

Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, Edmund Kizik, *Altes Reich und Alte Republik. Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen und Verflechtungen 1500–1806*, Darmstadt, 2014, WBG Verlag, 214 pp., WBG Deutsch-Polnische Geschichte, Bd. 2

This work by two historians from Poland and Germany looks at the bilateral relations between Poland and Germany in the early modern period. Aimed to fill a gap in the publishing market, it presents a comparative synthesis of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Republic) and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (Reich). Written in German, it is targeted mainly at the German reader. However, Polish readers will also find it very informative.

The chronological boundaries of 1500–1806 are rather loose. Considering the history of Poland, the year 1500 is symbolic and stands for two other dates: 1493, when the first bicameral Sejm was summoned, and 1505 when the *Nihil Novi* constitution (law) was passed. For the German States, the boundary of the year 1500 is even less explicit, although the authors emphasize the historical significance of the beginnings of capitalist forms of production in the German territories. The end date, the year 1806, marks the collapse of the German Reich. The year 1795, the date of the Third Partition of Poland, would be probably more appropriate for the Commonwealth.

The geographical area under consideration is marked by the German Reich, the territories settled by the German speaking population, such as Ducal Prussia and Livonia, and many cities in the Polish Crown largely populated by Germans, especially Danzig (Gdańsk), Thorn (Toruń) and Elbing (Elbląg) on one side, and the Commonwealth of the Two Nations, extended by the areas populated by speakers of Polish (that is, Ducal Prussia and parts of Silesia) on the other. The geographical coverage of the study, which includes territories populated by both Poles and Germans, shows numerous 'multicultural regions of penetration' (*multikulturele Austauschräume*), where the Polish and German cultural influences created a platform for competition, but also mutual enrichment.

The work has a two-part structure. Part I is a comparative overview ('Überblick') of the most fundamental institutions in both countries, such as rulers' courts, parliaments, armies, the post, and the diplomatic services. The authors laboriously look for structural parallels, show similar social relations and ways of exercising authority, examine bilateral political, economic, religious and personal relations. Part II, 'Fragen und Perspektiven', focuses on widely discussed issues which have provoked many research questions in recent years. It looks at social and geographical mobility, cultural transfers, linguistic relations, the

origin of the Polish and German national identities, and national myths. Each area of study is illustrated with many often obscure examples of mutual enrichment and collaboration between the two nations.

The numbers of the Polish and German landed nobility are accentuated, who were among the most numerous in Europe (about 5–10 per cent in Poland, 1–3 per cent in the German states), as well as the fact that the concept of republican freedom was not a Polish specialty. The German freedoms, in terms of the relation of individual states to their rulers and the autonomous member states to the emperor, had a meaningful impact on the shaping of the elites' identity in the states of the Reich, similarly to the impact of the Golden Freedom on the identity of the landed nobility in the Commonwealth of the Two Nations and their attitude towards rulers (pp. 8–9, 21–22, 30–32). However, the two notions of freedom are not equated. The success of defensive political ideas is noted in the policies pursued by the two political unions (terms such as *Reichstäte*, *Reichsverbände*, *Staatsverbände*, pp. 8–9, *Reiche*, p. 188 are used). However, the statement that in the modern era, the Polish-German border was one of the most peaceful borders in Europe (pp. 16–17, 24) is rather a simplification, considering that Brandenburg-Prussia supported Sweden during the Swedish Deluge, participated in the partition of Poland under the Treaty of Radnot signed in 1657, and finally annexed Elbing in 1698, while its recruiting officers notoriously violated the Polish border. Nevertheless, the authors rightly note the durability of Polish and German dynastic relations. Many Polish kings married German princesses (Sigismund Augustus, Sigismund III Vasa, Michael I (Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki), Augustus III¹), and German dukes were perceived as attractive suitors for Polish princesses. In spite of the rejection of the candidates of the House of Habsburg in the Polish elections of 1575 and 1587, the Polish Commonwealth had serious reasons to form an alliance with the German emperor (pp. 26, 66–67). Private relations between the Polish and German landed nobilities were sealed with many mixed marriages in Pomerania, Royal Prussia, Ducal Prussia, Great Poland, Livonia, and New March.

The authors show close intellectual and cultural relations between Polish and German courts, universities and towns. During the Protestant Reformation, Polish representatives of the reformed denominations liaised with German intellectuals. A long list of actors of the Polish and German intellectual, scientific and artistic scenes is presented. Even in the seventeenth century, when the religious schism in Europe and the identification of German culture with Protestant heresy could have diminished the appeal of the German intellectual potential, the Polish landed nobility studied in the German schools in Heidelberg, Altdorf, Ingolstadt, and so on on a massive scale. The German states, along Italy or France, were a must-see item on the itinerary of a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *grand tour* of a young magnate.

¹ Augustus II is not mentioned here, since he married Christine Eberhardine still as the Elector of Saxony.

While looking for the common ground, the authors do not avoid controversial topics which divided rather than united the Polish and German nations, such as deeply rooted mutual animosity. They look at the early birth of the topos of 'haughty Germans' (*hochmütige Deutsche*, p. 72) in Poland, and the propaganda, during the first free elections, which juxtaposed the Polish freedoms with the Habsburg absolutism, or the freedom-loving Polish landed nobility with the Germanophone burghers who did not have an understanding of the idea of freedom. In the seventeenth century, animosity was additionally fuelled by religious differences: the Catholic Pole was set against the German heretic. The eighteenth century, on the other hand, saw in the German lands the birth of two other stereotypes — an open-hearted, joyful and invincible (*offenherzig, witzig, unüberwindlich*) German, and an uncouth, savage and wasteful (*bäurisch, hochwild, Prasser*) Pole. They finally became part of the Prussian anti-Polish propaganda of *deutsche Ordnung* vs *polnische Wirtschaft* (pp. 179–80).

A separate chapter is devoted to the exceptional period of the Polish-Saxon union and the resulting political, economic, cultural and personal relations (pp. 79–96). The authors wisely do not support the myth that Augustus II was put on the Polish throne by the Russian army (we know that it was the Saxon army only). However, let us restore the truth — the ritual performed by Augustus II Wettin in Piekary (27 July 1697) was not a second open act of conversion, but a public confirmation of the conversion through participation in the Catholic rituals of the mass and communion (p. 79). The authors highlight the industrial and administrative activity of the Wettins, which aimed to stabilize their position and extend their reign in Poland. The effort to strengthen the position of the Wettin dynasty has been proven in the modern research; however, doubts arise whether it was accompanied by a comprehensive economic policy (p. 81).² An interesting paradox, unknown to many Poles, is brought to light: Stanisław I of the Polish family of Leszczyński, a rival of the Saxon dynasty to the Polish throne, ruled Lorraine from 1735, and thus became a duke of the German Reich (p. 80).

Another interesting chapter looks at the partitions of Poland and the related responsibility of Brandenburg-Prussia (pp. 97–130). The Polish point of view is focused on the annexation of the Polish territory. However, the authors rightly note that the imperialism pursued by Brandenburg-Prussia reached included the territories of the Reich: Swedish Pomerania, Jülich-Berg, Bavaria and Silesia. Nevertheless, the authors claim that relations between Brandenburg and Poland in the seventeenth century were marked by cooperation rather than conflict, whilst the policy of Brandenburg-Prussia shifted as late as in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century. According to the authors, an appetite for territorial extension at the cost of Poland appeared as late as at the times of Frederick II (the first plan of partition referred to in the text was

² Jacek Burdowicz-Nowicki indicated the problem, referring to the works of Uwe Schirmer of 1998, in his *Piotr I, August II i Rzeczpospolita 1697–1706*, Cracow, 2010, p. 155.

authored by future Frederick II in 1731 — pp. 99–100). We cannot agree with this view. Although up to a certain point in time Berlin refrained from open aggression, its consistent policy of annexation led to the seizure of Lauenburg, Bütow, Draheim (Łębork, Bytów, Drahim), and the territory of Elbing.³ From the beginning of the eighteenth century, new projects of annexation and partition were developed (in the years 1705, 1710, 1715, 1721, 1724/25, and 1732),⁴ which illustrated the consistent Prussian policy of territorial development. Therefore, the underlying concept of the pro-partition impetus of Frederick II was nothing new. Calling for eating the Polish Republic like an artichoke, leaf after leaf (pp. 103–04), Frederick II did not divert radically from the policy pursued by his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. In the light of the diplomatic correspondence of his predecessors on the throne, the acute resentment that Frederick the Great had towards Poles is very similar, although more openly declared and more profoundly investigated by researchers. Significant progress has been made in the recent years to understand the objectives and methods used by the Prussian diplomatic services.⁵ Mentioning the Prussian initiative of the First and Second Partitions of Poland, we should not forget that it was Russia's appetite which made them possible (p. 104). The authors make an important point that the interpretation of the partition as a benevolent act of Prussia, being part of its civilizing mission, is pure propaganda. Frederick II intentionally understated the value of the annexed Polish territories and propagated the myth of *polnische Wirtschaft* (pp. 104–05).⁶ The

³ Andrzej Kamieński, *Polska a Brandenburgia-Prusy w drugiej połowie XVII wieku. Dzieje polityczne*, Poznań, 2002.

⁴ Almut Bues, 'Comme un artichaut, feuille par feuille albo instrukcja ignorowania iura iuste', in *W cieniu wojen i rozbiorów. Studia z dziejów Rzeczypospolitej XVIII i początków XIX wieku*, ed. Urszula Kosińska, Dorota Dukwicz and Adam Danilczyk, Warsaw, 2014, pp. 39–66; Urszula Kosińska, *Sondaż czy prowokacja. Sprawa Lehmana z 1721 r. czyli o rzekomych planach rozbiorowych Augusta II*, Warsaw, 2009 (ibid. previous literature of the subject); eadem, *L'Affaire secrète, czyli nieznany plan rozbioru Polski z lat 1724–1726*, in *W cieniu wojen*, pp. 105–35 (all three texts are included in the volume, together with source appendices).

⁵ Burdowicz-Nowicki, *Piotr I, August II*; Urszula Kosińska, *August II w poszukiwaniu sojusznika*, Warsaw, 2013; eadem, *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-pruskich w ostatnich latach panowania Augusta II: Misja Franza Moritza von Viebahna w Saksonii i Polsce w latach 1727–29*, in *Polska wobec wielkich konfliktów w Europie nowożytnej. Z dziejów dyplomacji i stosunków międzynarodowych w XV–XVIII wieku*, ed. Ryszard Skowron, Cracow, 2009, pp. 483–94; Zofia Zielińska, *Polska w okowach 'systemu północnego' 1763–1766*, Cracow, 2012; eadem, 'Rzeczpospolita między Prusami a Rosją w świetle polsko-pruskiego sporu o cło generalne w 1765 r.', parts I and II, *KH*, 115, 2008, 2, pp. 5–52 and 3, pp. 5–60; previous research is brilliantly summarized in *Prusy w okresie monarchii absolutnej (1701–1806)*, ed. Bogdan Wachowiak, Poznań, 2010.

⁶ In fact, what counted was absolute power, desire for new territories and fulfilment of political obligations at the cost of Poland; this brutal reality is shown through a synchronic analysis of Russian, Prussian and Austrian diplomatic files, recently e.g. in Zielińska, *Polska w okowach*, passim.

authors direct the reader's attention to the prompt intellectual Germanization of the annexed territories: the German language was made official, in place of Polish and Latin (pp. 109–10), and traditional Polish outfits were banned. The arrogance of the new administration strengthened the negative image of Germans especially in the area of the Prussian partition (less so in Galicia, where no religious differences existed) as supercilious envoys of a foreign authority, hostile to the Polish culture. The image was counterbalanced by a myth (which became an educational pattern for the next generations born under the yoke of national bondage) of a noble Pole, an avid Catholic, enthusiast for freedom, and ardent patriot ready to sacrifice his (or her) life for the freedom of Poland.

The chapter 'Mobilität und Kulturtransfer' reveals the paradox of the transfer of culture, which has been eagerly researched in Germany under the term *Kulturträger*. In Poland, the transfer of the German cultural influences (*Kulturträgerei*) has ironic and pejorative connotations. Polish people prefer cultural imports from Italy, France or the Netherlands. Certainly, cultural imports from Germany do not go unnoticed; however, the stress is often put on Polonization of the *Trägers*. Research has been intensified in the recent years on migration, transfer routes, acculturation and cultural assimilation (Bambers in Great Poland, German inhabitants of Polish towns), as well as long-term cultural differentiation (such as linguistic islands inhabited by native speakers of Polish at the mouth of the Vistula River near Stuhm (Sztum), and analogously by German-speaking populations in Great Poland, German books in Poland, Lutheran prayer books in Polish for the Mazovian subjects in Ducal Prussia).

In the chapter 'Sprachlich-literarisch-kulturelle Verflechtungen' the authors rightly note that multilingualism was not an exclusively Polish phenomenon. Foreign languages, such as Czech, Polish, Sorbian, Danish, Frisian, and obviously Latin and French, which was the language of the social elites, were also used in the Reich (p. 123). Passages describing how attractive the Polish language and culture was may be of special interest to Polish readers. The tradition of the Polish coffin portrait was adopted by the evangelical Christian landed nobility of German origin, such as the Unrugs and the Prittwitzs (pp. 76–77). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the native German landed nobility of Royal Prussia learnt Polish to pursue a political career. The merchants of Danzig sent their children to Poland to study the language, which they needed to liaise with their most important trade clients. In the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, twenty-seven different textbooks for Polish as a foreign language were published only in Danzig in an impressive number of eighty-three editions (pp. 134–36). Poles, on the other hand, learnt German to maintain trading relations with the German states, but also because German was the language of everyday communication at the Polish court where Habsburg queens resided.

In the chapter 'Multikulturelle Austauschräume und regionale Entwicklungen', focus is put on the regional and national awareness of German

inhabitants of Royal Prussia and Danzig. Living in the German environment, they were also full-right members of *Regnum Sarmaticum* (p. 141). The double identity of inhabitants of ethnically and linguistically diverse territories is a worthwhile subject of study.

A separate chapter is devoted to the role of Jews in the Polish Republic and the German states (pp. 153–67). Although, throughout the work, the authors look for similarities and common ground, here they point out the difference in the attitude of Germans and Poles to the Jewish nation. This difference is undoubtedly the reason why the Polish Commonwealth was referred to *Paradisus Iudeorum*. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Commonwealth was the main refuge for the Jews expelled from Western Europe. The Jewish community in Poland grew from about 150,000 at the end of the sixteenth century to about 750,000, that is 6–7 per cent of the entire population, in 1772. Here, Jews enjoyed personal and religious freedom. They could build houses, pray and establish their own self-government. Although Jews established communities and inhabited entire town districts, they did not live in ghettos, and there was no practice of marking out the Jewish population. In spite of unavoidable conflicts of an economic nature (such as competition with the guild system), mutual relations were marked by tolerance. By contrast, until 1792 Prussia engaged in a policy of deporting Jews, and issued its Emancipation Edict as late as 1812 (p. 158).

The last chapter, with the meaningful title ‘*Finis Poloniae und Finis Germaniae (1772–1806)*’, elaborates on the similar fate that met the Polish and the German federations, and the dependency between the processes leading to the partition of the Polish Commonwealth and the collapse of the Old Reich. After all, German and English periodicals warned against the Prussian and Austrian attacks on the integrity of the German Reich (similar to the attacks on Poland) as early as in 1772–73 (pp. 187–88).

The bibliography covers only the key items in the literature on the subject issued after the year 1998, since the years 1900–98 are covered in German specialist literature.⁷ Most of the publications are in German. Several Polish titles are mentioned, but the list lacks some of the greatest names among researchers of political history, such as Jerzy Michalski, or Zofia Zielińska. Indices of names, geographical names and subjects are provided. The index of references to Polish or German geographical names is inconsistent. For example, there is no separate reference for Królewiec (Königsberg), the item ‘*Taurroggen* — lit. *Tauragė*’ lacks reference to the Polish ‘*Taurogi*’, and the item ‘*Dnjepr* — Ukr. *Dnipro*’ lacks reference to the Polish name ‘*Dniepr*’. The index of subjects contains only a dozen or so items.

⁷ *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Bibliographie 1900–1998*, 4 vols, ed. Andreas Lawaty and Wiesław Mincer, Wiesbaden, 2000.

In spite of some minor flaws, the work provides a sound introduction into the intricate history of relations between Poland and Germany, and is a good starting point for further research. In a nutshell, it is a captivating attempt at a synthetic and parallel presentation of complex historical processes.

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