady park with fallow-dears, beautiful flowers and a rustic brick house, similar to Pastavy, because there was no driveway to the front door. Inside we found a lot of salons, good paintings, mainly

¹⁸⁰ S. Moravskis, "Keleri mano jaunystės metai Vilniuje: atsiskyrėlio atsiminimai (1818–1825)", p. 99–107.

¹⁸¹ R. Ūmigelsjytė-Stukienė, p. 159.

¹⁸² I. Zaluski, Klaipėda, p. 89–90.

¹⁸³ Gabrielė Giunterytė-Puzinienė, "Vilniuje ir Lietuvos dvaruose" ("In Vilnius and Lithuanian Manors") [translated by Irena Aleksaitė], Vilnius: Regiono kultūrinio iniciatyvų centras, 2005, p. 239.



Victor Vincent Adam (1801–1866), Luis Philippe Alphonse Bichebois (1801–1850), Albertas Vaitiekus Pametas (1821?–1876), Jan Kazimierz Wilczynski (1806–1885), "Verkiiai", 1847, Lithuanian Art Museum, LDM G 2641a



Jozef Ozienblowski (1805–1878), "The surroundings of Vilnius. Verkiiai", the mid-19th c., Lithuanian Art Museum, LDM G-336

portraits of family, as well as an orangery, which was a dining spot during the summers.

Duchess Oginskienė usually sat on a couch underneath her own portrait. Her image in it, although already passed many years, was not much better than the current one.

Her grandson Kublicki, the four-year-old Karolis, every morning came to kiss his grandmother's feet drawn in the portrait. He was a handsome child; he had mother's eyes, as if a girl he was wearing a dress with short sleeves; he was very loved by all the family and guests. His songs were awaking us like a bird song. He was submissive, clever, and cheerful and with every word, you would fall in love again.

The name day of the host attracted people from several neighboring houses; ceremonial dinner was served in the orangery, and in the evening all were entertained by illumination of the park and a feast for villagers held in a forest rotunda. The whole ox was on a spit, apples for children were flying all around and a huge circle, consisting of perhaps a hundred couples, playing several musicians danced until the late night. Looking out the window, little Karolis said:

"When I grow up, I will design something even more beautiful for my mother!"

Lady Senator's wife guided us around the house, showed corner rooms, which were called *de la tour d'Amélie* (Zaluska) and *de la tour d'Irene*¹⁸⁴. She set-

led in one of the square towers. Its walls from inside were full of the portraits of generals, dukes and counts. "Ce sont mes amies."¹⁸⁵ openly said Lady Senator's wife. She did not hide the way of friendship, reminding the French song chorus:

"Quand l'amitié devient amour,
Adieu le repos de la vie!
Quand l'amour devient amitié,
Adieu le bonheur de la vie!"¹⁸⁶

One of the most pleasant moments of the stay in Zalesye was an acquaintance with the old friend of my father Mr. Konstantin Novomeiski. Lady Senator's wife, whose matters he managed, called him *utie mouche blanche parmi les autres*¹⁸⁷. Righteousness, deriving from deeply perceived religion, was the backbone of his character and determined his behavior. In addition, he had a cute wit, inexhaustible gentleness, and although he was the old bachelor did not avoid both flirting and grumbling. In his speech, you could hear apostolic psalms, however, as strange as it sounds, he could tell a truth in the eyes and do not offend, anger anyone, only to make a new friends.¹⁸⁸

In 1822, after her husband moved to Italy, Maria de Neri took care of children, matters of manors, which were left for her and children. It is unknown if she visited Mykolas Kleopas in Italy, but when in 1833, he died, Maria de Neri took care of a proper memory perpetuation of M. K. Oginskis in Florence.

¹⁸⁴ Amelia and Irena Tower.

¹⁸⁵ "This is my friends".

¹⁸⁶ "When the friendship turns into love, / Goodbye, the piece of life! / When the love turns into friendship, / Goodbye, the happiness of life!"

¹⁸⁷ "White fly between the black ones"

¹⁸⁸ G. Giunterytė Puzinienė, p. 239–240.

On the right (from the top): Unknown 19th c. painter. "The Cathedral of Vilnius", Lithuanian Art Museum, LDM G-2154; Karolis Raėinskis (1799 – after 1860), "Vilnius view from a perspective of Paplavos suburb", 1830, Lithuanian Art Museum, LDM T-2140

