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# *Gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus* – Dual Identity of the Elites of the Polish-Lithuanian State in the Late Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Times

*Gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus – podwójna tożsamość elit państwa polsko-litewskiego w późnym średniowieczu i w czasach nowożytnych*

## ABSTRACT

The text concerns the emergence of the phenomenon of the double identity of the elites of the Polish-Lithuanian state around the end of the 14th century. It is particularly concerned with the nobility of Ruthenian and orthodox origin, but not only, as the phenomenon extended to other ethnic groups as well. The nature of the dual identity (political, and to some extent ethnic) is discussed, the reasons for its persistence, its political, ideological and social background, and the first causes of its disintegration are outlined.

**Key words**: Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, ethnic identity, political identity, Ruthenia, multiculturalism

STRESZCZENIE

Tekst dotyczy pojawienia się mniej więcej pod koniec XIV w. fenomenu podwójnej tożsamości elit państwa polsko-litewskiego. Chodzi tu zwłaszcza o szlachtę ruskiego i prawosławnego pochodzenia, ale nie tylko, bo przecież zjawisko to objęło i inne grupy etniczne. Omawia się charakter podwójnej tożsamości (nie tylko przecież politycznej, ale do pewnego stopnia i etnicznej), przyczyny jej trwania, tło polityczne, ideowe i społeczne oraz zarysowuje się pierwsze przyczyny rozkładu.

**Słowa kluczowe**: Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów, tożsamość etniczna, tożsamość polityczna, Ruś, wielokulturowość

The main objective of this text is to present and analyze an interesting phenomenon which occurred in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth mid-14th century and as soon as a century later became a predominant view shaping the identity of political elites of this state. This phenomenon consists in the adoption of one quasi ethnic identity (to some extent considered equivalent to the Polish)[1] and at the same time staying in touch with one's original background, language, and, quite often, religion[2] by the entire body of nobility in the Polish-Lithuanian state, regardless of their ethnic origin and religion. This phenomenon applied predominantly to the Ruthenian or Ruthenianized population which gave rise to the phrase: *Ruthenian by birth, Polish by nationality*[3]. In fact, the first part of this phrase was rather flexible and instead of Ruthenian, one could say: Lithuanian[4]

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[1]    It should be noted that Polish peasants were not taken into account, here as there was no significant interest in their status and national identity until the end of the 18th century – N. Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland*, vol. 1, New York 2005, s. 405ff; vol. 2, s. 131ff; *Historia chłopów polskich*, t. 1, red. S. Inglot et al., Warszawa 1970, s. 451–455.

[2]    About the ethnic mosaic of the Polish-Lithuanian state e.g.: D. Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386–1795* (A History of Central Europe, vol. 4), Seattle–London 2001, s. 77–82.

[3]    It is striking that this matter is hardly researched – it is mentioned in the margin of reflection on the history of the Polish-Lithuanian state – e.g.: J. Lukowski, *The Szlachta and the Monarchy: Reflections on the Struggle 'inter maiestatem ac libertatem'*, w: *The Polish-Lithuanian Monarchy in European Context, c. 1500–1795*, red. R. Butterwick, Basinstoke 2001, s. 132–149; too critically about the problem: D. Althoen, *'Natione Polonus' and the 'Narod szlachecki'. Two Myths of National Identity and Noble Solidarity*, „Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung" 2003, 52, s. 487–506; this idea was developed by Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations. Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*, Cambridge 2006, s. 169–173.

[4]    The polonization of the Lithuanian nobility would usually occur usually after the earlier ruthenization. Significant part of the Lithuanian elites would use the Ruthenian (Belarusian) already at the moment of forming the Union of Krewa (1385) – vide: C.S. Stang, *Die westrussische Kanzleisprache des Grossfürstentums Litauen*, Oslo 1935, s. 3ff.; also:

or Tartar by birth – or even German, Scotsman[5], or Armenian. In the 18th century, this phenomenon covered even a certain part of Jewish population, the so-called Frankists[6]. While the phenomenon lasted until the 19th century, its destruction had started as early as at the beginning of the 17th century[7].

It is interesting that the matter of a certain internationalism of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility has not been researched much. Those few historians who even notice it, usually just settle for stating the fact or documenting it. Furthermore, Polish researchers often spin a tale about an unusually tolerant face of Polish Catholicism and highlight remarkably strong assimilative values of old Polish culture[8]. In truth, the genesis of this phenomenon is quite different and rather complex. It started hundreds of years before it became well-documented in times of the formation of the real union between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland in 1569 in Lublin[9]. It is even older than the first Polish-Lithuanian union formed in Kreva in 1385[10].

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S. Smolka, *Najdawniejsze pomniki dziejopisarstwa rusko-litewskiego. Rozbiór krytyczny*, Kraków 1890 (Pamiętnik Akademii Umiejętności w Krakowie. Wydziały filologiczny i historyczno-filozoficzny, 8), s. 1–55; S.C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending: A Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295–1345*, Cambridge 1994, s. 41–43.

[5]    If foreigners coming to Poland with intent to settle there permanently put forward appropriate evidence of their nobility, they could obtain Polish noble status rather easily as a result of the so-called 'indygenat' – N. Davies, *God's*, vol. I, s. 183–184; vide also: P.P. Bajer, *Scots in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 16th – 18th Centuries. The Formation and Disappearance of an Ethnic Group*, Leiden–Boston 2012.

[6]    A. Kraushar, *Frank i frankiści*, t. 1, Kraków 1895, s. 190ff.; A. Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. 1, *1350 to 1881*, Oxford 2010, s. 183–208.

[7]    T. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, New Haven–London 2003.

[8]    In Europe, the Eastern part of the continent (except from Russia) is rarely of interest. In Poland, the nationally-Catholic vision of history is still predominant. By many, the so-called 1st Commonwealth is seen as a Polish state (in the current understanding of this national term) and very few people notice that in the 17th century, the state was dominated by the Ruthenian-origin magnates after their conversion to Catholicism and adoption of the Polish language as a political medium. Fragility of this Polonization has been demonstrated superbly by T. Snyder, *op. cit.*

[9]    N. Davies, *God's*, vol. 1, s. 121–122; O. Subtelny, *Ukraine. A History*, Toronto 1988, s. 78–80.

[10]    R. Frost, *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569* (The Oxford history of Poland-Lithuania, vol. 1), Oxford Un. Press 2015, s. 3–4; see also review: J. Nikodem, *Reflections on the Polish-Lithuanian Union    (On the margin of Robert Frost's book, The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania, Volume I: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569, Oxford 2015)*, „Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae" 2022, 27, s. 87–116.

This phenomenon is an excellent example of an imaginary common-wealth[11], the existence of which had a very strong and real impact on the functioning and power of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Its destruction and final collapse of contributed significantly to the fall of this unique political creation. This article will not fill in the existing research gap as the discussed matter is extensive and complex. However, it can present the most distinctive features of the phenomenon and briefly introduced its genesis, history, and beginning of the end.

## THE PROCESS OF UNIFICATION
## OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN STATE'S NOBILITY

In 1413 in Horodło there was a meeting of Polish and Lithuanian nobility. It was an attempt at regulation of certain problems connected with the mutual relationship between Poland and Lithuania that arose since the first union of these two countries signed in 1385 in Kreva and not solved by subsequent agreements. At the same time these Lithuanian boyars who were Catholic or decided to give up the Orthodox faith, were adopted to Polish heraldic clans. One could say that they got adopted by the Polish nobility[12]. This was not a trivial matter. In fact, it became one of the most important factors in the integration of the nobility from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into the Polish nobility. Having the same coat of arms united people as it always involved some sort of legend about common ancestors, battle cry, and other elements making up the culture of knighthood.

Let's not forget that this concerns the times when the communities were divided into separate classes. In truth, in this part of Europe only knights (apart from, of course, Catholic priests) were allowed to participate in the political life. Only knights (and the churchmen) participated in the meetings, made decisions concerning state policies, and had indisputable rights to land (allods) and a number of other privileges. Even the omission of the Orthodox nobility and aristocracy from the Horodło act made the situation of these groups in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania worse

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[11]   Referring to the famous book of Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflexions on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London–New York 1983.

[12]   This fact had huge impact on a certain difference between the Polish heraldry and the West-European one because as a result of the Horodło resolutions, coat of arms stopped meaning just a real family and connected many families of various descent. Heraldic clans appeared N. Davies, *God's*, vol. 1, s. 162–163.

compared to the Catholics and these were not the only restrictions[13]. Such a division within the Lithuanian state was of great political significance as people of the Orthodox faith were outnumbering other groups there. An explicit religious conflict turned into a civil war (1432–1435)[14] when a younger brother of king Władysław II Jagiełło, Švitrigaila, became the leader of the Orthodox Christians as he wanted to carry out his own dynastic plans. The situation was brought under control only because of the support that the numerous and well-trained Polish army granted the Lithuanian Catholics. Even the support of the Teutonic Knights did not help the Orthodox Christians. Master of Livonia fell in the battle of Ukmergė and Švitrigaila narrowly escaped with his life[15].

However, Jagiełło was a wise ruler and did not persecute the Orthodox Catholics after the win. Still, the situation was rather difficult for him as his Catholic loyalties were questioned not only by the external enemies (the Teutonic Knights, the Luxembourg dynasty) but also by Catholic hierarchs from his own state who kept reminding him he was born a pagan[16]. Even so, the ruler withdrew the majority of the previously introduced restrictions[17].

Thanks to the flexible religious politics, the Jagiellonians were able to retain the loyalty of their Orthodox subjects[18]. Pragmatic tolerance towards the members of the Orthodox church cultivated in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania allowed other ethnic and religious groups to enjoy certain freedom there: the Jews and Armenians, and even Tatars[19]. This

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[13]  K. Chodynicki, *Kościół prawosławny a Rzeczpospolita Polska. Zarys historyczny 1370–1632*, Warszawa 1934, s. 79–88.

[14]  R. Frost, *The Making*, s. 151–157.

[15]  W. Urban, *Tannenberg and After*, Chicago 2003, s. 311–313.

[16]  At least this is how the official version goes. His mother was a princess from Tver (Russia). It is highly likely that the Ruthenian baptized her son. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania Vytautas was baptized as an Orthodox Catholic as a child. Received the name Alexander and only as an adult converted to Catholicism – vide: *Ioannis Dlugossi Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, red. D. Turkowska, Warszawa 1985, liber X, 195; more about the context: D. Baronas, S.C. Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania. From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians*, Vilnius 2015, s. 296.

[17]  However, some restrictions were in force until the reign of Sigismund Augustus who abolished them by edicts of 1549 and 1551 – K. Chodynicki, *op. cit.*, s. 88–90.

[18]  H. Grala, *Kołpak Witołdowy czy czapka Monomacha. Dylematy wyznawców prawosławia w monarchii ostatniej Jagiellonów*, w: *Katolicyzm w Rosji i prawosławie w Polsce (XI–XX w.)*, red. J. Bardach, T. Chynczewska-Hennel, Warszawa 1997, s. 51–67, 59; D. Tollet, *Religious existence and competition in the Polish-Lithuanian Commenwealth c. 1600*, w: *Religious Existence and Cultural Exchanging in Europe, 1400–1700*, red. H. Schilling, I.G. Tóth (Cultural Exchange in Modern Europe, 1), Cambridge 2006, s. 64–87.

[19]  T. Snyder, *op. cit.*, s. 17ff.

was particularly important in the face of growing power of Moscow, the ruler of which, Ivan the Great (1462–1505) announced himself to be the successor of the Byzantine emperors and the Grand Princes of Kiev simultaneously which was visible in the title he used: „(Tsar) of All Rus"[20].

Thus, the emerging Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, during a slow legal and cultural unification of the nobility of both states, guaranteed the Orthodox Catholics freedom of faith and the clergy protection of their ownership and preservation of the religious *status quo*[21]. It was also possible for the boyars of the Orthodox faith to hold offices and have ranks even though in practice, they had more difficulties getting power than the Catholics. Because of this, in the 15th and 16th century magnates slowly started to abandon the Orthodox faith.

An important stage of the construction of the joint identity is documented by Jan Długosz, author of the monumental collection entitled *Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland*[22] written between 1455 and 1480. Długosz was a confidant of Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki, at that time the most influential person in the Polish Church. However, the historiographer was also one of the collaborators of king Casimir IV Jagiellon[23]. In 12 extensive volumes, Jan Długosz presented not only the history of Poland from the mythical origins of the state to his contemporary times but also the history of Ruthenia and Lithuania. He learned Cyrillic for a sole purpose of being able to use Ruthenian sources. Usually, he would include direct Latin translations of excerpts from Ruthenian texts. However, he would often alter them so that he could prove the superiority of the Catholicism over the „full of errors" Greek faith and in order to demonstrate that the Ruthenians were, in fact, descended from the Poles[24].

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[20]  J.L.I. Fennell, *Ivan the Great of Moscow*, New York 1961; D. Ostrowski, *The Growth of Moscovy, (1462–1533)*, w: *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 1, red. M. Perrie, Cambridge 2006, s. 213–239; H. Paszkiewicz, *The Rise of Moscow Power*, New York 1983.

[21]  L. Bazan, *A History of Belarus. A non-literary essay that explains the ethnogenesis of the Belarusians*, London 2014, s. 109–122; A. Vasiliauskas, *The Practice of Citizenship among the Lithuanian Nobility, ca. 1580–1630*, w: *Citizenship and Identity in a Multinational Commonwealth. Poland-Lithuania in Context, 1550–1772*, red. K. Friedrich, B.M. Pendzich, (Studies in Central European Histories, vol. 46), Leiden–Boston 2009, s. 71–102.

[22]  *Ioannis Dlugossi Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, red. S. Budkowa et al., vol. 1–12, Warszawa 1964–2005.

[23]  Information about life and work of Jan Długosz: A. Perzanowska, *Wiadomości źródłowe o życiu i działalności Jana Długosza*, w: „*Dlugossiana". Studia historyczne w pięćsetlecie śmierci Jana Długosza*, red. S. Gawęda, Warszawa 1980, s. 293–365; also: *Pisarze staropolscy. Sylwetki*, t. 1, red. S. Grzeszczuk, Warszawa 1991, s. 132–173.

[24]  *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, lib. 10, s. 170; In general, Długosz accused the Ruthenians of perversity and bad will – for example, he attributed to them betrayal and the issuance

It is interesting how Długosz presented history of the Lithuanians. Before the acceptance of the Christianity, these people were wild invaders destroying nearby Christian countries. However, soon after mentioning the Union of Krewo, in which the Christianization of Lithuania, election of Jagiełło as a king of Poland and, importantly, attachment of Lithuanian lands to the Crown of Poland were decided, the image of Lithuanians changed. Długosz wrote that the Lithuanians and the Samogitians (he perceived these two groups as separate) were of Latin descent. He would even wonder if their origins could be traced to the Romans. And so, the ancestors of Lithuanians were to leave Italy during the civil wars that „broke out first between Marius and Sulla and then between Julius Caesar and Pompeius"[25]. The annalist repeated these pieces of information twice. Each time he noted that Lithuanian is a variant of Latin and the name „Lithuani" comes from the distorted „Itali". He also claimed that religion of the Lithuanians was the same as the religion of Romans in everything but the custom of cremating the dead[26].

Jan Długosz's *Chronicles* became the most popular and influential presentation of the history of Poland between late Middle Ages and the 19th century's development of the critical historiography that questioned numerous pieces of information presented by the chronicler. In fact, every compendium of Poland's past used works of the Krakow's priests or at least referred to them in some manner[27]. However, the idea of Latin origins of the Lithuanians and the Polish origins of the Ruthenians that meant a certain occidentalization of these nations was not well received. It is obvious that the chronicler sensed that in his era there was a need to construct some sort of a common past for the most important peoples of the Polish-Lithuanian state, an important component of identity. This attempt failed.

A turning point came only several decades after Długosz's death, sometime in the 16th century, when the myth of Polish nobility descending from the ancient Sarmatians was created. Certain foundations for this myth had existed for several centuries. They were laid by Wincenty Kadłubek, a chronicler and a bishop of Krakow, who in his *Chronicle of the Poles* (beginnings of the 13th century) wrote about Polish kings of old

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of Sandomierz to the Tatars in 1259 – *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales,* lib. 7, 124–126; 250; lib. 10, s. 132f.

[25]   *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, lib. 10, s. 164f.

[26]   *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, lib. 10, s. 164–169.

[27]   S. Cynarski, *Uwagi nad problemem recepcji „Historii" Jana Długosza w Polsce XVI i XVII wieku*, w: „*Dlugossiana*", s. 281–292.

defeating Alexander III of Macedon and Julius Caesar[28]. Phantasmagorias of Wincenty Kadłubek were a too obvious of a lie for the Renaissance erudite people who would not accept them as truth. However, the awakened need to bind the beginnings of the native history with the universal one (that is Roman history that was then believed to be universal)[29] was very strong. Furthermore, Jan Długosz promoted it in his *Chronicles*. Thus, the Sarmatians were used. The reason for that was important: in many ancient authors, from Claudius Ptolemy onwards, one could find mentions about the lands of the Commonwealth of the time coinciding by and large with the areas where the ancient Sarmatians used to live[30].

Maciej Miechowita, the author of a very popular in modern times in Poland as well as Europe work *Treaty on two Sarmatias (Asian and European) and what they include*[31], had the most significant impact on the creation of the myth and ideology related to it. The aforementioned text, published in Kraków in 1517, is believed to be the first Renaissance work aspiring to scientifically describe geography, history, and ethnography of the eastern Europe. While Miechowita himself was too critical (when it comes to the conformity of his texts to the ancient sources) to connect the genesis of Slavs or the nobility of the Commonwealth with the Sarmatians, he did propagate the association of the term „European Sarmatia" with the territory of the Commonwealth of the time. And this was enough. Even more so seeing as according to Miechowita, the European Sarmatia was also supposed to be the land of the *Moskals* [Moscow people] and despite political and other differences, it was known that the emerging

[28]  *Magistri Vincentii dicti Kadłubek Chronica Polonorum*, red. M. Plezia, Monumenta Poloniae Historica, nova series 11, Kraków 1994, s. 2–3, 13–18; the Latin-German edition: *Die Chronik der Polen des Magisters Vincentius*, red. E. Mühle, Ausgewählte Quellen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters. Freiherr-vom-Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe 48, Darmstadt 2014; more about the chronicler and his work: J. Banaszkiewicz, *Polskie dzieje bajeczne Mistrza Wincentego Kadłubka*, Wrocław 2002; and collections of studies: *„Onus Athlanteum". Studia nad kroniką biskupa Wincentego*, red. A. Dąbrówka, W. Wojtowicz, Warszawa 2009; *Writing History in Medieval Poland. Bishop Vincentius of Cracow and the 'Chronica Polonorum'*, red. D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, Turnhout 2017.
[29]  S. Bagge, *German Historiography and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, w: *Representations of Power in Medieval Germany, 800–1500*, red. B. Weiler, S. MacLean, Turnhout 2006, s. 165–188; vide also: E.B. Fryde, *Humanism and Renaissance Historiography*, London 1983.
[30]  C. Marx, A. Kleineberg, *Die Geographie des Ptolemaios. Geographike Hyphegesis Buch 3: Europa zwischen Newa, Don und Mittelmeer*, Berlin 2012; similar thesis about the land of Sarmatians we could find in works by Polibius, Herodot, Amiann Marcellinus and other.
[31]  *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis Asiana et Europiana et de contentis in eis.* I used the only academic publication of the text: Maciej z Miechowa, *Opis Sarmacji Azjatyckiej i Europejskiej*, red. H. Barycz, T. Bieńskowski, W. Voisé, Wrocław 1972.

Russian nation as a separate from the Kievan Rus[32] was related to the Poles. Gaining control over Moscow was a plan of the more ambitious politicians of the powerful Commonwealth of the time: either by union or even by conquest[33].

It is important that originally, the ideology of Sarmatism does not appear openly in the well-established and based on a rather critical analysis of antique texts works of the Renaissance Polish authors. One can find its traces in some hints and insinuations. This is exactly the case when it comes to Bernard Wapowski, a great researcher, geographer, and historian as well as a person well-informed about the current political relations. He was a secretary and an official historiographer of the Polish king Sigismund I the Old (1507–1548). Wapowski gained renown for his cartographic works[34] but he also wrote down an extensive history of Poland. Busy with different matters, he did not publish it. As a result, only parts covering years 1380–1535 have remained to this day[35]. The entire text (though especially fragments going beyond the times covered by the chronicle of Jan Długosz) is a valuable source when it comes to the history of Polish-Lithuanian and Polish-Ruthenian relations. Moreover, it includes reports on the contemporary attitudes of the Polish elites toward other nations of Eastern Europe.

What is important in Wapowski's text is the fact that in a number of ways, he expressed a belief that historically, the Poles, Lithuanians, and Ruthenians were one community. This can be seen at Wapowski's description of the Union of Krewa where the author emphasized the fact that Jagiełło (as it was already mentioned by Jan Długosz) was to guarantee the inclusion of the entire Grand Duchy of Lithuania[36] (that comprised after all mostly of Ruthenian land) into Poland. Moreover, Wapowski stressed that in 1432, Sigismund Kęstutaitis was to say that „the Lithuanians united with the Kingdom of Poland and incorporated into it are to become one nation, one people with the Poles forever and ever" when he became the Grand Duke of Lithuania[37].

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[32]   This distinction was emphasized e.g. by another Polish chronicler Marcin Kromer – *Kronika polska Marcina Kromera, biskupa warmińskiego*, Sanok 1857, s. 30.

[33]   H. Wisner, *Król i car. Rzeczpospolita i Moskwa w XVI i XVII wieku*, Warszawa 1995, s. 31–32.

[34]   K. Buczek, *The history of Polish cartography from the 15th to the 18th century*, tłum. A. Potocki, Wrocław–Warszawa 1966, s. 32–40.

[35]   The text was never published by the academic press – it is available only in the old Polish version: B. Wapowski, *Dzieje Korony Polskiej i Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego od roku 1380 do 1535*, t. 1–3, Wilno 1847–1848.

[36]   *Ibidem*, vol. 1, s. 53f; vol. 2, s. 72.

[37]   *Ibidem*, vol. 2, s. 168.

A historical, or rather mythical, foundation of the conviction expressed by Wapowski was a traditional belief that the Central and Eastern Europe used to be inhabited in ancient times by one nation: Sarmatians[38]. Even though the concept of the entire nobility of the emerging Commonwealth being descended from the ancient Sarmatians regardless of their origins and religion was not developed more at Wapowski's, one can still find its elements there. It is obvious that the author is proud of the politically and, to a certain extent, ideologically united peoples. He is even happy that „only Sarmatia bears as much big game" as can be found in the Lithuanian forests (in truth, Belarusian)[39]. He must have been proud of the strength of the nations combined into one state as he wrote that „as long as the brotherhood of these two great nations lasts, no power will be able to upset the happiness and might of the Kingdom thanks to the union with Lithuania"[40]. These words apply only to the Poles and the Lithuanians. However, one should remember that already in those days the Lithuanian elites would speak Ruthenian on an everyday basis (less often Polish) and this language and writing was official in Grand Duchy until the end of the 17th century[41]. This was a result of the Lithuanian elites mixing with the Ruthenian ones and the Ruthenization of the Lithuanians that dates back to the Pagan days. Thus, when writing about the Lithuanians, the chronicler meant also the Belarusians[42].

In a different part of his work, Wapowski presented a different concept of a certain community of the Eastern Europeans. When reporting on the meeting of Jagiełło and Witold in Lutsk with envoys of Sigismund of Luxembourg, he mentioned that the latter wanted to persuade Jagiellonians to form an anti-Turkish coalition. Wapowski expressed his opinion that the alliance could have been stronger if it included: „Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians and Samogitians, Muscovites, Vlachs". Thus, one could say that Wapowski's words picture the sphere of influence of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth; the side of Sigismund of Luxembourg was supposed to include „Hungarians and Czechs". This would make it possible to „drive the Turks out of Greece and the Thracians, Aetolians,

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[38]   *Ibidem*, s. 69, 77.

[39]   *Ibidem*, s. 3, 14.

[40]   *Ibidem*, s. 59.

[41]   T. Snyder, *op. cit.*, s. 18; vide also: D. Stone, *op. cit.*, s. 21; B. Wiemer, *Dialect and language contacts on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the 15th century until 1939*, w: *Aspects of Multilingualism in European Language History*, red. K. Braunmüller, G. Ferraresi, Hamburg 2003, s. 105–144.

[42]   G.B. Bercoff, *Plurilingualism in Eastern Slavic culture of the 17th century: The case of Simeon Polockij*, „Slavia: Časopis pro slovanskou filologii" 2003, 64, s. 3–14; G.D. Hundert, *Identity Formation in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth*, w: *Citizenship*, s. 131–148.

Epirotes, and other Greek nations would help in this undertaking"[43]. In fact, the chronicler mapped out the boundaries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. According to him, united „these nations could even liberate Jerusalem". These words indicate that in his belief, the main factor uniting all these people is, despite confessional differences, Christianity.

Wapowski informed also that while Jagiełło truthfully wished for an alliance, Sigismund „treacherously wanted only to harm Poland and Lithuania". Thus, when in 1426 the king of Poland was to assist Sigismund, „the Roman king", in his fight against the Turks by sending the cavalry counting 5 thousand men „selected from among the Ruthenian nobility, the Poles reached Braniłów on the Danube and waited in vain for the army of Sigismund"[44]. It is really interesting that the king is selecting from among the Ruthenian nobility but Wapowski calls this army collectively „the Poles".

Similar style can be found at the first Polish chronicler who wrote his work in a native language. Marcin Bielski came from middling nobility and in his youth, spent some time at the court of Janusz III of Masovia (1502–1526). Afterwards, he was a courtier of Piotr Kmita, one of the most powerful magnates of Poland at that time and a well-educated man who had an extensive book collection in his castle in Wiśnicz. Bielski most certainly used it. However, he could only do it in between numerous wars in which he participated at the side of his patron[45].

Thus, it is no wonder that Bielski's chronicle is full of information about wars waged at the Eastern borderlands of the Commonwealth, mostly against Moscow and Tatars. His text is rather chaotic but in parts, very authentic. After all, the author participated in some of the described events. What is the most striking about Bielski's narrative (his own, not the one based on the works of his predecessors), is the blurring of ethnic and national differences. To him, all the troops of the Commonwealth, these coming from Poland, Lithuania, or different parts of Ruthenia, despite having their place of origin mentioned, were „ours", even if they were Cossacks, Vlachs, or even Lithuanian Tatars. When he was writing about the Tatar invasions, to separate them from the Commonwealth armies he would add the name of the horde from which the enemies came. Even Livonia, after its incorporation, soon became part of the Commonwealth

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[43] B. Wapowski, *op. cit.,* s. 66.

[44] *Ibidem*, s. 40.

[45] He fought against the Tatars (1524, 1534), the Vlachs in the famous battle in Obertyn (1531). Bielski defended south-eastern border of the Polish-Lithuanian state as a regular solder against the Tatars – M. Korolko, *Pionier sarmackiego dziejopisarstwa – Marcin Bielski*, w: *Pisarze*, t. 1, s. 439–473.

from Bielski's perspective even though he was aware of the fact that the common folk did not like neither the previous German rule nor the contemporary Polish one[46]. He still stressed that the local nobles became part of the Polish nobility immediately after the annexation[47].

One cannot find in Bielski's texts any negative terms for various ethnic groups living in the Commonwealth. There is no ostentatious reprimand of the Ruthenian „schismatic" faith so common among the previous Polish historians – perhaps because Bielski was a Protestant[48]. Only people living outside the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian state were always described as more or less uncivilized, cruel, and barbaric[49]. What is even more interesting, their armies always counted thousands or tens of thousands of people fighting against small Polish, Lithuanian, and Ruthenian troops. The enemies (especially the Moskals, in other words Russians) would also regularly suffer defeat at the hands of these few in numbers but great in quality troops of Marcin Bielski's brothers in arms[50].

A similar pride in the victories of native armies over their enemies can be found in the chronicles written in the 16th century in Ruthenian in Orthodox monasteries in the Commonwealth even if they were fighting against the Moscow armies: followers of the same faith[51]. Ethnically and religiously diverse writing created then in the Polish-Lithuanian state conveys well a sense of a certain satisfaction that accompanied the opinion about the state the authors lived in (especially when it comes to the more prominent creators)[52]. This satisfaction resulted from the awareness that the Jagiellonian dynasty that ruled the country was capably of uniting very diverse peoples in order to form the space of religious and, to a certain degree, social tolerance that was rather unusual for Europe of the

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[46] *Kronika Marcina Bielskiego*, t. 2, s. 1129.

[47] *Ibidem*, s. 1129–1133.

[48] His chronicle appeared on the index of forbidden books – P. Guzowski, *Pierwszy polski indeks ksiąg zakazanych*, „Studia Podlaskie" 2002, 12, s. 173–202.

[49] *Kronika Marcina Bielskiego*, t. 1, s. 395, 607f., vol. 2, 850, 1068.

[50] *Ibidem*, s. 901f., 910, 941f., 1050f., 1064; 1130f.

[51] This is documented by, for example: *Latopis Hustyński*, red. H. Suszko, Wrocław 2003 – finally, the chronicle was written around 1670 in the Holy Trinity Monastery in Hustynia, Ukraine (near Kyiv), but its compiler used older texts to rewrite them directly.

[52] Х. Граля, *«Русская вера» и «роксоланские сарматы»: легитимационные стратегии русской элиты Речи Посполитой и casus Адама Киселя*, w: *Нарративы руси конца XV – середины XVIII вв.: в поисках своей истории*, red. А.В. Доронин, Москва 2018, s. 208–228; idem, *Rutheni vs. Mosci: elita ruska Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego wobec wojen z Moskwą w XVI w.*, w: *Наш радавод*, Кніга 8, *Беларусы і палякі: Дыялог народаў і культур. X–XX ст. Матэрыялы міжнароднага круглага стала (Гродна. 28–30 верасня 1999 г.)*, Гродна–Беласток 1999 (2000), s. 34–51.

time. It is worth mentioning here that king Sigismund I the Old, as a first Catholic ruler in Europe, recognized Lutheranism as an official religion in Prussia while guaranteeing that the Catholics retained the freedom of religion. The ruler himself, despite his Catholic religious zeal, granted the Anabaptists and Mennonites fleeing Germany from persecution the freedom of worship[53]. His son and successor, Sigismund II Augustus, confirmed in a number of documents released between 1557 and 1559 the freedom of religion for a number of variants of Lutheranism, extending these privileges in 1561 to Livonia incorporated into the Polish-Lithuanian state[54]. In his edicts from 1563 and 1568, the king abolished last limitations of the access to civil service on the members of the Orthodox church. In both parts of the state, the Jews, Armenians, Muslim Tatars, and Turkish Karaites in Lithuania who had their own religion enjoyed the full freedom of worship[55].

It is important and interesting that after the death of Sigismund II Augustus (1572), the last from the Jagiellonian dynasty, at the Sejm (Polish parliament) preparing an election of a new king, the masses of Polish and Lithuanian nobility gathered in Warsaw in 1573, aware of the basis of the existence and prosperity of their state, prepared a special resolution – the act of confederation[56]. Despite a fierce objection of the Catholic clergy (the act was signed only by one bishop of Kraków) and some of the Catholic nobility, it was enacted that every new ruler before becoming a king must swear that they would guarantee their subjects an unconditional freedom of religion and rights equal to the ones of the Catholics and that they would not support the Catholic clergy in religious persecutions[57]. Until Sigismund III Vasa (1592–1632), „the Jesuit king", every ruler ascending to the elective throne of Poland would not only swear that they would abide by the rules of the confederation of Warsaw but also truly abide by the them. Since the rule of Sigismund III Vasa, it stopped being a universal rule. In general, until the tragic for the Commonwealth half of the 17th century and a series of wars against Cossacks, Moscow, and Sweden, a situation of followers of other religions than the obligatory

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[53] P.J. Klassen, *Mennonites in early modern Poland and Prussia*, Baltimore 2009.

[54] D. Stone *op. cit.*, s. 51–66.

[55] J. Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, *The Image of the Infidelis in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: A Comparison of the Trends in the Creation of Anti-Jewish and Anti-Muslims Stereotypes*, w: *Fear and Loathing in the North. Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, red. C. Heß, J. Adams, Berlin–Boston 2015, s. 329–346.

[56] D. Stone, *op. cit.*, s. 116–117; N. Davies, *God's*, vol. 1, s. 126; vide also: G. Schramm, *Der Polnische Adel und die Reformation, 1548–1607*, Wiesbaden 1965.

[57] It is interesting that people preparing it were aware of the inevitable attacks of the clergy.

Catholicism was not bad – at least compared to other European countries. After this turning point, everything changed drastically and except for the Tatar Muslims, Karaites, or even Jews, all others experienced more or less serious persecution by the state, including being sent into banishment[58].

In the second part of the 17th century and later, Sarmatism would become more and more reactionary and backwater. This is also when the nobility cultivating this ideology combined it inextricably with the religious subordination to Rome. Thus, there occurred a certain fulfillment of the thoughts that existed at the very beginning of the formation of this fictional narrative.

At first, it was only about the combination of the contemporary geographical knowledge with the one that the Renaissance humanists would find in the ancient texts. However, the appearance of the Roman term *Sarmatia* coinciding in a considerable part with the territory of the Commonwealth stimulated the imagination of the ideologists from the middling nobility which in the 16h century started to be the strongest social class. The process was facilitated by the clear need of finding an ideological common ground that could unite ethnically and religiously diverse groups of nobility.

Furthermore, the theory that the leadership elites of the Polish-Lithuanian state were descendant of one of the peoples successfully fighting against the ancient Rome justified the lasting Polish political trend of remaining independent of the emperor who claimed the right to the universal rule inherited from the ancient Roman Empire. For some, such as the Protestants who were still numerous in Poland and Lithuania at that time, this idea could have suggested the independence from the papacy[59].

Moreover, the Sarmatian myth justified in the privileged position of the nobility in the political structures of the state, if not compared to the clergy as they were too strong then definitely compared to the so-called „third estate"[60]. Such was the tole of numerous „Sarmatian" references

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[58]   M. Hillar, *The Polish Socinians: Contribution to Freedom of Conscience and the American Constitution*, „Dialogue and Universalism" 2009, 19, s. 45–74, vide also: R. Frost, *After the Deluge Poland-Lithuania and the Second Northern War, 1655–1660*, Cambridge 2003.

[59]   R. Kościelny, *Dzieje reformacji w Polsce*, Kraków 2017.

[60]   In other words, weak economically and politically cities and systematically deprived of self-government rights peasants. Aversion of the nobility to the local Christian burghers was so strong that they tried to eliminate them and replace them with the Jewish burghers. Thus, the mythical genealogical triad of the humanity descending from three sons of Noe in the Sarmatism harmonized with a different understanding of this triad that emphasized Sarmatian ideals. This is why the nobility, situated at the top of the hierarchy, was to come from Japhet, the generation of Shem (the Jews) was supposed to make up the middle class and the rest of the society was to be descended from Ham and serve the sons of Japhet and

to the valor of the ancient people which resulted not only in the nobility manifesting the attachment to the knightly traditions and their cultivation of the ideal of the „tough Sarmatian" (*durus Sarmata*) but also their purpose: the defense of the state and privileges resulting from it. The myth justified also the demand for the equality within the estate as well as its existence in general.

It should also be noted that Sejm resolutions from the 16th century repeatedly prohibited the usage of the titles such as a prince and count in the Commonwealth. They were either historic in origin (many Lithuanian-Ruthenian families were descendants of the Rurik dynasty, princes of Ruthenia) or were granted by the emperors. It was an attempt at purging both these spheres. Resolutions were to force through an equality of all the nobility (the Sarmatians) in the eyes of the public law[61].

Ideology of the Sarmatism was also very present in the visual layer. This is where the meaning of the coats of arms comes from and especially the arduous modifications of old medieval heraldic legends so that after the transformations, they would resemble the alleged fights of Polish Sarmatians against the ancient Romans[62].

The knowledge that the Sarmatians lived in steppes and were nomads led to the formation of a unique dress and eccentric hairstyle of the Commonwealth's nobility. We are well aware that in the Middle Ages, there were no significant differences between the clothing worn by the Poles or even the Ruthenians and the clothing worn by other Europeans. At most, the medieval fashion might have been a bit more archaic as the trends would come from the West several decades late[63]. The 16th century saw a distinctive change: majority of the nobility from the Commonwealth rejected the West-European fashion and started to dress similarly to the wealthy Tatars who on the other hand copied the rich attire of Turks[64]. Together with different clothing there came the fashion for the Eastern shaving of heads and leaving just one long lock of hair as well as taking

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Shem. It should be mentioned here that the close cooperation between the nobility and the Jews meant that in the former Commonwealth there was no antisemitism among the nobility. On the other hand, Cossacks rebelling against the nobility would commit mass murders of the Jews – A. Polonsky, *op. cit.*, s. 29–30.

[61]  N. Davies, *Heart of Europe. The Past in Poland's Present*, Oxford 2001, s. 260.

[62]  M. Cetwiński, M. Derwich, *Herby, legendy, dawne mity*, Wrocław 1989, s. 39–41.

[63]  How Poles dressed in the Middle Ages can be seen by looking at a miniature from the Lubin Codex of the Legend of St. Hedwig of Silesia (14th century) showing the wedding of Henry I the Bearded with Hedwig of Andechs – https://www.alamy.com/henry-i-the-bearded-wedding-image386674758.html [dostęp: 23.12.2023].

[64]   I. Turnau, *History of Dress in Central and Eastern Europe from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, tłum. I. Szymańska, Warszawa 1991, s. 71–78.

great care of long moustache[65]. However, with time, this manner of shaving was rejected. Only the Ukrainian nobility kept it for longer just to reject it at the end, too as this was how the Cossacks shaved their heads and in the 17th century these two groups became sworn enemies despite the common background[66].

Interestingly, using the fashion to show one's dissociation from the Western Europe was never connected with the resignation from the participation in the community of its cultural, civilizational, and religious heritage. Quite the opposite, the nobility of the Commonwealth wanted to be openly associated with the Renaissance ideal of the center and cradle of the Western civilization and with the ancient Rome. This is exactly why the privileges of the nobility were compared to the liberties of the ancients and the political system of the Commonwealth to the one of the Roman Republic. The nobility knew and popularized the legend of Publius Ovidius Naso, a Roman poet living at the turn of the old and new eras, who allegedly went to live in Ruthenia. He was to learn the languages used there extremely fast: Dacian and Sarmatian and for them gave up writing in Latin. With time, in Baroque, some versions of the legends started to present Ovidius as a Sarmatian and thus, a Pole. Some would even search for his grave that was to be located either in Volhynia next to Dowigródek on the hill called the Ovidius Mountain or in the south of the Ukraine at the mouth of Dniester[67].

Educated using ancient and biblical sources that were handed down vaguely and transformed so that they would fit time and place, the nobility believed their mission. Their ideology combined the faith in the value of nobility and its ancient origins, love for the liberation-based system, and the belied that the Commonwealth was the bulwark of Christendom[68].

However, similarly to the way in which the political and ideological needs led to the formation of the ideology presented above and the fictional community that became real and influenced fates of many nations, certain political coincidences caused this interesting and, in a way, progressive ideology to degenerate, become anachronistic, and harm not only those who believed in it but also the entire state.

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[65]  T. Jurek, *Fryzura narodowa średniowiecznych Polaków*, w: „*Scriptura custos memoriae*". *Prace historyczne*, red. D. Zydorek, Poznań 2001, s. 635–651.

[66]  S. Plokhy, *The Origins*, s. 151; also: idem, *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine*, Oxford Un. Press 2002.

[67]  K. Kumaniecki, *De Ovidii apud Polonos fatis*, „Živa Antika" 1977, 27, s. 107–117.

[68]  W. Weitraub, *Renaissance Poland and „Antemurale Christianitatis"*, „Harvard Ukrainian Studies" 1979–1980, 3/4, s. 920–930.

## SOURCES AND ORIGINS OF THE PHENOMENON

In order to explain the historical foundations of the above-presented ideology, one should start from the 13th century and the situation of Poland of that time. The country was politically divided into several small provinces. Western ones started to strengthen ties with strong and civilizationally attractive neighboring countries. Silesia leaned towards Bohemia, Greater Poland was in the orbit of influences of Brandenburg or Saxony. Gdansk Pomerania got conquered by the powerful Order of Teutonic Knights together with part of Masovia. The rest of this country formed weak duchies that could barely survive. Western Pomerania broke away from Poland for good as early as at the end of the 12th century and became one of the parts of Reich, sometimes coming under the influence of Denmark.

Only the Duchy of Lesser Poland with its capital in Kraków retained its identity, significant power, and independence. Even if it had a permanent alliance with Hungary (very strong at that time), it still did not mean much in the conglomeration of the contemporary Polish states, not to mentioned on a larger scale. At the beginning of the 14th century two ambitious rulers from Kraków decided to change this situation: Władysław Łokietek and his son Casimir III the Great. The former took advantage of the temporary political situation and seized the Greater Poland and then crowned himself king. Malicious people would write that he remained only „the king of Kraków" because even his power in the Greater Poland did not have the strongest foundations. Kraków state was weak and could not extend its rule over the rest of lands of the former Poland[69].

Only Łokietek's son got the possibility of expansion and strengthening by seizing a state that at that time was richer than Kraków state and in a way supplemented it as it was located at the extension to the great trans-European trade route that also passed through Kraków[70]. This state was the so-called Red Ruthenia, formerly part of the huge Rus'. But at the beginning of the 14th century, the once uniform Kievan Rus' was only a distant memory. Since the twelfth century, many local authorities of the Rurik dynasty were established and strengthened, a century later becoming in fact separate states. Among them was also Red Ruthenia. Lack of natural borders and territorial proximity meant that the elites of this Russian principality were for centuries strongly associated with

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[69]   P.W. Knoll, *The Rise of the Polish Monarchy. Piast Poland in the East Central Europe, 1320–1370*, Chicago–London 1972, s. 14–40.

[70]   F.W. Carter, *Trade and Urban Development in Poland: An Economic Geography od Cracow, from its Origins to 1795*, Oxford 1994, s. 3–7.

the leadership circles of the Polish principalities, especially Cracow land (Lesser Poland) and Mazovia.

The issue of the incorporation of Red Ruthenia by the king Casimir the Great is very interesting and important for several reasons. Mostly because the rules of incorporating Ruthenian elites into Casimir's own state that the ruler created became a model copied by many others, including the Jagiellonian dynasts and thus, formed the foundations of the phenomenon this text is about. It is of significance that the Polish ruler had no other choice if he wanted to gain control over Red Ruthenia. Thus, he had to achieve some kind of compromise with the leadership elite of Red Ruthenia, because this country attracted the attention of strong neighboring states. Lithuanians who took up most of the territory of the former Kievan Rus' sought to take control of it. Also Tatars, who ruled it for almost a century after the conquest of all Rus' in the years 1237–1240, also tried to regain their rule. Even for the Hungarians, Red Ruthenia was an attractive area of expansion. But the Problems with Lithuania and Tatars were much more serious and consisted in more than just a rivalry over some land. The establishment of both Lithuanians and Tartars in Red Ruthenia would mean a significant threat to the emerging Poland, because each of these nations were willing to invade the kingdom of Casimir the Great, because the way from Halych to Cracow was neither long nor difficult.

The ruler, last of the Polish Piast-dynasty, must have realized that if incorporation of Red Ruthenia was to be permanent, it should be combined with the acquisition of the inhabitants of the country, especially their elite – Ruthenian boyars and the hierarchy of the local Orthodox Church. The policy of Casimir the Great towards the Red Ruthenian community had to take into account all the aforementioned factors.

The approach used by the Polish ruler had also certain legal grounds. This was not a mere aggression. In 1223 a local branch of the Rurik dynasty died out and its closest cousin was Bolesław, son of Trojden, the Mazovian prince. He received the military support of Władysław Łokietek and the approval of some of the Ruthenian magnates and at the end of 1323 Bolesław became the ruler of the Halych and Volodimir Volynski principalities. The prince joined the Orthodox Church, which was also manifested by the change of his name to a one more familiar to the Ruthenians – as Yuri II, the Piast from Mazovia tried to consolidate his rule in a country culturally foreign to him. However, he was not popular and people suspected him of crypto-Catholicism. Some of the Ruthenian magnates, boyars, looked at the Lithuanians with an eager eye, because even though most of them kept to paganism, their dukes married Ruthenian princesses and tolerated or even supported the Orthodox Church. Some members of the Eastern clergy were even closer to the Tartars than to the

Western Church[71]. Although the nomads from the Golden Horde already believed in the religion of Mohammed, in Ruthenia they traditionally tolerated the Orthodox Church and supported its hierarchs[72]. The Tatars had an extremely mobile, efficient, and strong army which at that time, and perhaps not only then, was the most important factor when it comes to the political authority.

When Yuri II died at the beginning of 1340, the Polish ruler immediately went to Ruthenia with a haphazardly gathered army. He only managed to subdue a part of the country after conquering Lviv. He took the oath of the local mighty there, to whom he guaranteed their position and property status and the freedom to preserve their own laws and religion[73].

The king tried to be as conciliatory as possible towards the boyars, which is why he decided to appoint one of them, a certain Dymytro (Detko) from Przemyśl, as his viceroy[74]. Soon, however, this man turned against Casimir. He and the boyars supporting him sent a message to Öz Bega Khan of the Golden Horde with a declaration of loyalty and a request for help against the Poles. The Polish king stopped the strong army of the Tatars with great difficulty as they were additionally supported by the Ruthenians. A fierce battle took place near the Vistula River in 1341. Later, he drove back the Tatar-Ruthenian forces besieging Lublin. At that time, the Lithuanians took the northern part of Red Ruthenia (the Volhynia principality) as well as its south-eastern part (Podolia) under their control[75].

After heavy fierce combat, Casimir the Great managed to oust the Tartars from Red Ruthenia in the same year (1341) but he could not do the same with the Lithuanians despite several armed expeditions. Besides, the Tartars were also coming back to Ruthenia many times, trying to regain control over the country. The wars that continued intermittently until 1392, more than two decades after Casimir's death, and that saw the intervention of the Hungarians, are not going to be discussed in detail here. Besides, their last period was launched following the death of Casimir and the lack of stability in the kingdom. In 1356, the ruler himself led to the subjugation of most of the Red Ruthenia, which was sealed

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[71] H. Paszkiewicz, *Polityka ruska Kazimierza Wielkiego*, Warszawa 1925, s. 64–87.

[72] В.В. Григорьев, *О достоверности ярлыков, данных ханами Золотой Орды русскому духовенству*, Москва 1842, s. 16–17, 133.

[73] K. Chodynicki, *op. cit.*, s. 8–9; more about the phenomenon: A. Janeczek, *Ethnicity, Religious Disparity and the Formation of the Multicultural Society of Red Ruthenia in the Late Middle Ages*, w: *On the Frontier of Latin Europe. Integration and Segregation in Red Ruthenia, 1350–1600*, red. A. Janeczek, T. Wünsch, Warszawa 2004, s. 15–45.

[74] H. Paszkiewicz, *Polityka*, s. 64–87.

[75] J. Wyrozumski, *Kazimierz Wielki*, Wrocław 1986, s. 95ff.

with a peace with Lithuanians, confirmed ten years later. The Tatars were also pacified by Casimir[76].

For a dozen of his final years, the Polish king did a lot in order to bind Red Ruthenia permanently with his country. He put an end to the duality of the capital cities and a certain competition between Halycz and Volodymyr by replacing them with a newly created center which was from the beginning designed as a big city of a new type unknown in Ruthenia. He built a castle in Lviv and organized a city which received the Magdeburg Law in 1356. What is interesting, he chose a different arrangement than the one used in Poland and in the West. There, the emergence of the urban community was always associated with the full immunity, which abolished all other old location laws and threw outside the walls all those who were not subject to this law. In Lviv, according to the will of the king, the Ruthenians and occupants of other nationalities as well as eastern religious groups were to some extent excluded from the power of the Magdeburg Law, which after all was Catholic in nature. The ruler decided that the following groups could live in the city: Ruthenians, Armenians, Jews, and the so-called *Saraceni*, the term used to denote Muslin population, regardless of where they came from. All of them could keep and publicly practice their own customs, religion, and laws within the municipality[77].

It meant that these ethnic and religious communities had their own self-government and jurisdiction[78]. Of course, the most important positions in the city were held by the Catholics, whom urban law primarily concerned itself with. This group consisted mainly of Poles and Germans, but also other newcomers from the West. Nevertheless, the position of the infidels, the non-Catholics, in Red Ruthenian cities in the face of Catholic power was quite exceptional compared to other authorities in medieval Europe.

The last king of the Piast dynasty made similar gestures towards the Ruthenian magnates, boyars. The measure of the successes of the integration of the Red Ruthenian's mighty with the Polish elite can be documented by the career of the family of Ivan (Iwonia) from Klecie. He was

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[76]  *Ibidem*, s. 96; P.W. Knoll, *op. cit.*, s. 140.

[77]  J. Heyde, *Multiethnizität, Stadtrecht, Stadt. Lemberg im späten Mittelalter*, „Annales UMCS. Sectio F" 2017, 72, s. 95–119; later, however, the situation of Ruthenian residents of Lviv in the Middle Ages and modernity was difficult until the late 18th century, their position was much weaker compared to Catholic burghers – see e.g.: J. Ptaśnik, *Miasta i mieszczaństwo w dawnej Polsce*, Kraków 1934, s. 331ff.; A. Janeczek, *Segregacja wyznaniowa i podział przestrzeni w miastach Rusi Koronnej (XIV–XVI w.)*, „Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej" 2015, 63, 2, s. 259–281.

[78]  M. Kapral, *Legal Regulation and National (Ethnic) Differentation in Lviv, 1350–1600*, w: *On the Frontier*, s. 211–228.

a supporter of Casimir the Great's policy. As a reward for his loyalty, he was allowed to retain his Orthodox faith and received a title of knighthood from the king, along with the coat of arms and considerable lands not only in Ruthenia, but also in the Lublin region that belonged to Poland. The grandson of Ivan, Dymitr of Goraj, belonged to the most powerful magnates in the state of that time. In 1390, he became the marshal of the Kingdom of Poland. This example was imitated by many Ruthenians families who, thanks to the skillful politics of Casimir the Great, became pillars of royal power in the eastern part of the state while retaining their Orthodox faith, their own language and customs[79].

Casimir the Great did a lot to win over the followers of the Orthodox Church. Not only – as already mentioned – he allowed the boyars to keep all their property and social position, but he also wanted to strengthen the structures of the Orthodox Church in order to strengthen his own power and make the local Orthodox Church independent from external influences, especially those from Moscow, whose position was growing at that time. He tried to reactivate the Halych archbishopric which existed until 1347 and was abolished during the period of struggle and confusion as a result of the activities of Theognost, the Metropolitan bishop of Kiev, who resided already in Suzdal Volodimir and was a subordinate of the Moscow state[80].

At the end of his reign, probably in 1370, Casimir sent his envoys to Constantinople with a letter in Greek, in which he asked the Patriarch „in order for the rite of Rus' not be lost or contaminated" for the appointment of Antonius to the Metropolitan bishop of Halych. The Polish king threatened that the lack of consent would mean consent to the domination of the Catholic Church in Red Ruthenia. The Patriarch Philotheus Kokkinos (May 9, 1371) ordained Antonius as a Metropolitan and placed him at the head of the union of four dioceses: Chełm, Przemyśl, Turov and Volodymyr. The decision was supported by the authority of Emperor John V Paleolog[81].

Following similar intentions of building the sovereignty of state power in Red Ruthenia, which in this case meant the isolation of Eastern Christians from the interference of any external church administration, an Armenian bishopric was established in Lviv in 1363 with the king's

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[79]  M. Wilamowski, *Magnate Territories in Red Ruthenia in the Fourteen and Fifteen Centuries. Origin, Development and Social Impact*, w: *On the Frontier*, s. 81–118.

[80]  J. Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century*, Cambridge 1981, s. 84; K. Chodynicki, *op. cit.*, s. 3–11.

[81]  K. Chodynicki, *op. cit.*, s. 11.

support[82]. Casimir subsidized the building of the Armenian cathedral that stands there to this day.

The religious tolerance of the king, whose practices resulted from the conviction of the raison d'état, had, however, strong opponents. Distinctive examples of that are papal letters which were undoubtedly the result of reports sent by the Polish Church dignitaries to denounce the king. Maintaining religious organizations other than only Catholic ones meant after all halting the possibilities of expansion and increasing their influences and earnings. Many times, subsequent popes (e.g. Klemens VI) exempted Poland for a period of several years from tithe, all or part of which the king was to devote to the fight against the pagan Lithuanians, Muslim Tatars, or Ruthenian „schismatics"[83].

At the same time, however, in 1345 the Pope admonished the king „that his subjects should not help or support the schismatics against the Christians, either directly or indirectly, openly or secretly". Similarly, in 1356, when Casimir entered into an agreement with Lithuanians, he was condemned by Pope Innocent VI (the bull from 24.01.1357), who criticized the king's actions, claiming that the Lithuanians are the main enemies of the faith. In addition, the letter included the statement that the king made an agreement with the Tatars and made them his tribute payers[84].

It does not seem that the deep knowledge about these „wrongs" of Casimir the Great against the Church came exclusively from his external opponents, especially the Teutonic Knights. There are many testimonies, unfortunately dated a bit later, stating that the Polish dignitaries of the Catholic Church did not like the equal rights of the Orthodox Church. They wanted to dominate, remove or at least subject the eastern hierarchs to Rome.

The consecutive rulers of the Polish and later Polish-Lithuanian states were able to somehow solve amicably problems connected with the difference of interests between the state and Church authorities when it comes

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[82]   R. Lesniak, *Armenier in Lember: Grenzen sozialer Integration in den Städten Rotreußens in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Eine Skizze*, w: *On the Frontier*, s. 229–240.

[83]   *Bullarium Poloniae. Litteras apostolicas aliaque monumenta Poloniae Vaticana continens*, vol. 2: *1342–1378*, red. I. Sułkowska-Kuraś, S. Kuraś, Romae–Lublin: École Française de Rome, 1982, no. 813, s. 133; vide also: R. Mazeika, *The Role of Pagan Lithuania in Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Religious Diplomacy in East-Central Europe (1345–1377)*, New York 1987.

[84]   The matter is unclear; perhaps temporarily Casimir was paying tribute to the khan of the Golden Horde of a part of Ruthenia – S. Jaros, *Between East and West. Crown Ruthenia between the Golden Horde and the rising power of the Polish Kingdom*, w: *Rus' and the world of the Nomads (the second half of the 9th–16th c.)*, red. V. Nagirnyy (Colloquia Russica. Series I, 7), Kraków 2017, s. 281–290.

to the Orthodox Church until the end of the 16th century. However, after death of the last of the Jagiellonians, Sigismund II Augustus (1572), the elites of the Polish-Lithuanian state faced an enormous challenge of ensuring the continuation of power with the adoption of a legal custom of electing a new ruler after death of the previous one by the entire body of nobility of the state. For a few dozens of years, it seemed that they were able to do it skillfully. However, once they selected a wrong person and a multinational and religiously diverse country took a turn towards a catastrophe.

## BEGINNING OF THE END

On the 10th of December 1587, Sigismund, son of Swedish king John III of Sweden and Catherine Jagiellon (sister of Sigismund II Augustus) was crowned a king of Poland in the Cracow Cathedral. This act meant also that the elect would become the Grand Duke of Lithuania.

People supporting the candidacy of the Swedish prince hoped that in his rule, the new king would draw on the policies of Jagiellonians, Catholic kings who respected the freedom of other religions. After all, at the head of this party stood Jan Zamoyski, a powerful magnate but at the same time a leader of the middling nobility who to a large extent were infidel[85]. However, pretty soon it was obvious that Sigismund III Vasa, alumnus of the Jesuits, was not capable of ruling the religiously-complex machine of the Polish-Lithuanian state. As a matter of fact, for the significant part of his reign, he was more interested in regaining the lost throne of Sweden than in the matters of the Commonwealth. In this situation, when at the very beginnings of his reigns serious problems with the Orthodox church appeared[86], the kind used radical solutions. In synod under the leadership of the king in Brest-Litovsk in 1596 it was decided that the entire Orthodox clergy in the state is to place itself under the authority of the Pope of Rome and recognize Catholic dogmas

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[85] In the Polish land mostly Calvinist and in the Ruthenian additionally Orthodox – G.D. Hundert, *op. cit.*, s. 131–148.

[86] In 1588 the Patriarch of Moscow was established and openly made claims to the rule over the members of the Orthodox church who lived in all Ruthenian areas, including the Commonwealth. These lands were plagued by serious internal conflicts among the Orthodox believers and the resistance to the Patriarch of Constantinople was growing – I. Harasim, *Die Union von Brest. Voraussetzungen und Motive ihrer Entstehung,* w: *Internationales Forschungsgespräch der Stiftung Pro Oriente zur Brester Union* (Das östliche Christentum, NF v. 54), red. J. Marte, Würzburg 2004, s. 11–38.

in exchange for the legal and social autonomy, maintaining their own rite, their calendar, and legal equality with the Catholic hierarchy. Formally, the activity of those clerics who refused to follow the union was prohibited[87]. Some of the bishops as well as secular Orthodox nobles did not recognize the agreement. Furthermore, masses of ordinary believers opposed it decidedly, especially in the Eastern parts of the state. These people were getting closer and closer to the Patriarch of Moscow and found political support in the country of tsars. Moreover, Cossacks started to openly rebel against the Commonwealth. Since mid-16th century they had a military union in the south-east of the Ukraine. Formally, it came under the authority of the Polish king but in truth, it was very independent. The Cossacks started a number of uprisings at the bottom of which lied not only the social issues but also the defense of the Orthodox faith.

In 1633 the prohibition on the activity of Orthodox hierarchs opposed to Rome was abolished. However, over three decades of persecutions led not only to the worsening of the old dislike of the members of the Orthodox church to the Catholicism but also to the formation of new platforms of disputes among the Uniates and the Disuniates. Designers of the Union wanted to control the situation in the East of the country and to cut the king's subjects from the influences of Russia. However, what happened was the opposite: the internal conflict was growing and the Moscow emissaries were fueling it.

In 1648, a rebellion led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky broke out in the Ukraine. Soon, king Władysław IV Vasa (son of Sigismund III) died and the interregnum resulted in a very weak resistance to the Cossacks. Furthermore, they formed an alliance with the Tatars from the Crimean Khanate. In such situation, the civil war became a serious conflict. Resolution of the new king, John Casimir (brother of the deceased ruler) and victories of royal armies over the Cossacks did not help much. Eventually, Moscow got involved and seized the entire left-bank Ukraine together with Kiev (1654–1686)[88].

The religious conflict caused by the Union of Brest and the conduct of Sigismund III Vasa who was openly supporting Catholicism had more consequences. Middling nobility, in large numbers Protestant, took a dislike to the ruler who wanted to strengthen his own rights and rebelled against him. The rebellion was violently pacified in the Battle of Guzów (1607) by the royal forces[89]. However, the embers of rebellion kept flickering especially as gradually, the Protestants started to suffer more and

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[87] K. Chodynicki, *op. cit.*, s. 333–334.
[88] S. Plokhy, *The Origins*, s. 246–249.
[89] N. Davies, *God's*, vol. 1, s. 261–262.

more restrictions and persecutions[90]. Furthermore, Sigismund III, despite the state officially staying neutral in the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), allowed the Habsburgs to recruit Polish troops to fight the Protestants. These demonstrated not only great efficiency on the battlefield (especially forces led by Alexander Lisowski and fighting like Tatars) but also turned to ashes large stretches of Germany and Transylvania, murdering civilian population without mercy[91]. Protests of Polish Protestants (afraid that these troops could be used against them) before the king were of no use.

The religious conflict was growing and eventually, when in 1655 the Commonwealth was attacked by the troops of Charles Gustav, king of Sweden, Polish and Lithuanian Protestants supported the invaders *en masse*, except for those who lived in Royal Prussia and Livonia that enjoyed autonomy. As shortly before large stretches of the Eastern land of the Polish-Lithuanian state got occupied by the Moscow's armies and Transylvanians supported the Swedes, the threat of destruction loomed over the Commonwealth. With great difficulty, Polish king John II Casimir, supported by the Habsburgs, managed to repulse the attack.

However, the miraculously rescued state was not the same as before the wars from the mid-17th century. The Commonwealth suffered significant losses when it comes to the territory. Royal Prussia became independent and after combining with Brandenburg formed the basis of the Kingdom of Prussia (1701)[92]. It is estimated that between 1648 and 1660, half of the residents of the Polish-Lithuanian state died as a result of fights, diseases, and hunger and half of the estate belonging to the country and the citizens got destroyed. These Protestants who supported the Swedish king were blamed for all the defeats and banished from the country[93]. As a result of the persecutions, Polish and Polonized groups of nobility became almost exclusively Catholic (and Uniate) and the conflict with the Orthodox Church led to the nobility of Ruthenian descent losing the connection with their ethnicity and thus, the old phrase *gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus* became outdated.

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[90]  D. Tollet, *op. cit.*, s. 71–76; S. Plokhy, *The Cossacks*, s. 65–99.

[91]  H. Wisner, *Lisowczycy*, Warszawa 2004.

[92]  P.G. Dwyer, *The Rise of Prussia, 1700–1830*, London–New York 2013; Prussia initiated the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian state (1772–1795), for which also were responsible Russia and the Habsburg Empire.

[93]  K. Grycz-Śmiłowski, *Bracia polscy, Arianie-Unitarianie. Zarys dziejów*, Kraków 1977; S.P. Ramet, *The Catholic Church in Polish History. From 966 to the Present*, New York 2017, s. 29–37.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up the above-mentioned deliberations, it should be noted that the formation of a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse elite of the Polish-Lithuanian state was cause by a series of certain political factors. The proficiency in the rule over this conglomerate of peoples was dependent on the religious tolerance and imagined identity of the elites who despite obvious and multiple national and religious differences were able to form a new quasi-nation: the nobility of the Commonwealth. Both imaginary qualities and connected with them real enterprises aimed at the consolidation of the ruling class led to the formation of the strong community that managed to rule and defend the vast country well in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, when the basis of the order of the Polish-Lithuanian state was recklessly weakened at the end of the 16th century, in other words when the religious tolerance stopped being supported, the political creation built by many generations of people of various backgrounds and religions collapsed like a house of cards.

This is also when the reconstruction of nations creating former Commonwealth started as large numbers of Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian nobles abandoned the identity formed by the phenomenon described in this text with the phrase *Ruthenus genere Polonus natione*. They became the driving force behind new, this time purely nationalistic, creations[94]. This, however, is a different issue that goes beyond the subject of this text.

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[94]   On the role of language as a medium for the creation of national consciousness e.g.: B. Anderson, *op. cit.*, s. 67–82; M. Baar, *Historians and Nationalism. East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford 2010, s. 136–152.

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Andrzej Pleszczyński – profesor historii średniowiecza w Instytucie Historii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie. Specjalizuje się w badaniach nad stosunkami polsko-czesko-niemieckimi w średniowieczu, traktując je jako rodzaj konfrontacji kultur. Ostatnio jego zainteresowania dotyczą kwestii mitologizacji i tworzenia stereotypów w badaniach historycznych – w tym przypadku stara się odnaleźć inercyjne, nienaukowe wpływy dawnych, starożytnych i średniowiecznych koncepcji nad nowożytną, a nawet współczesną historiografią.