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Польша и Святая Русь

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Аннотация: В наше время очевидна сильная геополитическая напряженность в некоторых православных странах. Радикальные националисты предпринимают попытки переписать историю и навязать разные культуры людям, которые никогда не были частью этих культур. В этой короткой статье описывается, какое историческое место и какое отношение имеют польские земли и их народ к глубокому духовному и культурному наследию Святой Руси. Можно ли утверждать, что эти земли или их части находились под влиянием сначала Киевской, а затем и Московской Руси, прежде чем она оказалась под влиянием римского папы? Если это так, в какой степени это влияние было Руси? И, наконец, какая часть наследия Святой Руси должна быть связана с православными верующими в Польше, исторически и сегодня. Цель этой работы в том, чтобы попытаться ответить, в какой степени православие в Польше может быть связано со Святой Русью и ее наследием.

Ключевые слова: Польша, Русь, Святая Русь, Россия, Православное христианство, католицизм, история.

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Poland and Holy Rus

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Abstract: In this paper, very briefly, is examined the historical place of Poland (and the Polish lands) in Holy Rus and in the heritage of Holy Rus. There is made a short analysis of the history of Poland from the moment it accepted Christianity and we see if it is in any way correct or even plausible to claim that Poland is or should be in any way seen as being part of the heritage of Holy Rus.

Keywords: Poland, Rus, Holy Rus, Russia, Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, History.

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Introduction

Polish culture and Russian culture, while very close, are not one and the same. Poland has had the constant influence of the papist west, especially the Germanic people west of Poland. In Poland, not only the elites were primarily influence by Germany, like was the case in Russia under Catherine the Great, but the common, poor and simple people who lived side by side with Germans. Polish people are certainly culturally and ethnically Slavs; but with a twist. During some periods of Russian history, Russian elites sought out German and western influences, Poland didn't have a choice in this matter, it came more naturally due to its geographical location.

It is therefore of great importance to look upon if and to what degree Poland, or parts of it, were religiously and culturally parts of Rus. I will in this short paper examine what place historically and what ties the Polish lands and its people have to the deep spiritual and cultural heritage of Holy Rus. Can it be claimed that those lands, or parts of them, were under the influence of firstly the Kievan and then Muscovite Rus before it was almost completely submitted under the Roman Pope? If that is the case, to what degree was this influence from Rus? And lastly, how much of the heritage of Holy Rus should be connected to Orthodox faithful in Poland, historically and today. I will in this paper start with a focus on the 9th century and move forwards in time.

The aim of this work is not to force upon Poland or its faithful some geopolitical or Russian national ideology – the aim is to simply attempt to answer if and to what degree Orthodoxy in Poland can be connected to Holy Rus and its heritage.

Like Metropolitan Kirill (Kapral) of New York summarizes the idea of Holy Rus, so we will in this work approach and understand it:

“As sons and daughters of the Russian Orthodox Church, we are all citizens of Holy Russia. When we speak of Holy Russia, we are not talking about the Russian Federation or any civil society on earth; rather, it is a way of life that has been passed down to us through the centuries by such great saints of the Russian Land as the Holy Great Prince Vladimir and Great Princess Olga, Venerable Sergius of Radonezh, Job of Pochaev, Seraphim of Sarov, and more recently, the countless New Martyrs and Confessors of the 20th century. These saints are our ancestors, and we must look to them for instruction on how to bravely confess the Faith, even when facing persecution. There is no achievement in simply calling oneself “Russian:” in order to be a genuine Russian, one must first become Orthodox and live a life in the Church, as did our forebears, the founders of Holy Russia!”¹

Orthodoxy in the Polish lands up until the 15th century

Overview

The history of eastern Christianity (from now on referred to as Orthodoxy for practical reasons) in the Polish lands² is that of a complicated one. The commonly held view is that Poland is one of the most Roman Catholic territories in the world, and that it has been so historically for over 10 centuries, since the historical event known as “The baptism

¹ http://www.synod.com/synod/eng2013/20130619_enmhappeal1025.html

² “Polish lands” refers to the lands that today are part of Poland. Many of the cities and areas that will be mentioned in this paper were at the historical time we discuss them not part of any one nation, but rather were smaller kingdoms.

of Poland” which was when the Polish king (according to common Catholic/Western history understanding) Mieszko I was baptized in the year 966 into the Latin rite Christian Church; modern day Roman Catholicism. To however claim that Poland always and only was part of the Latin Christendom is historically inaccurate. While it is true that Sts. Methodius and Kyrillos did not have that much influence over the Slavs in the Polish lands themselves as they did in the other eastern and south-eastern Slavic nations, the eastern rite Christendom in Poland dates to at least the moment of the Baptism of Poland, if not preceding it.

Background of the modern situation

To fully understand the historical aspect of this issue, it is proper to briefly look at the more contemporary times.

Among the Orthodox faithful today in Poland, many, especially in the east of Poland, not only consider Holy Rus as a part of their own religious and cultural heritage, but also see the people of modern-day Belarus, Ukraine and Russia as very close to them, if not as one and the same many times. There is a tendency of some forces in the Orthodox community to want to separate from the Russian connection and draw closer to the Greek heritage, historically by denying the common Orthodox heritage and contemporary by using geopolitics. There is no attempt however to try to as of yet to form a clear Polish Orthodox identity. This because such identity is in Poland deeply connected to Roman Catholicism, to be Polish is to be Roman Catholic. The prelate of the Polish Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Sava, often on Sundays and feast days preaches in Russian up to today, which many bishops and priests of the Orthodox Church in Poland also do. So, to speak about a “Polishness” in Orthodoxy is still very far away, whether that is good or bad for the missionary work of the Church is not a question this paper will handle at all. In the 1920’s, right after the Polish Orthodox Church had via pressure from the state and the state’s connection to the Ottoman Sultan (who had a lot to say in the Church of Constantinople) gained autocephaly, many Orthodox shrines, including the main cathedral in Warszawa, were then destroyed by the state in pogroms; this is still a very sensitive topic among the Orthodox in Poland. It is almost as if the state wanted its own Orthodox Church so it could persecute it without being labeled as Russophobic.

All of this makes the question of the identity and heritage of the Orthodox faithful in Poland a topic always relevant and complicated. Orthodoxy is commonly referred to in Poland as “the Russian faith” up until today and Poles that convert to Orthodoxy often hear that they betray not only their faith, but mostly their country for the “Russian faith”. The Russophobia is today very strong among some elements in Poland, especially among the pro-western elites who mostly occupy the power structures in the state. It is also only fair to mention here that phobia against Poland is very much alive in Russia and Ukraine also; this is not an issue that only exists in Poland.

The history of Orthodoxy in the Polish lands: 10th–14th century

Let us now look at the main goal of this paper: the history of Orthodoxy in the Polish lands.

The archeological findings as well as written historical accounts strongly suggest that eastern rite (Orthodox) churches stood in cities like Krakow and Przemyśl (two cities today seen as being in the area that is considered to be the cradle of Polish Roman Catholicism) as early as the 10th century³, the century when Poland officially became Christian. These

³ Hawrot J. Pierwotny kościół pod wezwaniem Salwatora na Zwierzyńcu w Krakowie. *Architektury i Urbanistyki*, No 1, Warszawa, 1956, p. 157–172.

cities in the 10th c. were not only under the Latin Popes control, but quite the opposite the historical material suggest that they were intimately connected with the byzantine Slavic civilization, having Slavic bishops alongside the Latin ones as well as having had the Slavic liturgy and using the Cyrillic alphabet. In Krakow in the end of the 10th c. there was a Slavic Orthodox cathedral and next to it a Latin one⁴, which is a testament of not only the presence of eastern Christianity there, but also that it had an established place in the society, something today being denied and minimized by many Catholic Poles. According to Historian Henryk Lowmianski, the establishment of a Slavic bishopric in Krakow took place before the year 972⁵, which would place it before the time Mieszko I was baptized into the Latin rite. This shows us how diverse the Polish lands were at this time. It was the meeting point of west and east, of the Latin and Byzantine Christian cultures.

Because of the baptism of Mieszko I into the Latin rite, from the 10th c. the Polish lands became predominantly a territory dominated by Latin Christendom, but not exclusively.

While most of the elites and nobles in the Polish lands accepted western Christendom, Poland was still very much the meeting point of east and west during the medieval time. Very much influenced by the western Church and its culture, but nonetheless still very much in touch and still affected by the Byzantine Slavic east, which after 10th c. became known as Kievan Rus'. It is important to underline that while some historians rightly claim that some disciples of Sts. Kyrillios and Methodius did indeed reach the Polish lands and spread the faith there, most of the contact with the Byzantine east came thru the already converted Rus lands, and so these influences are rightly called Byzantine Slavic, rather than strictly Byzantine. It is therefore safe to say the Orthodox influences came to Poland via Rus and not straight from the Greeks, enforcing the idea that Orthodoxy came to Poland, at least in part, via Kievan Rus, from Holy Rus.

So, while Poland after the 10th century was largely juridically a part of the Latin Christendom under the control of the Pope of Rome, it was very much on the periphery and outskirts of the Latin world, something it remained for most of its history up until the modern day in many ways. It is during the medieval period that the ethnic and territorial borders were developed in the area, this is the period when the culture of Poland, Polonialism, was formed. This Polonialism is intimately connected with Latinism and Latinization. During the Piast Dynasty (until 1370) the Polish borders in the west were largely established and secured, while the eastern/south-eastern borders were floaty, not in any way established or controlled in the same manner. People living there were part of the Kingdom under Polish rulers, but de facto they didn't become Latin Christians and their cultural heritage was more in the East Slavic pagan religions and after the Christianization of those land, in the Orthodox faith. This made possible for the above-mentioned influence of Kievan Rus. Here in the early medieval period we had a territory that through faith was mostly under influence and under direct control of the Latin west, while still very much maintaining its connection with the by now the Orthodox Slavic east, which had direct relations with Byzantium. The fact of this and the large number of royal Polish that married with the nobles and royals of Kievan Rus, made this influence ever clearer. From chronicles written at the beginning of the 11th c., we know there were many Polish royals, who came into alliances with Kievan Rus thru marriages⁶. All this contributed to the eastern rite Christendom to exist in the Polish lands on a large scale alongside the latin rite at least until the end of the 11th c. It was also during

⁴ Narbutt O. *Żywoty Konstancyntyna i Metodego*. Warszawa, 1979, p. 118.

⁵ Lowmianski H. *Początki Polski*, vol. IV, Prague, 1978, p. 513-514.

⁶ Mironowicz A. *Kościół prawosławny w dziejach Rzeczypospolitej. Symposium*, 4/1(6), Muzeum Historii Polski (bazhum.muzhp.pl), 2000, p. 41.

the 11th c. that territories in the east, i.e. modern day Podlasie and Chelmszczyzna, that today and historically have been Polish, became spiritually part of Kievan Rus. These lands were under strict Rus spiritual and cultural influence for 3-4 centuries until the 14th c. This territory was Christianized by the Orthodox Church, starting already in 988. Hence these territories, while part of Poland, were strictly Orthodox. Papal Legate Opizon tried to latinize these lands with a church union in the middle of the 13th c., but, was however unsuccessful. The constant threat of Latinization which de facto equals Polonization which we mentioned before as well as the fear of the Teutonic Order⁷ (which operated in modern day Germany/western Poland), made the Orthodox clergy and faithful in the eastern Polish lands very hostile towards the Latin church and any contacts with it were avoided. This divide in eastern and western Christianity in the Polish lands seems to have stayed in balance until the tragedy of the Union of Brest. We can all agree that the vast majority of the people in Poland in these times were western rite Christians, but the Orthodox minority was not so small and marginal as it is sometimes claimed by historians. A marginalized group wouldn't be allowed to have a Cathedral in the City of Krakow in the 10th century and such a small and unimportant group wouldn't attract the attention of the Papal legates and eventually the union.

16th century and onward

In the middle of the 16th c. the question that the Polish leadership was asking is whether Orthodoxy is a part of the Polish nation or if it's an alien and foreign element. The Jagiello dynasty understood that regardless the answer, the Orthodox poles were on their historically ethnic territory and that it was much better to make them accept the Polish crown (and the Polish nation) and stay Orthodox; than to force them to convert and possibly make them enemies of the Polish nation, having them turn for help to their Orthodox brothers to the east. And so, the success of the Jagiello dynasty was the fact that a lot of the Orthodox, both clergy and laity in the Polish lands, accepted the crown and saw the Polish-Lithuanian kingdom as their own country, they viewed themselves as part of this society and on paper enjoyed most of the same privileges as Catholics, at least in theory. This was confirmed in 1573 by the Warsaw Confederation, which granted religious freedom in the kingdom⁸ — being first such legal document in the history of Europe. This can be seen as an early attempt of the so-called secular state, where all citizens are allowed to believe and practice which ever faith suits; as long as they follow the laws of their country. It has to be pointed out that this document didn't however make the state in any way secular — it was still a Roman Catholic kingdom — however other faiths were in theory allowed in private use. This couldn't however last long because of the constant pressure from Rome and its dignitaries. The Jagiellos seem to have genuinely wanted to allow Orthodox to be Orthodox (as well as allowing Jewish and Muslim minorities to keep their faiths; as long as they accepted the crown).

During the 16-17th c., the Latins increasingly aggressively started to refer to the Orthodox population of the Polish lands as “pagan”, “heretics” and “schismatics”, viewing them as the enemies of Christianity and expressing it loud and clear. Historical research however clearly shows that during the Jagiello dynasties rule the Orthodox population of the Poland was fighting on the Polish side in armed conflicts against the Orthodox Rus, staying loyal to the Polish crown⁹, and protecting de facto western Latinized Europe.

⁷ A Catholic religious order originally founded as a military order in the 12th century (c. 1190) in Acre.

⁸ Stone D. *The Polish-Lithuanian State 1386-1795*. Seattle, 2001.

⁹ Mironowicz A. Kosciol prawoslawny w dziejach Rzeczypospolitej, p. 44.

The 16th and 17th century however was truly the start of official documented state sponsored oppression of the Orthodox faithful in Poland. Even with the attempts of the Jagiello dynasty to include the Orthodox population into its state, one can clearly see how the pressure from Rome hindered these attempts of a multi religious nation. This pressure had as its aim making the whole region subordinate to the Pope and “his” monarchs in Europe, which led to discrimination and ignorance of the Orthodox people.

Despite the pressure from Rome and other loyal to Rome nobility in Poland to suppress the Orthodox faith, they couldn't stop its religious and cultural influence on the people and even on the Latin faith itself. The monastic life was one of the foundations of the Orthodox communities in the Polish lands, with their deep ascetic practices and piety but also as centers for the Byzantine-Slavic culture, art and history. These monasteries had a lasting influence on the whole society and not just the Orthodox themselves. Iconography for example became very popular in the Polish lands, even among the Latin Christians. Traces of this can be seen up to modern times where the miraculous Icon of the Black Madonna (Theotokos) of Czestochowa (Originally of Byzantine origin) is highly venerated in the Latin church and even given the title of “Queen of Poland” by Pope Clement XI in 1717. Byzantine influenced architecture can be seen in many Latin churches built in the medieval times, as well as Latin architectural influences in the Orthodox ones, most notably in the Church of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos in the Orthodox monastery in Suprasl, which is the pinnacle of synthesis between eastern and western Christian architecture. The most famous religious Polish hymn, used in schools up to this day as a poem, “Bogurodzica” from somewhere between the 10th and 13th c., is heavily inspired by eastern Christendom. The title itself is the used by the Orthodox term for The Mother of God, “Bogurodzica” (Church Slavonic: Bogorodica, Greek: Theotokos) rather than the traditional Roman Catholic name used in Poland which is usually “Matka Boska” (Mother of God) or “Maria Dziewica” (Virgin Mary). These modern examples we include to present that while Orthodoxy was and is a minority in Poland, its cultural and spiritual influence is deeply rooted in the identity of Poland as a nation; even if the Catholics tend to ignore it and instead use the tragic Union of Brest as an example of something beautiful in Polish history. This event is in modern days also used by the Polish state and nationalistic elements to somehow symbolize the freedom from Russia and a glorious return to the truth¹⁰. The Union of Brest is in many ways a testimony that Orthodox in Poland were a part of Rus. The Papal Jesuit Legate Possevino, who attempted to convince Ivan the Terrible to a union in Moscow, wrote later to the Pope suggesting submitting first the Orthodox in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to Rome. If the Orthodox in the Commonwealth weren't close to Muscovy, the Latins wouldn't suggest to use them as a “bait” to get Moscow to join the union.

Conclusion

And so, we can see through history how the Orthodox in Poland have been dragged back and forth, west and east, by various kings and Popes. Orthodox fighting for Poland in wars against the Orthodox wasn't enough to satisfy the Popes of Rome who demanded complete submission to their earthly and jurisdictional rule. This gives us a unique historical picture of a people who were many times outcasts in their own lands. What is however clear, is that prior to the 16-17th century and the tragic Union of Brest, the Orthodox in Poland were spiritually and culturally part of Holy Rus; there can be little doubt about this. The Orthodox in Poland stayed faithful not only to their faith while living in a de facto Catholic kingdom.

¹⁰ *Tragiczna w skutkach Unia Brzeska 1596/* Krzysztof Mazur et al. Białystok, 2016, pp. 8-15.

They also, up until this day, preserved their culture which they got from Rus. The Church Slavonic language has always been used by Polish Orthodox, likewise the secular Russian/Belarussian language has been preserved by many families up until this day, something we mentioned before when speaking about preaching in modern day Orthodox churches in Poland. Orthodox in Poland not only identify historically with Rus, but are de facto labelled as part of it by their Catholic brothers.

It is therefore a conclusion of this paper that it is right to claim that Poland, its Orthodox parts and Orthodox faithful should be historically viewed as part of Holy Rus. To what degree this is the case, we hope to trigger further objective study on this issue with this brief paper.

Furthermore, the cultural aspects of Rus have been preserved at many places in Poland among faithful Orthodox living there. To claim that Orthodoxy in Poland come directly from the Greeks, as is an attempt in our modern-day time by Russophobes, is an error and ignorance of history. In this particular case of Poland, we can see how political and earthly interests try to strip its people of their heritage, either by inventing new made up heritage or imposing one that wasn't theirs in the first place.

Orthodox areas of Poland were part of Holy Rus. The culture of Rus is and was dominant in these areas of Poland that were and are Orthodox.

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