

English Gentry in the First Half of the 15th Century

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The article examines with the social characteristics of the gentry of the first half of the 15th century. The author systematizes the criteria of belonging to the gentry in historiography and applies them to the Armburgh family. The article shows that the Armburghs belonged to the lesser gentry according to the income level, the structure of their land holdings and methods of estate management. It was the land that was of the greatest value to them as a marker of social status and the main source of their income. The household of the Armburghs was focused on commodity production but they were connected with the town not only by their economic interests, but also by family relations. The author gives a number of arguments showing that the interests of the Armburghs were primarily concentrated in the counties in which their lands were located — Essex, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire. They were integrated into social life of their counties due to numerous family, matrimonial, neighborly and friendly relations that united the gentry. The gentry of the first half of the 15th century were involved in the power system of their counties, exercising their authority as landowners, and due to personal relations and service to their lords and the king. In the author's opinion, the material of the Armburgh Papers enables to state that social characteristics of the 15th-century-gentry meet the criteria developed in historiography.

Keywords: England, gentry of the first half of the 15th century, landownership, urban property, commodity production, social identity, social relations, patronage, public authority.

Английское джентри первой половины XV в.

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В статье рассматривается социальный облик джентри первой половины XV столетия. Автор систематизирует имеющиеся в историографии критерии принадлежности к джентри и применяет их к семье Амбург. Показано, что по уровню доходов, структуре земельных владений и методам хозяйствования Амбурги принадлежали к мелким джентри. Именно земля представляла для них наибольшую ценность как маркер социального статуса и главный источник доходов. Как отмечается в статье, хозяйство Амбургов было ориентировано на товарное производство, а с городом их связывали не только экономические интересы, но и родственные отношения. В статье приводится ряд аргументов,

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показывающих, что интересы Амбургов в первую очередь были сосредоточены на графствах с их землями — Эссексе, Хартфордшире и Уорикшире. Представители семьи были интегрированы в социальную жизнь своих графств за счет разветвленных родственных, матримониальных, соседских и дружеских связей, объединявших джентри. При этом важное значение имели отношения джентри с их лордами. В соответствии с моделью поведения джентри в ходе длительного судебного разбирательства из-за наследства Амбурги пытались заручиться покровительством влиятельных аристократов, которым противодействовали другие знатные семьи. В силу этого Амбурги делали ставку прежде всего на судебные инстанции, и лишь затем — на социальные и патронатные связи. Речь идет о влиянии частной власти на официальные (судебные) процессы в условиях нарастания социально-политической нестабильности в Англии на протяжении первой половины XV столетия. Важно, что такая практика принималась как неотъемлемая часть механизма функционирования власти. Джентри первой половины XV в. были включены во властную систему своих графств как землевладельцы, а также за счет личных связей и службы у лордов и короля. По мнению автора, материал корреспонденции Амбургов позволяет говорить о соответствии социальных характеристик джентри первой половины XV столетия выработанным в историографии критериям.

Ключевые слова: Англия, джентри первой половины XV в., землевладение, городская собственность, товарное производство, социальная идентичность, социальные связи, покровительство, властные полномочия.

About ten years ago, P. Yu. Uvarov wrote that “problems of society’s social structure, its system, existing hierarchies and the ways of social categorization have not disappeared from the agenda and are now coming back to the attention of scholars who belong to the methodological vanguard...”¹. This assertion seems to be still urgent today. Therefore, turning to social history of the 15th-century-England, its first half in particular is fully justified.

In historiography, this period was given symbolic names: “the dark age”, “the age of paradox” and “the age of ambition”². They all were to underline a complicated, transitional character of that time when the English society was undergoing a deep inner transformation and its traditional structures were acquiring a new content³.

Social changes most notably were seen in the English gentry who soon would be the main supporters of the Tudors who came to power⁴. But we are going to discuss an early period of the gentry’s history which started, according to British researchers, in the middle — the second half of the 14th century⁵. As P. Coss noticed, “The gentry finally crystallised during the first half of the fourteenth century”⁶.

¹ Uvarov P. Yu. Sotsial’nye imenovaniia parizhan v epokhu Starogo poriadka // Sotsial’naia identichnost’ srednevekovogo cheloveka / eds A. A. Svanidze, P. Yu. Uvarov. Moscow, 2007. P. 180–192.

² Du Boulay F. R. H. An Age of Ambition. English Society in the Later Middle Ages. London, 1970; McFarlane K. B. England in the Fifteenth Century. London, 1981; Zolotov V. I. Obschestvo i vlast’ v pozdnesrednevekovoi Anglii XV veka. Briansk, 2010.

³ Du Boulay F. R. H. An Age of Ambition. English Society in the Later Middle Ages; McFarlane K. B. England in the Fifteenth Century; Thomson J. The Transformation of Medieval England, 1370–1529. New York, 1983.

⁴ Braun E. D. Voiny Roz: Istoriia. Mifologiya. Istoriografiia. Moscow; St. Petersburg, 2016. P. 17.

⁵ Carpenter C.: 1) Locality and Polity. A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499. Cambridge, 1992; 2) Gentry and Community in Medieval England // Journal of British Studies. 1994. Vol. XXXIII, No 4. P. 340–381; Acheson E. A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century, c. 1422–1485. Cambridge; New York, 1992; Mercer M. The Medieval Gentry: Power, Leadership and Choice during the Wars of the Roses. London; New York, 2010.

⁶ Coss P. The Origins of the English Gentry. Cambridge, 2003. P. 239.

Another preliminary remark should be given. Mobility and instability of social groups in England of the 15th century⁷ makes it difficult to study the fate of any stratum. So it is necessary to analyze the history of some families during a certain period of time. Such an approach can lead to wide generalizations and show the dynamics of changes within a social community⁸.

Traditionally, researchers of the late Middle Ages in England had four considerable collections of letters available — the Pastons (1440–1480), the Stonors (1470–1483), the Celys (1472–1488) and the Plumpton (after 1485), which are dated mainly to the middle and the second half of the 15th century. But in 1998 Doctor Christine Carpenter from Cambridge published some papers of the Armburghs⁹ discovered in Chetham's in Manchester. This material covers the period of 1417–1453, with most letters written at the end of the 1420s- the beginning of the 1430s and in the period from 1448 until 1453.

This source almost entirely consists of the copies of the letters with the exception of several legal documents and real estate business (13 documents in all) and nine poems in French, Latin and English. Most letters belong to Robert Armburgh (57 letters and a petition to the Parliament) and to his wife Joan (5 letters and a petition to the chancellery). There are also several letters (8) addressed to Robert.

In general, the letters and the Armburgh documents connected with them represent a detailed report on the property dispute¹⁰ concerning Brokhole-Roos' inheritance. The Armburghs were one of the sides who laid a claim on it.

Before we begin to consider the Armburgh Papers, let us first try to find the criteria of belonging to the gentry.

Having generalized the research results of some British and Russian scholars, it is possible to identify the following characteristics of the gentry.

1. This is the lowest level of the English nobility (lesser nobility)¹¹. Those who belonged to this estate can be found in the manorial history as knights, esquires, gentlemen, armigers and so on¹².

2. The position of the gentry in society was defined first of all by the presence of those who provided a certain level of income of landed property and land possessions in counties¹³. English historians give some interesting data that go back to the first decades of the 16th century: in 1520, knights had an average income from land of about 204 pounds, esquires — 80 pounds, and gentlemen — 17 pounds while peers' average annual income was from 800 to 900 pounds¹⁴.

⁷ Carpenter C. *Locality and Polity. A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499*. P. 145.

⁸ Ponomaryova N. A. *Dzhentri i gorozhane v Anglii v 60–80 gg. XV v.: Avtoref. diss. ... kand. ist. nauk*. Bryansk, 2001. URL: <http://www.dissercat.com/content/dzhentri-i-gorozhane-anglii-v-60-80-kh-gg-khv-v> (accessed: 12.03.2018).

⁹ The Armburgh Papers. *The Brokholes Inheritance in Warwickshire, Essex and Hertfordshire, c. 1417–1453* / ed. by C. Carpenter. Woodbridge, 1998. (Hereinafter — The Armburgh Papers.)

¹⁰ Williams S. R. *English Vernacular Letters. c. 1400–1600: language, literacy and culture*. York, 2001. P. 224.

¹¹ Heal F., Holmes C. *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700*. Basingstoke; London, 1994. P. 7; Coss P. *The Origins of the English Gentry*. P. 11.

¹² Mingay G. E. *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class*. L.; N. Y., 1976. P. 1–5; Heal F., Holmes C. *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700*. P. 7–9.

¹³ Coss P. *The Origins of the English Gentry*. P. 11.

¹⁴ Heal F., Holmes C. *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700*. P. 14.

It was the land that defined the social status and personal (family) ties in society of the Middle Ages and the early Modern Time¹⁵. It was society in which power, social prestige, personal ties, and political system were based on the possession of landed property¹⁶.

However, the social image of the gentry depended also on other types of wealth including urban property¹⁷. This provided a constant flow of the most viable, energetic and ambitious representatives of the top townspeople (as well as freeholders) into the gentry. Due to continual renewal the English gentry was notable for their special flexibility and ability to adapt to changing conditions. Absence of strong opposition and rejection of low estate, common economic and often political interests created favourable conditions for developing enterprise of the nobility. The English gentry was widely involved into commodity-money relations and participated in marketing (selling bread, cheese, meat, wool and other agricultural products) being connected with the so called “new patrimonial estate” established in England in the 14th century. Such small and average owners of patrimonial estates of a new type continued to run domains based on hired labour, combined grain farming with animal industry, ran mills, malthouses and other enterprises¹⁸. V. M. Lavrovsky and M. A. Barg noticed that the gentry were a “social hybrid” of noblemen-landowners and entrepreneurs generating their revenue from the ground rent and the profit of enterprise¹⁹.

3. The gentry is a territorial elite whose status was determined by being in king's or nobility's service and/or personal ties on the one hand, and their authority from tenure, on the other hand. As the levels of wealth were changing, there was a natural tendency to deepen the gentry's social gradation²⁰ against the backdrop of complicating social hierarchy within the nobility during the 14–15th centuries. Instead of two main ranks — barons and knights — now there were at least five: below lords there were greater knights, then knights, esquires and gentlemen²¹. At the same time, more intensive ennoblement of two lower levels was going on. This was gradually legalized: every rank was given its place in society according to the size of land and income. M. V. Vinokurova convincingly demonstrated that out of 360–400 families of the new nobility in Devonshire at the beginning of the 17th century the most numerous stratum was lesser gentry whose annual income was insignificant, from 50 to 100 pounds. The second category of the Devonshire nobility was made up of medium gentry — esquires — who possessed one or two manors and had from 100 to 200 pounds of annual income. Some families from big gentry were much

¹⁵ Payling S. J. Social mobility, demographic change and landed society in late medieval England // *English Historical Review*. 1992. No. XLV. P. 51.

¹⁶ Vinokurova M. V. *Mir angliiskogo manora. Po zemel'nym opisiam Lankashira i Uiltshira vtoroi poloviny XVI — nachala XVII v. Moscow, 2004. P. 6.*

¹⁷ Horrox R. E. *The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century // Towns and townspeople in the Fifteenth Century / ed. by J. A. Thomson. Gloucester, 1988. P. 22–44; Coss P. The Origins of the English Gentry. P. 11; Mosolkina T. V. Sotsial'naiia istoriia Anglii XIV–XVII vv. Moscow; St. Petersburg, 2017. P. 171–173.*

¹⁸ Ul'yanov Yu. R.: 1) *Obrazovanie i evoliutsiia struktury manora Stonor v XIV–XV vv. // Srednie veka. 1971, iss. 34. P. 117–144; 1972, iss. 35. P. 154–173; 2) Obrazovanie i struktura manorov Birton i Stok v XIV v. // Srednie veka. 1978, iss. 43. P. 49–83; 3) Ekonomicheskoe razvitie manora Stonor v XIV–XV vv. // Srednie veka. 1986, iss. 49. P. 60–81; 1987, iss. 50. P. 185–211.*

¹⁹ Lavrovskii V. M., Barg M. A. *Angliiskaia burzhuaiznaia revoliutsiia. Moscow, 1958. P. 98.*

²⁰ Coss P. *The Origins of the English Gentry. P. 11.*

²¹ Gutnova E. V. *Vliianie ehkonomicheskoi evoliutsii na izmeneniia v sotsial'noi ierarkhii v Anglii XIV–XV vv. // Srednie veka. 1983, iss. 46. P. 45–46.*

better off having from 2000 to 3000 acres of land, which gave 3–4 thousand pounds of income per year²².

General growth of nobility was accompanied by the growth of social prestige and wealth of knights, esquires and gentlemen. Thus, by the end of the 16th century, less than 3% of the land they or their ancestors had owned before remained in the possession of English peers²³.

4. The gentry as local elite sought to have collective and social control over the population on the local level strengthening their own individual status and power²⁴. We should not forget that it was the nobility that played the main social and political role: they controlled not only a considerable part of the land but also practically the whole system of central and local government. Not only magnates but also the richest and the most influential knights took the main highest positions at court, in the army and in the Parliament. They expanded their judicial rights in the field, in the central administration and king's courts²⁵. As C. Carpenter notices, the gentry tried to stay away from political problems and distance themselves from the nobility²⁶ because in the case of failure the consequences for this social group of representatives could be much harder than for the magnates. In this respect, the majority of lesser and medium nobility were a factor of political stability in England²⁷.

5. The gentry had collective identity and collective interests which became apparent in matrimonial and neighborly relations, friendship, and education, etc. Aspirations to the status of a gentry representative had to be approved by a local community, and in order to achieve social stability the gentry sought to establish personal relations with higher nobility²⁸.

To what extent could the above criteria of belonging to the gentry be applied to the Armburghs as the gentry of the first half of the 15th century?

The analysis of the sources enables to arrive at the following conclusions that concern the social image of the early English gentry.

The inheritance the Armburghs laid claim to was located in three counties — Essex, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire. In Essex, it was the manor Roos in Radwinter (Great Brokholes) — knight's holding from the king, the "Duke of Lancaster"; the manor Gifford's; the manor New Hall in Asheldham — knight's holding from the Duke of York; in Hertfordshire: manors Rosehall — holding from an abbot of St Albans; Gilston — knight's holding from the king, the "Duke of Lancaster"; the manor Great Manden — landholding from the lord of the manor Great Manden²⁹, in Warwickshire — the manor

²² Vinokurova M. V. Mir angliiskogo manora. Po zemel'nym opisiam Lankashira i Uiltshira vtoroi poloviny XVI — nachala XVII v. P.48–49.

²³ Ibid. P.71–72.

²⁴ Coss P. The Origins of the English Gentry. P.11.

²⁵ Gutnova E. V. Vliianie ehkonomicheskoi evoliutsii na izmeneniia v sotsial'noi ierarhii v Anglii XIV–XV vv. P.46–47.

²⁶ Carpenter C. Locality and Polity. A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499. P.617.

²⁷ Ibid. P.628.

²⁸ Heal F., Holmes C. The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700. P.17–19; Coss P. The Origins of the English Gentry. P.11.

²⁹ Mapping the Medieval Countryside. E-CIPM 26-211: Joan the late wife of Robert Armeburgh, Esquire. London, 2014. URL: <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/26-211/> (accessed: 25.02.2018); Mapping the Medieval Countryside. E-CIPM 22-829: Cristine sister and heir of John son of John Sumpter and Margery his wife. London, 2014. URL: <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-829/>

Mancetter³⁰. An annual income from all these possessions was estimated at 80 pounds³¹. Besides, the Armburghs also had lands, buildings, rents and services in the manors Ashdon, Bartlow End and Coupal's Farmin Essex whose lord was Count Oxford³². Thus, by the level of income the Armburghs belonged undoubtedly to the lowest stratum of the gentry. It is important to note that it was land inheritance that Joan and Robert Armburgh had been struggling for almost for two centuries. It shows how important land, the main source of income and a sign of the status in society, was for the gentry.

It is difficult to discuss the structure of all the above mentioned manors because a detailed description available is only of Weston in Hertfordshire. This estate consisted of a mansion, two karukats (200 acres) of land, two acres of grassland, 100 acres of pastures, four acres of forests and annuity of 6 sh. 8 p.³³

We can also add that leaseholders and farmers are often mentioned in the sources. They resisted the intention of the Armburghs to increase the flow of revenue at the expense of reconsideration of rental conditions³⁴. Unfortunately, the sources do not give us a full picture of the way how the Armburghs ran a household. Generally, very little is known about household activities of the gentry. Correspondence of the Pastons, though, may be of some help. In it, we can see that in the 50s — 60s of the 15th century, the Pastons themselves and some other gentry of their circle almost did not run their domains and had certain difficulties with getting the rent. However, they tried to improve their position by using short-term lease for 1–2 years in order to make a better use of changes in the market. They possessed a lot of mills, breweries, malhouses, and oil mills, which brought them in a sizeable return. They actively and profitably sold grain, malt and wool³⁵.

In any case, from the Armburgh Papers it is clear that leaseholders and farmers worked on their lands. Farms were closely connected with the market and specialized on commodity production of grain, meat, cheese, milk and other products or wool supply for cloth industry. It is interesting that the wife of one of the leaseholders, Thomas Bernard, was supplying wool to Essex³⁶, which was one of important centers of English cloth industry.

It is obvious that town was not something far and unfamiliar to the Armburghs. It is known that in the 1440s, Reynold, Robert Armburgh's elder nephew, studied in Lincoln's Inn, one of the four London juridical corporations, lived with his uncle and may well have helped him as a lawyer and a secretary³⁷. His second nephew, his namesake, Robert,

ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-829 (accessed: 25.02.2018); Mapping the Medieval Countryside. E-CIPM 22-830: Ellen sister and heir of John son of John Sumpter and Margery his wife. London, 2014. URL: <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-830/> (accessed: 25.02.2018); Mapping the Medieval Countryside. E-CIPM 22-539: John son of John Sumpter and Margery his wife. London, 2014. URL: <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/22-538/539> (accessed: 25.02.2018).

³⁰ The Armburgh Papers. P. 5.

³¹ Mapping the Medieval Countryside. E-CIPM 26-211: Joan the late wife of Robert Armeburgh, Esquire. London, 2014. URL: <http://www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/26-211/> (accessed: 25.02.2018).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The Armburgh Papers. P. 104–109, 114–118, 130–131, 170, etc.

³⁵ *Ульянов Ю. Р. Rost novogo dvorianstva v Anglii v XV v. // Iz istorii srednevekovoi Evropy X–XVII vv. Moscow, 1957. P. 141–149, 150.*

³⁶ The Armburgh Papers. P. 130.

³⁷ Ibid. P. 59.

went into business and lived in London³⁸. There he could count on the support of another uncle, John Armburgh, a Londoner and gilder³⁹. It was his urban relatives that Robert Armburgh applied to for financial help.

Another Londoner's debtor was Joan's second husband, Thomas Aspell, who had to borrow money (not less than 27 pounds⁴⁰) to participate in a military campaign in France from a well-known at that time saddler (a craftsman who made harness, including blinkers which were put on a horse to limit its field of view), Richard Ketford, who also financed Hundred Years' War (1337–1453)⁴¹. Joan, who had to look into the debts of her unlucky husband, was also seeking protection from a London merchant, John Rigges⁴².

E. Ekwall seems to be right saying that the relationships between London urban community and the gentry were so close and varied in the 15th century that it was difficult to distinguish the latter from townspeople proper⁴³. In England, the invasion of noblemen into the burghers' economy was open and massive, first of all, on the part of great landowners who augmented the gentry with whom townspeople were connected by both family and common or similar economic, and often social and political, interests⁴⁴.

But vital interests of the gentry were defined in the first place by the county in which they had their lands. It was within their counties that they shaped a sustainable social community with diverse and intertwined ties and relations uniting all its members who created a close social net. First of all, these are family relations based on the closeness of origin, aims and interests. A tradition to marry within their county was typical of the late medieval England gentry. Marriage strategies were an important part of the property distribution, and creation of marriage unions in the noble environment and daughters were in the center of this system. Our heroine, Joan Armburgh, in this respect was not an exception.

Little is known about Joan's life. Her childhood is not clearly reflected in the sources. She was, probably, born at the end of the 14th century. Her father was Sir Geoffrey Brok-hole, and her mother — Dame Ellen de Roos who possessed manors in three counties: Essex, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire⁴⁵. Joan was not the only child in the family: some information about her sister and co-heiress Margaret (died by 1420) remained. We do not know anything about how Joan lived in her parents' house, and what she was taught and by whom. It is obvious what fate awaited her: a usual one for women of her circle, the fate of the wife and the mother. Furthermore, her status of an heiress of the property from the two sides — Brokhole and Roos — must have made her an attractive fiancée.

Approximately until 1410, she was married to Sir Philip Kedington from Essex (a holder of manor from Count Oxford). This marriage, obviously, had been arranged by her parents, first of all, by her father. We should not forget that marriage strategies were

³⁸ The Armburgh Papers. P. 186.

³⁹ Ibid. P. 128–129.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 78–79.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 77n.

⁴² Ibid. P. 75–76.

⁴³ Ekwall E. Studies on the population of Medieval London. Stockholm, 1956. P. XXXII, XXXVIII.

⁴⁴ Chernova L. N. Pod sen'iu Sviatogo Pavla: delovoi mir Londona XIV–XVI vv. Moscow; St. Petersburg, 2016. P. 269–270.

⁴⁵ Mapping the Medieval Countryside. E-CIPM 26-211: Joan the late wife of Robert Armeburgh, Esquire. London, 2014. URL: <http://www.inquisitionpostmortem.ac.uk/view/inquisition/26-211/> (accessed: 25.02.2018); The Armburgh Papers. P. 5.

an important part of the property distribution and creation of marriage unions in the noble environment, and daughters were in the center of this system. Traditionally, the father had to give his daughter a dowry. It usually contained not only clothes, linen, and a sum of money but also some real estate: a certain part of land which after a church courtship display and concluding a marriage contract was passed on to a spouse for the complete control of it⁴⁶. However, in fact, Joan's land inheritance was considered matrilineal: she could possess it by the right of her mother who inherited these lands due to her marriage to Geoffrey Brokhole. By this reason, Joan did not control her land inheritance until 1419 when Ellen Roos died⁴⁷. Perhaps, this was the reason for the fact that having married Kedington, Joan established very close relations with his family and fully shared their interests. Her future choice of heirs showed what a big preference she gave to the husband's family but not her parents' one. According to her last will, her property was inherited by Joan and John Palmer, Philip Kedington's relatives, perhaps, descendants of his daughter from the previous marriage⁴⁸. It is very strange because in the marriage with Sir Philip Kedington Joan had two children — Robert and Margaret⁴⁹. Usually, as opposed to Joan, noble women left land to their own children or their family relatives if the marriage was childless. Leaving the property to the husband's descendants, though, was not a unique but was rather a rare case⁵⁰. Perhaps, the explanation could be found in the fact that Joan Palmer married a nephew of Robert Armburgh, the third and last Joan's husband⁵¹.

Soon after her first husband's death, Joan married (about 1411) Thomas Aspall⁵². In 1409, he had the position of an escheator⁵³ in Essex. In his county, Aspall belonged to the respected people with land income no less than 20 pounds per year. Such was a requirement for escheators contained in parliamentary scrolls⁵⁴. The responsibilities of the manager involved controlling the revenue that was received from holdings whose tenants died without an heir, and from fiefs of young vassals who were not able to perform military service. These fiefs belonged to the crown until owners of fiefs came of age (for male heirs it was 21, for female — 14). Revenues were also received from vacant church benefices and seized manors. Escheators were accountable to the Exchequer and had to be changed every year⁵⁵. Aspall was counting on the marriage to Philip Kedington's widow because she was supposed to have access to the greater part of property she inherited from her first husband and her father, and this was most convenient as he was going to take part in another campaign in France under the head of King Henry V (1413–1422). However, all these hopes were never to come true as at that moment Joan did not control

⁴⁶ Vinokurova M. V. Imushchestvennye prava zhenshchin v srednevekovoi Anglii // *Dolgoe Srednevekov'e* / eds A. K. Gladkov, P. Yu. Uvarov. Moscow, 2011. P. 48.

⁴⁷ Schoonover J. *Medieval Women Go to Court: The Armburgh Papers and the Role of Women in Court in Medieval England*. Ohio, 2017. P. 27–28.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* P. 28.

⁴⁹ *The Armburgh Papers*. P. 9.

⁵⁰ Schoonover J. *Medieval Women Go to Court: The Armburgh Papers and the Role of Women in Court in Medieval England*. P. 28.

⁵¹ *The Armburgh Papers*. P. 184–185.

⁵² *Ibid.* P. 78.

⁵³ *Ibid.* P. 78n.

⁵⁴ Kalmykova E. V. *Vlastnye instituty i dolzhnosti v srednevekovoi Anglii // Vlastnye instituty i dolzhnosti v Evrope v Srednie veka I rannee Novoevremia* / ed. by T. P. Gusarova. Moscow, 2011. P. 252.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* P. 251–252.

anything from her inheritance⁵⁶. Unfortunately, this marriage became a real disaster for Joan because of financial ventures of her husband who shifted quite an impressive debt, no less than 27 pounds, onto her⁵⁷.

Joan's third and last husband was Robert Armburgh from the family of Huntingdonshire lesser gentry who hoped to get lands and, naturally, income from this marriage. Robert became Joan's reliable helper and defender she was in need of. It is symbolic that one of Robert's nephews married Joan Palmer, Sir Philip Kedington's relative from his daughter's side⁵⁸. In fact, already in the first half of the 15th century family relations (even rather distant) between noble families of this or that region in England were an inevitable consequence of a realized at that time matrimonial practice.

Besides family relations, in the community of local gentry neighbourly relations established on the basis of cooperation concerning demesne lands played a very important role. But as we can see in the Armburgh Papers, mechanism of such interrelations did not always work. In this respect, a letter of Robert, Joan's and Philip Kedington's son is extremely significant. From this letter we learn that not long before Kedington's death his best friend and a godfather of his son, Thomas Blendyssh, (these two families had long and strong relations⁵⁹) had taken all his lands and property, but after Philip's death he was supposed to return them back to his son and widow immediately⁶⁰. This plan would give Joan the possibility to get control over her husband's property without paying taxes. Such behavior of Kedington was a widely spread practice in England when a tenant applied to his friends and neighbors for help in inheritance problems or in solving tangled land litigations. The gentry often acted as witnesses, executors and vassals of one another. In fact, it can be interpreted as transferring the property to the trustee's use, usually their friends, on condition that this land would be returned to the heirs of the donor. This was done in order to avoid paying burdensome feudal duty to their immediate lord and deprive him of the control over the lands. Reciprocal services which the gentry rendered to one another were supposed to strengthen their relations and promote establishing a sustainable local community. However, in this case, Blendyssh broke the agreement and did not return the lands to Joan and Robert. What is more, he practically kidnapped his godson and brought him to Count Oxford⁶¹ who was not far away from this place. Perhaps, Thomas Blendyssh carried out instructions of his lord, Count Oxford, who, probably, had the right of trusteeship of Robert Kedington whose lord he was⁶².

During the course of a long judicial proceeding, which lasted almost for two decades, the Armburghs tried to enlist support and get protection of influential aristocrats. Such a practice fully conformed to the model of the gentry's behavior, according to which in the case of some disagreements, they tried to solve their problems with the help of a mediator. Informal settlement of disagreements and litigations, without judicial committees, by the noble community itself was an important feature of interrelations in the gentry's envi-

⁵⁶ Hanawalt B. *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London*. Oxford, 2007. P. 61.

⁵⁷ *The Armburgh Papers*. P. 78–79.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* P. 184–185.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* P. 90–91.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* P. 90.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* P. 91.

⁶² Schoonover J. *Medieval Women Go to Court: The Armburgh Papers and the Role of Women in Court in Medieval England*. P. 28.

ronment accentuating its patriarchal character⁶³. In this respect, the Armburghs was not a typical family: Joan and Robert relied first of all on the court and only afterwards — on forming patronage networks.

To begin with, the Armburghs tried to rely on social relations in Warwickshire where they stayed more often. Integration into the nobility's relations had vital significance for the family's success on the whole, and for Robert in particular, because he was to some extent a stranger. The Armburghs established contacts and even friendly relations with Lord Ferrers and Lady Ellen Ferrers of Chartley⁶⁴ and through them — with the Mountford, Cokayn and Malory and, finally, with the earl of Warwick. Unfortunately, absence of family relations in the county and an open hostility from no less noble families (particularly, Lady Bergavenny) who supported an opposite side in the conflict, created a lot of difficulties for the Armburghs. They visited Essex and Hertfordshire very seldom, and, actually, Robert Armburgh was not admitted into the local noble community being deprived of the support of Bouchier, Fitzwalter, Bergavenny, Holland of Huntingdon and Exeter, York and Stafford/Buckingham. The Armburghs' social resources were not sufficient enough to tilt the balance to their advantage. In fact, we can see the importance of patronage relations, personal power, and personal influence on official (judicial) and social processes in the conditions of growing social and political instability in England. It is important that such practice was accepted as an integral part of power functioning mechanism.

Thus, the analyzed material enables us to make the following conclusions:

According to the level of income (a little more than 80 pounds per year), the structure of land domain (arable lands, grasslands, pastures, forests, and so on) and methods of management (probably a short-term land leasing), the Armburghs belonged to the lesser gentry. It was land that had the highest value for them. It was no mere chance that Joan and Robert Armburgh had been litigating land inheritance for more than two decades, which was a marker of a social status and the main source of their income.

We can definitely assert that the Armburghs' estate management, at least in Essex, was focused on commodity production of wool. They were connected with town not only by economic interests but also by family relations. In the most difficult situations they counted on financial support of their relatives, merchants and craftsmen, who lived in London.

But first of all, the Armburghs' interests were concentrated in the counties where they had their lands — in Essex, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire. They were integrated into social life of their counties by having various family, matrimonial, neighborly, and friendly relations which united the gentry and formed the feeling of the collective identity. But relations of the gentry with their lords were also of great importance. The behavior of Sir Thomas Blendyssh, an old and, as it seemed, reliable friend of Sir Philip Kedington, who preferred to act in favour of his lord, Count Oxford, is a striking example of this.

In accordance with the model of behaviour of the gentry in the course of a long judicial proceeding, the Armburghs tried to get protection of influential aristocrats, which brought them only temporary success. Counteraction of other noble families played its role. Perhaps it was the reason why the Armburghs relied primarily on the court, and only then — on social and patronage ties. In fact, we can see the importance of personal power, and personal influence on official (judicial) processes in the conditions of growing social

⁶³ Пономарьова Н. А. Dzhentri i gorozhane v Anglii v 60-80 gg. XV v.

⁶⁴ The Armburgh Papers. P. 92.

and political instability in England during the first half of the 15th century. It is important that such practice was accepted as an integral part of the mechanism of power functioning.

To a certain extent, the gentry of the first half of the 15th century were involved into the power system of their counties exercising their authority as landowners, and due to personal relations and service to their lords and the king (remember Thomas Aspoll, an escheator in Essex).

Thus, the examined material of the Armburgh Papers enables to state that social characteristics of the 15th-century-gentry meet the criteria developed in historiography.

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