



A view from Poland: the state and the Orthodox church in the Ukrainian lands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as reflected in the Polish historical research

Valerii Lastovskyi

Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, E-mail: lastov@ukr.net

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8900-5569>

ResearcherID: V-2549-2018

Abstract

This article explores the shifting perspectives of Polish academics about the role of the Orthodox Church in domestic and interstate relations within the Commonwealth and the Russian Empire. Why Poland's sovereignty crumbled at the end of the 18th century was one of the most critical questions Polish historians sought to explain. Since Bohdan Khmelnytskii's uprising, Moscow's geopolitical objectives had placed the Ukrainian territories in the forefront of their attention.

It has been documented that the nineteenth-century Polish scientific research was more concerned with the social and political impact of Orthodox Churches in Commonwealth regions than any other aspect of its history. However, this scenario has altered through time. Since the eighteenth century, the viewpoints of Polish historians have changed drastically. Additionally, they investigated the inner workings of churches and religious activity in Ukraine.

Rezumat

Articolul examinează dinamica opiniilor savanților polonezi cu privire la rolul Bisericii Ortodoxe în relațiile interne și interstatale din cadrul Commonwealth-ului și al Imperiului Rus. Unul dintre subiectele cheie la care istoricii polonezi au încercat să răspundă a fost motivul pentru care statalitatea Poloniei s-a dizolvat la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea. Problematicele teritoriilor ucrainene, care erau în interesul geopolitic al Moscovei începând de la insurecția lui Bogdan Hmelnițki, s-a aflat în prim-planul atenției lor.

S-a stabilit că istoriografia poloneză din secolul al XIX-lea a fost mai preocupată de consecințele sociale și politice ale Bisericilor Ortodoxe asupra Commonwealth-ului decât de orice alt aspect al istoriei sale. Acest scenariu a evoluat însă de-a lungul timpului. Perspectivele istoricilor polonezi s-au schimbat dramatic după secolul al XIX-lea. Ei au analizat, de asemenea, funcționarea internă a bisericilor și activitățile religioase din Ucraina.

Keywords: Ukraine, Poland, historiography, Orthodox Church, church-state relations

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Introduction

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Polish historians have developed a keen interest in the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Since then, it has remained constant, although there have been periods of twists. It gained the most focus in the second half of the nineteenth century, then throughout the Interwar period, somewhat in the second half of the twentieth century, and more actively at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Jozef Szujski, Tadeusz Korzon, Franciszek Gawronski-Rawita, Edward Rulikowski, Władysław Andrzej Serczyk, Andrzej Gil, Antoni Mironowicz, Maria Papeżyńska-Turek, Marek Melnik, Norbert Morawiec, Rafal Dimchik et al. are only few of the Polish historians who have written about the connections between the Church and the two states (Poland and Russia) in the Ukrainian lands. The 2019 establishment of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the person of Bartholomew I have reignited interest in this topic.

There have been three waves of interest in religious, social and church-state relations in the territory of Ukraine in Polish science:

1) the first wave, from the 1830-40s to the early 1900s; this wave was undoubtedly triggered by the defeat of the Polish uprising, which raised the issue of the role of the Orthodox Church as an institution and the Ukrainian clergy in the destruction of Polish statehood; during this time, there was a debate between Poles and Ukrainians, as well as Russian scientists;

2) in the 1920s and 1930s, the second wave culminated in the restoration of Polish sovereignty (1918) and the establishment of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (1924);

3) the third wave, which began in the 2000s and lingers on, was triggered by the revolutions in Ukraine in 2004 and 2013-2014, as well as Russian aggression, which began in 2014 and continues to this day.

Political interests of Polish historians

The rise of interest in the Orthodox Church's activities was conditioned mostly by political factors rather than strictly scientific ones

from the outset. One of the primary questions that Polish historians have attempted to solve is the reason why the Polish state was destroyed at the end of the 18th century. The Ukrainian lands, which have been in the realm of geopolitical interests of Moscow since the Khmelnytsky Uprising in 1648, were at the center of their attention.

Indeed, as early as the middle of the nineteenth century, two conflicting approaches to the portrayal of the function and place of the Orthodox clergy in the events of the 17th and 18th centuries in the Right-bank Ukraine were formed:

- According to Polish history and certain Ukrainian historians, the Russian authorities and Ukrainian clergy were the source of conflict on the Right Bank;

- Russian historiography and some Ukrainian researchers attributed all blame to the Orthodox clergy. Both of these perspectives were essentially ideological. Then, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, a third approach began to emerge, the primary goal of which was to collect reliable information and clarify the actual situation in the Ukrainian regions. This paradigm has been confined to Ukrainian historiography. Mykhailo Maksymovych (1804-1873), the first rector of the University of St. Volodymyr in Kyiv, was the first to voice these ideas.

Polish historians have highlighted the bond between the state and the Church as one of the decisive elements that contributed to the disintegration of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. According to Polish historians of the 19th century, the Orthodox Church was one of the factors that hindered the development of Polish statehood. At the same time, the Church appears to be at the core of the conflict between the two governments, Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, serving as a finger tip for both sides. The operations of church institutions and clergy in Ukrainian territory were analyzed within the perspective of the history of the Russian Orthodox Church and, therefore, Russian statehood. According to Polish history, the religious aspect in the regions of Ukraine, together with the corresponding deterioration of sociopolitical ties, has historically been viewed as one of the determining reasons in the demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The vast majority of Polish historians adhere to this approach. This is especially true of Teodor Morawski, Jozef Szujski, Tadeusz Korzon, Franciszek Gawronski-Rawita, and many others' scholarly outputs. Modern Polish historians, on the other hand, express themselves more cautiously on the matter, although it is evident to them that the religion issue was employed by Russian authorities in their foreign policy towards the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with the sole goal of subjugating the latter.¹

Polish historical study has progressed along a difficult path since the end of the 15th century, then following the loss of Polish sovereignty and its restoration at the turn of the twentieth century under diverse political and ideological settings. At the same time, Polish historical science is as closely tied to Ukrainian historical science as Russian science, and concerns about Ukrainian history have long worried it as much as concerns about Polish history, since the two have long been intertwined. As a result, the seventeenth and fifteenth-century Ukrainian topic was, and continues to be, one of the most difficult in Polish history. And, first and foremost, it concerns people's movements, the Khmelnytsky Uprising, Koliyivshchyna, and Orthodox Church activities in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth territory. Many scientific and popular works reflect this. At the same time, Polish historical science cannot be faulted for constantly being one-sided and biased in its analysis. Researchers have voiced a variety of viewpoints and used a variety of data to support their positions. Furthermore, the evolution of historical theory in Ukrainian, Russian, and Soviet historiography has been influenced by Polish historiography. The strategy taken by Polish scientists in dealing with a specific issue has sparked a lot of debate (for example, the participation of the Orthodox clergy in the political situation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 1760s or 1790s). Nonetheless, it is Polish historiography's achievements that have inspired a more serious examination of interfaith relations and the sociopolitical situation on the Right Bank. It may even be said that, in terms of the study of Ukrainian

¹ See e.g.: Serczyk W., *Katarzyna II – carowa Rosji*, Wrocław, 1989, s. 176-177.

history, Polish historiography has been ahead of the development of Ukrainian historical science at times.

Polish historical science, its development and formation of concepts, respectively, were of interest to many Ukrainian and Russian scholars who left behind a number of studies, which, in particular, considered the attitude of Polish historians to Ukrainian history in various aspects (Mykola Karieiev, Volodymyr Zavitnevych, Dmytro Doroshenko, Leonid Dobrovolskyi, Zenon Kohut, Leonid Zashkilniak, et al)². However, it should be emphasised that national researchers do not yet fully pay attention to Polish historical science in relation to its attitude to Ukraine, in particular, its approaches to evaluating the activities of the Orthodox Church.

Because of the events of 1760-1790, the perception of the Orthodox Church's negative participation in the disintegration of Polish sovereignty became entrenched in Polish historical thinking. Polish historians feel that the Church was merely exploited in the interests of the Russian government to meddle in the internal affairs of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a result of those occurrences. As is well known, it was at this time that Empress Catherine II's diplomacy executed the "dissident issue," which was nominally aimed at resolving the problem of the Polish Orthodox population's religious and civic rights. Thus, the historian Jozef Szujski wrote in 1866 that "the case of dissidents was a philanthropic cape for Europe"³. Furthermore, he believes that this is precisely what sparked an upsurge in religious extremism in Poland⁴. The Orthodox bishops Hervasii Lintsevskiyi and Hryhorii Konyskyi, according to the researcher, were the primary executors of tsarism's will, inciting religious hatred.

Teodor Morawski also dislikes Russia's policy on the "dissident issue", including Catherine II's requests that Bishop Hryhorii Konyskyi be given a Senate seat, although even "biscupi unicci" did not have it. Teodor Morawski resents her threats to resort to various means to execute her will,

² Ластовський В., *Між суспільством і державою. Православна церква в Україні наприкінці XVII – у XVIII ст. в історії та історіографії*, Київ, 2008, 496 с.

³ Szujski J., *Dzieje Polski*, t. IV, Lwów, 1866, s. 410.

⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 439.

as well as Prince Nikolai Repnin's pressure on the senators.⁵ As a result, the historian defends the Bar Confederation, claiming that it was only a reaction to the Sejm's illegal actions taken under political duress.⁶ He is also convinced that the Haydamak Uprising of 1768 was organised by the Russian authorities⁷. According to him, the Orthodox clergy in Ukraine followed Moscow's orders, which were passed through Bishop Hryhorii Konyskyi, the abbot of the Motronyn Saint Trinity monastery Melkhisiedek Znachko-Yavorsky, and finally Bishop Viktor Sadkovskyi. The researcher exclusively considers the latter's nomination to the office of bishop of Pereiaslav and Boryspil in the context of Catherine II's policy. As a result, he portrays Bishop Viktor Sadkovskyi's complete reliance on her, believing that one evidence of this is the fact that Bishop Viktor Sadkovskyi swore an oath before the Polish king with the Empress's consent⁸.

Bishop Viktor Sadkovskyi is also chastised by historian Henryk Moszczycki. The researcher focuses on the fact that this hierarch had long-standing political and religious practices before his appointment, and he hated Poles and Catholics for personal reasons; he was always a faithful servant of the imperial house, despite being a subject of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; that is why Viktor Sadkovskyi prepared a catechism for the parishioners with words about loyalty to Russian interests and allegiance to Catherine II, so he contributed to the preparation of the uprising in Ukraine in 1789, "in which he could play the role of Melkhisiedek Znachko-Yavorsky". Henryk Moszczycki emphasises the bishop's close ties with the Russian government and the latter's interest in his actions. That is why Viktor Sadkovsky was released from custody "under the strong influence of the Russian ambassador"⁹.

Another Polish historian Władysław Grabenski had a negative attitude towards all Orthodox Ukrainians who were "a dark, poor and contemptuous part of the population". Accordingly, he evaluated the active

⁵ Morawski T., *Dzieje narodu polskiego*, t. V, Poznań, 1877, s. 42-43, 74.

⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 78.

⁷ *Ibid.*, s. 87.

⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 216.

⁹ Mościcki H., *Dzieje porozbiorowe Litwy i Rusi*, zeszyt XII, Wilno, 1912, s. 365-366.

actions of Orthodox church hierarchs sequencing them in a certain way: from politics and ideology to the practical implementation of plans. Therefore, the activity of Bishop Hryhorii Konyskyi is nothing but intrigues against the republic; Bishop Hervasii Lintsevskyi is credited with starting Orthodox agitation among the Ukrainian population with the support of the Holy Synod and Orthodox monasteries; and Melkhisedek Znachko-Yavorsky performed more lowly tasks – luring the Uniates to Orthodoxy and galvanising coreligionists against the Catholic gentry and the Latin clergy¹⁰. The researcher also considered the development of the domestic political situation in the country and therefore saw the decisions of the Polish Sejm in February 1768, which had granted some rights to the Orthodox, doomed to stagnation and legal dependence on Russia, as they had been taken by delegates terrorised by the representative of Catherine II in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Prince Nikolai Repnin¹¹. Vladislav Grabensky accused Otto Stackelberg, another Russian envoy in Warsaw, of trying to turn almost all Orthodox Christians into Russian subjects ruled by the Holy Synod after the first partition of the Polish state (1772), and as a result of his policy "actually obtained supreme power in the republic"¹². In return, the Russian ambassador agreed in 1775 to the elimination of those provisions on the "dissident issue" by the Sejm that had been adopted in 1768: "... as dissidents were important in the process of strengthening Russian influence in Poland, so too they lost their previous value in the eyes of the St. Petersburg cabinet after its actual acquisition. In addition, by restricting the rights of dissidents Stackelberg payed for the delegation's compliance with the matters more important to Russia"¹³.

The situation in the Right Bank Ukraine was most fully considered by the famous Polish historian Franciszek Gawronski-Rawita. In his opinion, it was here, in the Right Bank Ukraine, that the interests of Russia and Poland intersected. The researcher tries to describe all aspects of the socio-political life of both countries in relation to Ukraine. And in general, he followed the

¹⁰ Grabienski Wł. [Smoleński Wł.], *Dzieje narodu polskiego*, cz.2, Kraków, 1898, s. 42-43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, s. 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, s. 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, s. 61.

ideas expressed by his predecessors. As a result, he considered that the dissident situation was primarily political and national in origin, rather than religious¹⁴. Describing its examination during the Sejms of 1766, 1767 and 1768, he points primarily to the pressure of the Russian authorities on the course of events in the Polish parliament, which he interpreted as nothing short of legalising Russian protectorate over Poland¹⁵. At the same time, the Polish historian significantly deepened the views expressed against him, not only by factual material but also analytical. Thus, he came to the conclusion that the basis of Russia's interference in the internal affairs of Poland was the idea of religious cohesion from which the idea of tribal cohesion was artificially created by court scholars¹⁶.

Franciszek Gawronski-Rawita also integrated his views on Koliyivshchyna's history in his artistic prose, in which he represented the artificiality of the religious strife between Ukrainians and Poles in Right Bank Ukraine. Amid the artistic images, he claimed that Bohdan Khmelnytsky was the first to fly the flag of religious struggle, and this tradition had continued for a long time; Russia, taking advantage of this factor, made the weakening of Poland its central aim¹⁷.

The belief that the Constitution of 3 May had achieved full equality between non-Catholics and Catholics was a prevalent theme in all of the works of Polish historians.

The 20th century: a change in rhetoric

Political issues related to the religious situation in Right Bank Ukraine in the fifteenth century were also crucial to postwar Polish historical research, but they were no longer as nuanced as they had been. This was obvious in Maria Bogucka's, Wadysaw Andrzej Serczyk's, and other historiographic works. Despite the fact that charges against the Russian government and its actions have remained, the Polish nobility and Catholic church have not been absolved of blame for the situation. At the same time,

¹⁴ Rawita-Gawroński Fr., *Historia ruchów hajdamackich*, t. II, Lwów, 1901, s. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 81.

¹⁷ Rawita Fr., *Na kresach. Opowiadanie historyczne z XVIII wieku*, Warszawa, 1886, s. 196-198.

the historiography of the recent period has reflected the continuation of Polish science's traditions and general perspective.

Modern Polish historiography, on the other hand, has attempted to distance itself from prior Polish historiography by referring to it as "nationalist historiography."¹⁸ However, attempts to subordinate historical research to the ruling Communist Party defined this approach, not the historical science's growth in Poland. Nonetheless, there was a degree of consistency in Polish historiography. For example, in the 1950s, Emanuel Rostworowski suggested that non-Catholics seeking assistance overseas gave Russia more opportunity to meddle in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's internal affairs, particularly during Empress Catherine II's reign.: "Moreover, the patronage of Orthodoxy beyond the borders of the Empire was designed to serve the Russian policy in the Balkans and in Poland"¹⁹. At the same time, Russia gave the dissident case a strong political tone by asking that the Orthodox nobles be granted political rights. In general, Emanuel Rostworowski regarded the problem of Poland's division and statehood liquidation through the lens of the crisis of its internal order²⁰.

Maria Bogucka already accused the Polish gentry and the Catholic clergy of intolerance and religious fanaticism²¹. However, she believes that assessing the Bar Confederation of 1768 is more difficult and equivocal since religious fervour was paired with patriotism oriented "against Russian meddling in Polish affairs."²². According to Juliusz Bardach it was this anti-Russian statement that provided grounds for Russia's armed intervention²³.

Among modern Polish historians, Wadysaw Andrzej Serczyk is most known for his insights on Ukraine in the 17th and 18th centuries. His scientific legacy includes a large number of publications that have become a

¹⁸ Podraza A., Rostworowski E., "Materiały do sytuacji na Ukrainie Prawobrzeżnej i ruchów hajdamackich lat 50-tych i 60-tych XVIII wieku z korespondencji Jerzego Wandalina Mniszcka", *Przegląd Historyczny*, t. XLVII, zeszyt I, Warszawa, 1956, s. 146.

¹⁹ *Historia Polski*, pod red. S.Kieniewiczza i W.Kuli, t. II, cz, I, 1764-1795, Warszawa, 1958, s. 57.

²⁰ Rostworowski E., *Historia Powszechna: Wiek XVIII*, Warszawa, 1984, s. 703-705.

²¹ Bogucka M., *Dzieje Polski do 1795 r.*, Warszawa, 1964, s. 250.

²² *Ibid.*, s. 260-261.

²³ Bardach J., "Konstytucja 3 Maja i zaręczenie wzajemne obojga narodów 1791 roku", *Konstytucja 3 Maja 1791*, wprowadzenie naukowe J. Bardach, Warszawa, 2001, s. 5.

unique "middle ground" in Polish history. As a result, his writings were well-received in both Ukrainian Soviet and Ukrainian foreign historiography.

This historian connects the evolution of Russian interference in the internal affairs of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth only with the coming to power of Empress Catherine II (1762) and the election of King Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764) as a candidate from St. Petersburg, whereas he emphasises that the central focus of that policy was "the case of dissidents (adherents of a different faith)"²⁴. However, he was convinced that Emperor Peter I was the one who set this policy in motion when he forced King Augustus II to allow the establishment of the Orthodox Mogilev diocese, which was subordinated to the Moscow Patriarch, and it was at this point that "Russia's dominant position became apparent."²⁵ In this regard, it is worth noting that Wadysaw Andrzej Serczyk's opinions on the subject remained constant from the 1960s to the beginning of the twenty-first century. He expanded on them in a special monograph on Catherine II's actions, in which he suggested, among other things, that the conflict between Catholic and Orthodox populations in Right Bank Ukraine was totally orchestrated by her government²⁶. When it comes to the country's domestic political predicament, the historian is hesitant to place all of the blame for its complexity on the external opponents' devious operations. He considered that the biggest threat to Orthodoxy in Poland was not the king, senate, or sejm (and this was his way of justifying the state's supreme bodies), but the gentry and Uniates, who utilized different forms of coercion.²⁷ At the same time, the historian believed that the concept of the independence of the Orthodox Church was a political novelty for the 1790s and its purpose was to create an independent church entity "in the Polish lands from Russia"²⁸.

²⁴ Serczyk W., *Historia Ukrainy*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk, 1979, s. 190; Serczyk W., *Historia Ukrainy*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 2001, s. 151.

²⁵ Serczyk W., *Koliszczyzna*, Kraków, 1968, s. 48.

²⁶ Serczyk W., *Katarzyna II – carowa Rosji*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź, 1989, s. 178.

²⁷ Serczyk W., *Koliszczyzna...*, s. 48-49.

²⁸ Serczyk W., *Historia Ukrainy*, Wrocław, 1979, s. 193; Serczyk W., *Historia Ukrainy*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 2001, s. 154.

Volodymyr Potulnytskyi, a contemporary Ukrainian researcher who studies Ukrainian history from a Polish perspective, raises a number of questions for which he believes a scientific search for answers is still needed, in particular, to reflect in Polish historical science the idea of "Ukrainians' ability to become a nation," the solution of "Ukraine's problems separately from the solution of the problem of Polish national identity," and the interrelation of the Ukrainian and Polish histories.²⁹ The above-mentioned evidence, in my opinion, demonstrates that, at the very least, we can claim the Ukrainian influence in Polish historiography as one of the requirements for the "formation of Polish national identity". Furthermore, it is a necessary condition because, in the face of the 15th-century Ukrainian problem in Russian-Polish interstate relations, Polish historical science has attempted to demonstrate the historical injustice of depriving one of the largest Slavic nations of statehood and the necessity of restoring it.

Conclusions

From the above, it is clear that the history of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was primarily viewed through the prism of political considerations in Polish historiography of the 19th and early 21st centuries. Furthermore, practically all Polish academics agree that the Ukrainian Orthodox clergy did not behave as an independent entity in political internal and external affairs, but rather as an obedient instrument in the Russian government's hands.

It should be noted that historical science in Poland was not isolated. It actively replied to Russian and Ukrainian historical science's significant subjects. Russian experts are the most conservative in this regard because, in my opinion, they purposefully overlook the entire corpus of scholarly material produced by Ukrainian and Polish historians.

Furthermore, another issue that has yet to be considered in Ukrainian historical science – the demythologisation of church-state and interfaith ties in Ukraine – emphasizes the relevance of Polish scholarship. After all, even

²⁹ Потульницький В., *Україна і всесвітня історія: Історіософія світової та української історії XVII – XX століть*, Київ, 2002, с. 34.

in the nineteenth century, all of these processes were seen only from an ideological standpoint in Russian historical science. Soviet and later contemporary Russian historical science followed this technique. At the same time, it was Polish historical science that challenged it for a long time.

Under the influence of Polish and Russian historical science methodologies, Ukrainian historical science in the study of church history arose, allowing it to take its own positions aimed at defending its interests and highlighting the unique characteristics of historical processes in the development of church institutions, church-social, and church-state relations in Ukraine.

Overall, we have every reason to anticipate that the study of the Orthodox Church's history in Ukrainian regions will become a distinct research field in Polish science.

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