

Baroque Culture and the Polish Historical Consciousness Development

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Abstract

The purpose of article is to study development of the Polish historical consciousness in the 16th century when it gained new lines. Political changes, strengthening of Catholicism and sarmatizm ideology directly influenced this consciousness. The historical consciousness found bright reflection in painting and poetry. Due to the huge interest in the past genealogy became popular. The historiography turns into the main direction of human studies. At the same time nature of historical research changes. Instead of the generalizing works on stories covering all past of the Polish state since the most ancient times the works devoted to the actual problems connected with the present appear. Interest in modern political history becomes the main specifics of historical researches. XVII – the beginning of the 18th centuries became a new, special stage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth history. Deep crisis captured political, economic and social spheres; the country lost its international positions, having become object of foreign powers policy. The period of "shlyakhetsky democracy" with the relevant political system was replaced by time of magnates domination followed by weakening of the central power and political anarchy. The decline of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which led further to loss of independence and partitions of the state began.

Speaking about development of the 16th century Polish historical consciousness it should be noted that it was caused by the level of society political and spiritual development in general. The Baroque culture and mentality peculiar to it in the

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth found reflection in development of sarmatism ideas. The country political system features were affected including the directions of historical researches which were concentrated on political and war events of the recent past. The Polish historical consciousness of XVI – the beginning of the 17th centuries gained a number of new characteristics which found reflection in painting, literature and first of all – in historical researches. Against huge interest in the past the genealogy and heraldry are of particular importance. At the same time historical researches become narrowly targeted and devoted generally to the events of the recent past which exerted direct impact on the present.

Keywords: Poland, history, historical consciousness, baroque, historical science.

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INTRODUCTION

XVII – the beginning of the 18th centuries became a new, special stage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth history. Deep crisis captured political, economic and social spheres; the country lost its international positions, having become object of foreign powers policy. The period of "shlyakhetsky democracy" with the relevant political system was replaced by time of magnates domination followed by weakening of the central power and political anarchy. The decline of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which led further to loss of independence and partitions of the state began [1, p. 943]. Considerable changes happened in the field of culture, in spiritual life, and as a result the inevitable changes in the scientific sphere, first of all in development of the humanities took place. The historical science as the leading socio-humanistic discipline also underwent very serious changes.

METHODS

The leading method to research of this problem is the historical and system method allowing understanding laws of functioning of the social system and national consciousness of the Polish society in XVII – the beginnings of the 18th centuries on the basis of historical sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The second half of the 16th century became the beginning of Counter-Reformation. It was carried out without religious wars, inquisition and prosecution of Protestants. To the middle of the 17th century Catholicism won dominant positions, the polonization of Catholicism which becomes "national" religion began. "Polonization" of Catholicism leads to the fact that in national representation all sacred history occurs in Poland – Adam speaking in paradise good luck in Polish was the first Pole, Saints and prophets were represented in the Polish clothes.

Strengthening of Catholicism led to the attitude change towards gentiles, there was a refusal of the toleration principles peculiar to the "gold" 16th century. It was promoted by both activity of Jesuits, and actions of Swedish Protestants during "the Swedish flood" of 1655-1656 and Catholicism, having won a victory, became bone, lost the intellectual and moral impulse [2, p. 289-299].

Huge impact on culture of the Polish baroque was exerted by sarmatism as class ideology, culture, a way of thinking and a conduct of life of the Polish shlyakhta. Sarmatism began to be formed in the 16th century, but finally it developed and was common to XVII – the beginning of the 18th centuries. Idea of an origin of the Polish shlyakhta was one of the main myths in sarmatism [3, p. 178]. The Polish knights represented themselves as descendants of the Sarmatians who were considered as Slavs who once allegedly won local population. Their descendants were also the Polish shlyakhta other than representatives of other estates. Sarmatians brought the customs and the social structure which remained invariable throughout centuries. The

shlyakhta was a keeper of traditions, foundations and former orders which were perfect and did not need changes [4 p. 240]. These ideas of perfection and ideality of age-old orders – those "gold shlyakheta liberties" – found reflection and in historiography. Augustine Koludzsky's work "A domestic throne or the palace of eternity" published in 1707 and 1727 is an example of it.

For additional "upclassing" of shlyakhta origin, genealogy of Asamrota the leader of Sarmatians was built up to Noa and to his son Japheth.

In the 17th century connection of Catholicism ideas – God of the chosen religion, and sarmatizm – idea of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as "shield of Europe" (i.e. Catholicism) before the Muslim world and schismatic led to emergence of the idea about special God's predetermination of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – the providentialism. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Polish shlyakhta were elected by God for rescuing the Christian world. The idea of a providentialism located in numerous historical compositions of that era, sources were in an ancient and modern history. V. Dembolensky wrote that the Bible prophet Ezekiel predicted the Polish domination over Asia, Africa and Europe [5, p. 64].

17th century became the period of the Polish society historical consciousness development. However this idea of the past, of the place of the people in centuries past was filled with various myths. Especially vivid it can be tracked in development of genealogy and art of the baroque period.

The genealogy becomes extremely popular in wide circles of the Polish nobility. Shlyakhtich studied various works on genealogy, numerous armorials, made family trees of the childbirth. The Polish shlyakhta tried to add additional gloss to the sort, even more to improve it, to prove an ancient origin of the ancestors. The majority of them sought to find the Roman or Roman-Sarmatian roots of the childbirth.

Authors of the brightest works on the Polish genealogy of this period were C. Nesetsky and W. Pototsky. Casper Nesetsky (1682-1744) prepared and published a four-volume armorial "The Polish Crown" in 1728-1743, in it he set a goal "to deserve our surname before Fatherland, as well as to put our ancestors to immortal memory" [6, p. 2-3]. The Arian poet Wáclaw Pototsky (1621-1696) forced to accept Catholicism in 1683-1695 prepared a rhymed armorial "Series of the coats of arms of the Kingdom Polish shlyakhta".

The well-known "Book of boors" made in 1624-1640 by Valerian Nekandy Trepka (1584/1585-1640) became the most known work on Polish genealogy. It contains a list of about 2400 surnames which owners received shlyakhetstvo in the illegal and dishonest ways. The author based his work on quite scientific sources (he studied judicial and assembly records, armorials, local chronicles), and on numerous gossips and rumors.

The national historical consciousness found bright reflection in culture, first of all in painting. The shlyakhetsky portrait, on which the certain person was not just represented, but also his historical acts were imprinted, was widely adopted. For

example, on Jan Hodkevich's portrait, the great hetman Lithuanian, Hotinsky fight was immortalized. In many estates portraits of Jan Sobessky represented in the heat of victorious fights hung. In the 17th century the portraits of petty bourgeois decorated with a municipal coat of arms also began to address history. But most historical consciousness was awakened by numerous historical pictures. In court of Vladislav IV the major historical events were imprinted on canvas by Tomasz Dolabella (apprx. 1570-1650) and his students. The Warsaw palace of Wases was decorated with such pictures as "Capitulation of Smolensk", "Fight near Bychina", "Sigismund III's Crowning" and "Trial of Arians". Jan Sobessky's fulfillments were represented by Martin Altomonte (1657-1745) who in addition represented fight near Vienna, battle under Parkanami, rescue of Vienna from the Polish invasion [7, p. 539-540]. Historical pictures decorated not only royal palaces, but many magnates also had them, they hung in city town halls; besides, since the end of the 17th century wall painting on historical subjects began to develop. There was a historical battle painting, of panegyric character in majority.

The historical subject took central place in the Polish poetry of the 17th century as well, the appeal to epic genre was common. The poet Samuel Tvardovsky (apprx. 1600-1661) became famous as the author of the multivolume poetic chronicle "Internal War with Cossacks and Tatars, Moscow, then with Sweden and with Hungary" (1660) which basis was formed by diary entries and documents. Explaining defeat in war with the Ukrainian Cossacks by God's punishment for shlyakhta sins, he was inanimous with those contemporaries who saw payment for derogations from righteousness and virtues in series of events of the middle century, tragic for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, [8, p. 886].

The historiography became the main direction of human studies of that period and was directly connected with growth of society historical consciousness. The increasing number of people was engaged in writing of history, historians were supported and kings interested in their work. In the period of Waz dynasty rule the position of the royal historiographer, the most known of which was Joachim Pastorius (1611-1681) awarded nobilitation for the works on the Polish history, was entered. Parallel to it, at the Krakow University the position of the historiographer who chronicled the current events was entered. For the 17th century five university professors – Jan Innokenti Petrytsi (1592-1641), Jan Tsynersky (1600-1654), Stanislav Tembersky (mind. in 1679), Jan Ratsky and Stanislav Józef Bezhanovsky (1628-1693) – held this position, having left behind the detailed arch of events of the Polish history of this period [9, p. 278]. Such chronicles were also created in church, family chronicles were written. Classical history became an obligatory subject of school education. At the Krakow University the first department of history was created. That huge role the historical knowledge played in education and formation of youth was recognized.

As well as in other European countries, the Polish historiography during this period entered the early period of eruditionism. History occupation gradually stopped being literary creativity only, becoming scrupulous scientific research. Erudites sought for registration of the facts, for conscious collecting, processing and the publication of sources for preservation of the past. Sources were collected by one of the outstanding Polish historians of the baroque era Shimon Starovolsky (1588-1656). In 1655 he published "Monumenta Sarmatorum" – the gravestone epitaphs collected by him from more than two hundred churches [10, p. 168].

Most of historians of the baroque era did not seek to write voluminous works covering all past. If large works appeared, they had compilation character, they were the peculiar popular compendiums made first of all in the pedagogical purposes. Considering general interest in history during this period, the vast majority of the nobility representatives sought to conduct daily notes or to write memoirs. Such compendiums of notes carried the name "wood of things" (*silva rerum*) as they represented separate meetings of diary entries, genealogy of a sort, office and personal correspondence, contained descriptions of significant military campaigns or political decisions in which the author was directly involved [11, p. 68].

Notes and memoirs of direct participants of events which are considered as historically significant become a characteristic example of the same description of the present because they were connected with successful military campaigns of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Researchers created works which were demanded by readers, as Antoine Pro said "the historian creates that type of history which society demands; otherwise society turns away from him" [12, p. 330]. One of the leading modern researchers emphasizes that "the Polish historians of the baroque era ... were interested first of all in national history, and only in its part which was considered the most important and interesting: political history of the present" [13, p. 278]. For this reason works of P. Pyasetsky, A. Lipsky, S. Lyubensky, A. S. Radzivill and other outstanding Polish historians of this period were devoted to the Polish kings of the 17th century or rough war and foreign policy events of the first half and the middle of century.

Many works of historians were devoted to the Polish governors of the 17th century. – To Sigismund III (1587-1632) and Wladislaw IV (1632-1648), Jan Casimir (1648-1668) and Mikhail Koburg (1669-1673). Pavel Pyasetsky (1579-1649), the author of "Chronica gestorum in Europa Singularium", 1645 criticized Sigismund III for his susceptibility to foreign influences, communications with Gabsburgs and for aspiration to absolute power. Andrzej Lipsky (1572-1631), Stanislav Lyubensky and Albrecht Stanislav Radzivill (1593-1656) wrote about Sigismund's III times too, but gave a positive assessment to his rule, justifying actions of the king. Eberhard Wasenberg (1610 – apprx. 1668), Stanislav Kobezhitsky (apprx. 1600-1665) and Lukash Opalinsky (1612-1662) in the works described the period of government of Wladislaw IV.

Historians of that time paid considerable attention to the rough events of the Polish history of the middle 17th century which were followed by continuous wars and important internal political changes. Jan Vavzhinets Rudavsky (1617-1674) wrote "Stories of Poland from Wladislaw's IV death to the Olivsky World in Nine Books". He criticized the role of magnates in Poland and proved need of the monarch strong hereditary power establishment. Vespasian Kokhovsky (1633-1700) prepared "The Annals of Poland" (1683-1698) in four books in which he noncritically presented the Polish history of the middle and the second half of the XVI century. In the work he was guided by official documents, correspondence of individuals, used stories of direct participants of events, but at the same time managed to present material in a way that his work became a panegyric of the shlyakhetsky Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the period of its crisis and chanting of those institutes. The history periodization offered by him is peculiar: it divided the past into the seven-year cycles which were coming to the end with general decline behind which there come a rise again.

The Krakow canon Shimon Starovolsky (1588-1656) famous for the works in Europe was an outstanding publicist [14]. All the long life he passionately fought against decline of the Polish customs and against the state crisis of the political power. He made projects of liberties restriction for shlyakhta and strengthening of the royalty – "Reformation of the Polish Customs" (apprx. 1650), "Crying of the Grieving Mother, Corona Polskaya" (apprx. 1650) and with appeals of returning shlyakhta to the kind customs of old times ("The True Knight"). In Starovolsky's creativity lines of Sarmatian ideology in its religious interpretation were most brightly shown.

The work "Sarmatiya's Soldiers" and collection of biographies of the Polish writers published during lifetime of the author promoted glorification of the Polish history and culture in Europe.

Summary: Speaking about development of the 16th century Polish historical consciousness it should be noted that it was caused by the level of society political and spiritual development in general. The Baroque culture and mentality peculiar to it in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth found reflection in development of sarmatism ideas. The country political system features were affected including the directions of historical researches which were concentrated on political and war events of the recent past.

CONCLUSION

The Polish historical consciousness of XVI – the beginning of the 17th centuries gained a number of new characteristics which found reflection in painting, literature and first of all – in historical researches. Against huge interest in the past the genealogy and heraldry are of particular importance. At the same time historical

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