# Renaissance and Baroque Art and Culture in the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1506-1696)

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Urszula Szulakowska

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*For*

*Stanisław Brodalka and Florian Brodalka*

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Much of the photographic material in this work is reproduced by permission of the Instytut Historii Sztuki at the Jagiellonian University. These are photographs taken in the 1920s and 1930s describing the original condition of the architecture, sculpture and painting, prior to their destruction in the war of 1939-45 and during the Communist period.

Urszula Szulakowska 2018

*Map of the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th-17th centuries, adapted by U. Szulakowska from pre-1939 maps printed in Poland*

# INTRODUCTION

The present study is intended to serve as an introduction to the art, architecture and humanist culture of the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as presenting an over-view of the historiography produced by East European scholars which is mostly unavailable in English translation. The geographical area under discussion consists of the modern nation states of Lithuania, Belarus and western Ukraine.

The main issue which has become apparent in the course of research for the present work is that of national identity in a federated polity where there co-existed many different ethnic groups, such as Ruthenians, Belarussians, Lithuanians and other Baltic peoples, Poles, Jews, Armenians, Muslim Tatars, Karaite Tatars, Italians, Germans, Scots, Greeks and less numerous groups of Moldavians and Balkan peoples. The issue of ethnicity was implicated in the various artistic cultures favoured by the patrons of the old Commonwealth. In actuality, however, their aesthetic choices were neither pre-determined by ethnicity, nor by religious denomination, since patrons from different national groups would select the same artists and the same fashionable styles in painting, sculpture, architecture and the decorative arts. Moreover, royalty and the great magnates would often provide religious buildings for communities of other ethnicities and religious groups, so that Catholic patrons would provide synagogues for the Jewish community. These were designed in the most fashionable Mannerist styles, newly arrived from the Protestant Netherlands, or on the model of the latest Baroque forms originating in the Catholic West. In turn, Ruthenian Orthodox parishes would select designs for their churches, not only according to the Orthodox models provided by the neighbouring states of Moldavia and Wallachia, but also by following the newest Italian styles first used for Polish Catholic foundations. Orthodox churches, such as the Wallachian cathedral in Lwów, were built by Italian architects and masons. The same architects also designed Jewish synagogues. At the same time there did, nevertheless, evolve important and distinctive differences in the arts and architecture resulting from ethnicity and religion.

The literary output in the Eastern Commonwealth played a decisive role in stimulating discussion concerning ethnic roots and political

loyalties. Humanists of all nationalities, whether Polish, Lithuanian, Belarussian, Ruthenian, or Armenian, produced essays, poetry, lyrics, religious and political treatises discussing what it meant to be a citizen of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations.

The distinctive and productive art-history of these geographical regions with its many problematic aspects remains little known to western scholars, since texts are rarely available in the English language, although, in contrast, there does exist an increasing number of reputable studies in regard to the political, social and economic history.[1] Hence, one of the main functions of the present work is to introduce English-speakers to important secondary sources in contemporary Polish, Belarussian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian research.

The time span of the present study runs from 1506 (the accession of Zygmunt I Jagiellończyk) through to 1696 (the death of Jan III Sobieski). It was Zygmunt I who introduced the major aspects of the Italian Renaissance to Poland, while the death of Sobieski and the election of the Saxon kings to the throne mark the beginning of the Commonwealth's political decline. The three Partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795 wiped Poland and Lithuania (including Ukraine) off the map of Europe for one hundred and twenty-four years (1795-1918).

In 1569 by the Treaty of Lublin the Great Principality of Lithuania was united with the Polish Crownlands to form the Commonwealth of the Two Nations. Over the centuries the original Lithuanian Principality had absorbed numerous Ruthenian princely states and independent towns in northern and southern Rus, including Włodzimierz (Vladimir), Mińsk, Polotsk, Nowogródek, Pskov, Pereyaslavl, Pińsk, Turów and Czerwieniec. Across the border, the Polish Crownlands were territories governed directly by the Polish king. From 1569 these Crownlands incorporated many Ruthenian areas recently removed from the Lithuanian state, namely, the regions of Halicz, Wołyń (Volhyn), Podole and the Kievan regions east of the River Dnieper. In the present context the main interest lies in the cultural history of the Great Principality of Lithuania and of Crownland Rus lying west of the Dnieper. Only limited reference will be made to the lands east of the Dnieper, or to the Byzantine culture of Kiev, since there already exist well-established fields of research on this subject

1 Standard English-language authorities, for example, include Daniel Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795. A History of East Central Europe*, 4, Seattle: University of Washington Press (2001). See also Oskar Halecki, F. Reddaway, Jan H. Penson and R. Dyboski, *The Cambridge History of Poland,* vol. I*: From the Origins to Sobieski (to 1686)*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press (1950).

in English. It is the lesser known history of western Rus that will be discussed, consisting of a geographical area extending south-east from the city of Lwów (Lviv) into the province of Podole, as far as the fortress of Kamieniec Podolski.

Through-out this study the term "Commonwealth" will be used in reference to the territory of Poland and Lithuania, including Crownland Rus, as established by the Union of Lublin in 1569. It should be noted that the name "Ruthenia," or "Rus," in both historical literature and in modern scholarship is often applied not only to the lands that currently form the modern state of Ukraine, but also to regions further north in Lithuania where Ruthenians formed a majority population. These regions included White Rus (Bel. Беларусь), an area divided after 1569 between the Lithuanian Principality and the Polish Crownlands. The more specific term "Crownland Rus" in the present study will describe the territories of southern Rus that were joined to the Polish Crown by the terms of the Lublin Union in 1569. The Polish designation "Crownland Rus" (Pol. "Ruś Koronna") should, however, be distinguished from that of "Red Rus" (Pol. "Ruś Czerwona"; Ukr. "Червона Русь") which was an administrative województwo (a large province) comprising the region around Lwów (Ukr. Львів, Lviv).[2]

The name "Ukraine" (Pol. "Ukraina"; Ukr. "Україна") is first recorded in 1187. From the 16th century it was used on maps to designate a geographical area roughly the same as that of the modern state. In common parlance, however, the Ruthenian people of those times did not refer to themselves as "Ukrainians," but as "Rusyny" (Eng. Ruthenians; Ukr. Русины; Pol. Rusini). Hence, in the present study the names "Ukraine" and "Ukrainian" will be used only in discussing the modern state and in reference to the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the 19th century. It is common practice, nevertheless, among contemporary Ukrainian historians to refer to earlier historic Rus as "Ukraine." In fact, there is no agreement as to when the Ruthenian peoples (or what proportion of them) began to identify themselves as "Ukrainians," rather than as "Rusyny" (Ruthenians), or what this change of name specifically signified.[3] This change of designation seems to have commenced in the mid-19th century, although it was never universally accepted among all Rusyny. In present-day Ukraine the name "Rusyny" refers to a particular

2 Aleksandra Górska, *Kresy Przewodnik*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kluszczyński (200?), pp. 9-87.

3 Volodymyr Potulnytskyi, "Galician Identity in Ukrainian Historical and Political Thought" in Chris Hann and Paul Robert Magocsi, *Galicia. A Multicultured Land*, Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press (2005), pp, 82-102.

ethnic group living in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. They are descendants of the original Ruthenian inhabitants who refused to adopt the designation of "Ukrainian."

## "Kresy"?

The name "Kresy" ("Borderlands") as a name for the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth originates in the Polish word "kres," meaning "end," or "limit." This term is probably German in origins from the word "Kreis," meaning "borderline," or "district". However, as a designation "Kresy" was not used in the 16th and 17th centuries by the residents of Lithuania. They referred to their land in Polish as "Litwa," or in Lithuanian as "Lietuva." In the 16th and 17th centuries the name "Kresy" was also not applied to the territory of southern Rus which was named by the Polish administration as "Ruś Koronna" ("Crownland Rus").

In fact, the common designation in the 16th and 17th centuries for the entire territory of the Commonwealth was that of "Sarmatia" (Pol. Sarmacja). This name was derived from the claims of the nobility that they had originated as a class in the ancient tribes known as "Sarmatians" by ancient classical authors. In the 16th and 17th centuries the term "Sarmatia" was also commonly employed by foreigners for the geographical areas of Poland, Northern Lithuania (including the Baltic coast) and southern Rus. The inhabitants of these lands were known as "Sarmatians," a term interchangeable with "Polish," although, crucially, not with "Lithuanian." The Baltic Lithuanian princes and nobility claimed a totally different descent from their Slav neighbours, that is, they believed that they had originated from the Roman nobility of classical antiquity and not from the Sarmatian tribes. The situation of the Ruthenian princes in this respect was more complicated than that of the Poles and far more deeply coloured by nationalistic issues. The Ruthenian magnates and nobility similarly acknowledged the same Sarmatian forefathers as the Poles and they accepted a commonality with their peers among the Polish magnates and nobles.[4] Nonetheless, the issue of their Ruthenian origins was profoundly related to their Orthodox religion and the relations of the nobles with the lower Ruthenian classes were very different from those of the Polish elite with their social inferiors.

4 Roman Krzywy, "Ideologia sarmacka wobec tradycji antycznej i renesansowego humanizmu (wprowadzenie do zagadnienia)" in M. Prejs (ed.), *Humanistyczne modele kultury nowożytnej wobec dziedzictwa starożytnego*, Warszawa (2010), passim.

The term "Kresy" became more commonly used in the 19th century when it was popularised by the Polish nationalistic poem, *Mohort* (1854), written by Wincenty Pol, as also in his work, *Pieśń o ziemi naszej* (Song about our land) (1843). However, Pol used the name only in reference to the lands lying between the rivers Dniester and Dnieper in Ukraine. In the 19th and 20th centuries there emerged in Polish culture an extensive literature of novels, poetry and historical accounts romanticising the Eastern Commonwealth as a region of Polish nationalistic endeavour. It was on these eastern lands that the real Polish identity was developed, not in the older Polish lands to the west in the Crownland areas around Poznań, Kraków and Warsaw. At that time in the 19th century, during the partitioning of Poland between Russia, Germany and Austria, the name "Kresy" began to carry an emotive significance which it has retained to the present day. Moreover, the concept of the "Kresy" is inter-linked with the myth of the Polish nobility, greater and lesser alike, and with their patriotic programme, but even more so with their unsurpassed political authority and economic clout. For, the Polish magnates and nobility had vast estates in the Eastern Commonwealth on which they operated as independent princes, little circumscribed in their wealth and authority, even during the lengthy period of the Partitions.

These 19th and 20th century myths of the "Kresy" and their patriotic Polish ambience are the main reasons why this designation should be discontinued in the analysis of earlier historical periods such as the 16th and 17th centuries. In the earlier periods the notion of national identity was much more complicated. This was a time when a "Sarmatian" noble could be Polish in his civic identity, Lithuanian in his country of residence and Ruthenian in his ethnic origins and in the majority of instances, usually was so. The Commonwealth humanist of the 16th century to first examine the issue of national identity in depth was Maciej Stryjkowski (ca. 1547-ca. 1593). He wrote in Polish as a citizen of the Commonwealth, while identifying his specific ethnicity as being Ruthenian. Stryjkowski's definition of his own civic status as arising from the conjunction of several different ethnic groups contrasts with the claims of Polish nationalist authors, most especially Stanisław Vincenz (1888-1971), that Polish identity was a singular and specific outgrowth of life in the "Kresy."[5]

Polish literary historians of the 19th and 20th centuries have adopted such Renaissance authors as being precursors of what has become known

5 These issues are examined in depth in a recent collection of essays concerning the modern literature of the Kresy edited by Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz and Edward Kasperski, viz. *Kresy w literaturze. Twórcy dwudziestowieczni*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna (1996), pp. 7-73.

as the "literatura kresowa," a literature of the Kresy. Stryjkowski is discussed by modern literary historians of the Polish Kresy in the same terms as the later literature of 19th century writers, such as Maria Rodziewiczówna, and, most especially, Henryk Sienkiewicz. Surely, the earlier writers should be characterised by historians in a more specific historical context within their own time periods? They should not be discussed in the same critical mode as writers operating in the conditions of partitioned Poland, such as Sienkiewicz, who were engaged in a polemical defence of Polish nationality against policies of russification and germanisation by the occupying powers.

Above all, although Stryjkowski's ideology may have contributed to the creation of the 19th and 20th century myths of the "Kresy," he himself did not use this term. Stryjkowski was writing as a national of Lithuania, as well as a Polish-speaking Ruthenian and as a citizen of the Commonwealth. Even those literary historians, such as Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz, who are most critical of the Polish idealized notions of the Kresy, nevertheless, have insufficiently distinguished between Stryjkowski's Commonwealth and the "Kresy" of the 1920s and 1930s. What is left out is the notion of a multi-ethnic state. In the 17th century although the national culture of the Principality was, indeed, being eroded by the use of the Polish language and the polonisation of the Lithuanian and Ruthenian nobility, even so, many of them felt that their unique histories legitimated them in pursuing a different political and cultural trajectory from that of the Polish magnates and szlachta whose primary allegiance was to the Polish Crownlands.

The Commonwealth of the 17th century was a multi-national state in a manner that it was not in the 20th century Second Republic of Poland (1918-39). When Poland re-emerged as an independent state in 1918, then it did so as an entity in which a single nationality, that of the Poles, was the determining political factor. The Lithuanians were awarded a small state of their own (although without Wilno) by the Versailles Treaty (28 June, 1919), but the Ukrainians gained no territory at all and were forced into an antagonistic position to the Polish state and into a continued struggle for national independence. The Polish vision of the eastern territories was no longer that of the lands of Poland, Lithuania and Rus united within a Commonwealth greater than the sum of the three, but as the eastern half of a specifically Polish republic, although, in actuality, there lived substantial numbers of ethnic minorities within its borders, as recorded in the Second Census held by the Polish state in 1931.[6] The

6 *Główny Urząd Statystyczny* (corporate author), *Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dnia 9 XII 1931r. Formularze i instrukcje spisowe*, Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny (1932).

Lithuanians, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews constituted a majority population in many areas of the eastern Polish state.

In his criticism of the use of the term "Kresy," Czaplejewicz has pointed out that by the late 19th century and during the early 20th century this designation did not even include the lands of the old Lithuanian Principality. Instead, the term involved only the south-eastern Commonwealth consisting of Przemyśl and its hinterlands, that is, Ruś Czerwona, Podole, Wołyń, Ukraina and Galicia, in fact, the lands that mostly comprise modern Ukraine.[7] It was only during the Second Polish Republic (Pol. "Druga Rzeczpospolita") (1918-1939) that the name "Kresy" was extended to all Polish territories east of the Curzon Line established by the Allied Powers in 1918 to become the border between Poland and the Soviet Union. The Poles ignored this international settlement and broke through the Curzon Line to re-conquer much of their former territories as they had existed prior to the First Partition of Poland in 1772. On these lands there lived substantial numbers of Polish nationals who constituted a particularly large majority in the regions of Wileńszczyzna around Wilno and around Nowogródek, as well as in southern Rus in Halicz-Wołyń and the Lwów area. The Wileńszczyzna region of Lithuania, as well as White Rus and western Ukraine, were incorporated into the Polish state in 1919. The term "Kresy" was applied to these territories to indicate that they were Polish borderlands whose capital was Warsaw.

The power of these concepts was such that the loss of the eastern regions to the Soviet Union in 1940 and after 1945 to the successor states within the USSR was more than a rift with history. In the Polish national consciousness the elimination of the former heartlands of Polish culture continues to be felt as a tragedy to which it is impossible to be reconciled. Since the 14th century the major political, economic and cultural investment of the Polish crown and its peoples had been directed towards the Lithuanian and Ruthenian lands. This investment had come to naught. It will take more than one generation before this sense of emotional loss is eventually dissipated in the process by which Poland gains a new national identity by means of engagement with western Europe.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental truth within all this play of myth which needs to be acknowledged. Accommodation has to be made for the natural sentiments of people born and bred on these lands for centuries. There are those dispossessed of their family lands in 1940 and deported to the Soviet Union who never returned, as well as those in 1946-48 who

7 Eugeniusz Czaplejewicz, "Czym jest literature Kresowa" in Czaplejewicz and Kasperski, *Kresy w literaturze.* (1996), pp. 8ff.

were forcibly removed to post-war Poland, to Pomerania and Silesia. In the other direction were sent thousands of Ukrainians who had been settled on the Polish Crownlands for generations. The memoirs and political histories produced by the people who lost their family lands in the 1940s are of a quite different order from the writings of the Polish nationalists who mythologised the Kresy in the 19th century, or of those who romanticised Polesie and Polish Ukraine during the Second Republic in 1919-1939. The histories of those uprooted against their own will constitute an archive that was deliberately obliterated by pro-Soviet authorities, as well as by Lithuanian, Belarussian and Ukrainian nationalistic groups determined to obscure the historic Polish influences.

Czaplejewicz comments on the increasing numbers of commentaries produced since the 1980s concerning the literature of the "Kresy." In the conditions of a post-communistic Eastern Europe there exists a need to re-examine the historical determinants creating Polish identity. Into this literary polemic have been drawn the names of 16th to 18th century writers, such as Sebastian Fabian Klonowicz, Szymon Szymonowicz, Szymon Zimorowicz and Mikołaj Sęp Starzyński.

The later 19th century nationalist writers such as Wespazjan Kochowski and Maria Rodziewiczówna seemed to their contemporaries to be continuing the idyllic sagas of Strykowski. Czaplejewicz identifies the characteristics of the 19th and 20th century literature of the "Kresy," which includes strong aspects of exoticism, notions of the "Kresy" as a territory threatened by incursions of savages from the east, with its borders determined as much by culture and religion as by geography. These required defending at all costs. The "Kresy" were regarded as the school of manhood and knightly qualities. Conversely, the "Kresy" were also seen as a "terra nullius," a primeval forest-land or empty steppe, unpopulated, unsettled, the land uncultivated, lacking history and free for the taking. This was a space that belonged to nobody and was legitimately available for colonisation. In the vision of the nationalist *literati* it was, in fact, an obligation to civilize these mythic regions lost to mind and to bring them into historical time. The "Kresy" were also regarded as Nature's kingdom and the heartland of the Polish nobility, the szlachta, the home of Saramatism. They were also the soul of populist national culture, a lost paradise, a devastated and ruined Arcadia, the land of romantic adventure. From a more overt political angle, the "Kresy" were regarded as a specific mission of the Polish state, a wound in the body politic, a part that had been bloodily severed. They were a living hell: the site of horrific

carnage, cruelty, chaos. The "Kresy" were a deep black shadow in the national consciousness, a communal sepulchre.[8]

Due to the manner in which Sienkiewicz's trilogy (*Ogniem i Mieczem* (1884), *Potop* (1886), *Pan Wołodyjowski* (1888)) became the foundation of Polish nationalist attitudes in the 20th century (compulsory reading for all Polish school-children), the ancient class and ethnic prejudices became enshrined within modern Polish nationalist ideologies. Sienkiewicz resurrected the concept of noble and pure Sarmatian values in contrast to the dark brutality of the illiterate peasantry in the Ukraine. The old prejudices were further reinforced by the factual history of the massacres by Cossacks and Ruthenian peasantry of Polish nationals in the siege of Humań (1768) and elsewhere and, most especially, in the recent history of the Wołyń massacres where tens of thousands of Polish nationals were slaughtered by extremist Ukrainian nationals and over three thousand Ukrainians were killed in retaliation by Polish soldiers and peasantry.

Fortunately, at the present time enlightened projects for co-operation, plus the political necessity of good neighbourship, are countering to some extent the older stereotypes. There is also emerging a more tolerant use of the word "Kresy," not in a singular nationalistic sense, but as describing a multi-national scenario in which the geographical terrains lying between modern national boundaries enable different socio-political orders, cultural factors and economic forces to inter-relate, mingle and hybridise, or, alternatively, to acknowledge and accept each other's differences for mutual benefit.

## Polish historiography

In the specific area of art-history some critical epistemological approaches have recently begun to emerge in the writings of Polish art-historians influenced by western theoretical developments. A pioneer of this type of investigative discourse is Piotr Piotrowski who has provided a much broader approach to the concept of "borderlands" (Kresy). Piotrowski has examined the inter-relation between western and East European art-historians in regard to the geography of art-production, specifically the ontological status and epistemology of "borders." Piotrowski has argued for the need to eliminate the stereotyped historical models that have westernised periods such as the Renaissance and the Baroque on the assumption that the eastward progression of such stylistic

8 Czaplejewicz, "Czym jest literature Kresowa" in Czaplejewicz and Kasperski, *Kresy w literaturze.* (1996), p. 16.

trends necessarily results in their hybridisation, as well as in a conceptual and technical decline in production values.

In addition, Piotrowski recalled how after 1945 it had become customary for western art-histories to fall silent at the Oder-Neisse line, the western border of Poland established in 1945. Even when discussing the art of earlier periods western scholars never used to cross that artificial border into the Soviet satellite states, let alone into the Soviet Union. The post-war political settlement dictated the construction of history-writing, even for periods such as the Renaissance and the Baroque. Piotrowski argues that, in actuality, no such eastern boundaries had ever contained the migration of the Renaissance into Central and Eastern Europe whose art was no alien orientalised "other" of lesser quality with bizarre aspects. On the contrary, the classical revival in Budapest, Kraków, Brzeg, Lwów/Lviv, Wilno/Vilnius and Kiev had formed a seamless unity with that of western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius has similarly commented that

> Borders drawn by art-historians have been, perhaps, the most value-loaded, most arbitrary and unsurpassable of all. [9]

Most of the modern distrust of Poland by her eastern neighbours had been created after the 1914-18 War in the disputes concerning national frontiers.[10] Even more so, after 1945 the communist rulers of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine encouraged the growth of an intense distrust of Poland which their pro-Soviet polemic portrayed as a threat to the political independence of its neighbouring states. Suspicion of Poland by the Soviet Union determined the manner in which the history of the Eastern Commonwealth was written in this period. [11] In the late 1970s, for example, the distinguished Polish art-historian Jan Białostocki produced his definitive monograph on the history of the Renaissance in Eastern

9 Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (ed.), *Borders in Art Revisiting Kunstgeographie The Proceedings of the Fourth Joint Conference of Polish and English Art Historians*, Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki [Institute of Art], (2000), pp. 10-12.

10 Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad. The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, Princeton University Press (1988), passim.

11 See Matthew D. Pauly, "Soviet Polonophobia and the Formulation of Nationalities Policy in the Ukrainian SSR, 1927-34" in David L. Ransel and Bozena Shallcross, *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity*, Indian University Press (2005), pp. 172ff.

Europe which was published in English by Phaidon.[12] However, he made no mention of any artefacts east of the modern Polish border with the Soviet Union, although these former Polish-Lithuanian territories had been inseparable from the historical record of the old Commonwealth. Instead, Białostocki was obliged to present a truncated version of the history of Renaissance Poland in which the focus was placed on Kraków and on the former German Silesian territories that had been incorporated into Poland in 1945. This focus by Białostocki on the history of Silesia, instead of on Rus and Lithuania, concealed the fact of the illegal seizure in 1945 by the Soviet Union of the former Eastern Polish territories. In addition, the emphasis in Białostocki's text on the western territories as being at the heart of the Polish Renaissance purposely served to prove the essentially "Polish" nature of what had been prior to 1945 German Silesia and Pomerania. Such an, at best, inaccurate historical model was forced onto Białostocki by pro-Soviet censors who were seeking in the 1960s and 1970s to normalise the post-war political settlement. Białostocki's historical emphasis obscured the fact that these western territories had been German for several centuries. Officially titled after 1945 as the "Ziemie Odzyskane" ("regained territories") these lands had not, in fact, been any part of the Polish kingdom since the late middle-ages and they had been independent principalities in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries.

If the post-war settlement of Poland's western borders had ever been publically queried in that country, then it would have simultaneously called into question the seizure by the Soviet Union in 1940 of Poland's eastern territories. Furthermore, such a questioning of the post-1945 borders would have also served to validate the undiminished demands of Lithuanian, Belarussian and Ukrainian nationalists for independence from Moscow, as well as supporting those of Polish traditionalists for the return of the lands of the old Commonwealth (ignored by the democratic Polish government in the 1990s). Hence, Białostocki's whole project was heavily politicised, as was that of other historians, most notably that of Helena and Stefan Kozakiewiczowie who similarly published texts on Polish art-history for English-speakers in the 1960s and 1970s.[13]

At the same time in the western political bloc from 1945 to the 1990s the artistic inheritance of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania was almost entirely forgotten by historians. These geographical regions

12 Jan Białostocki, *The Renaissance in Eastern Europe: Bohemia, Hungary, Poland*, London: Phaidon (1976), passim.

13 Helena and Stefan Kozakiewiczowie, *The Renaissance in Poland*, Warsaw: Arkady Publishers (1976).

became invisible to western scholars. In that era the states of Eastern Europe were economically weak and politically silent, hence, there was little academic interest in them until the break-down of the Soviet system in the 1990s when Eastern Europe re-entered the world stage and regained its voice. In the 1990s the Soviet satellite states were liberated, as were some of the component republics of the former Soviet Union. New histories had to be written which would be free of pro-Soviet bias. Piotrowski relates how in order to gain acceptance in the west for the art of their own countries, scholars in Eastern Europe were at first obliged to strive for a universalist interpretation of their own cultural inheritance. In short, they had to argue for similitude of product in eastern and western European art-history, rather than celebrating cultural difference. As the first step to political and cultural re-integration with the west, Eastern European scholars had to demand that their own national histories and culture be recognised as an integral part of the development of European art-history as a whole.

Later, however, there followed the more difficult task of establishing the value of difference, that is, of the Renaissance as a distinctive phenomenon in Poland, Lithuania and Rus, one that was both unique in character and, yet, of equal qualitative importance to the Renaissance in France and England at least, if not in Italy. In this second stage East European historians had to define the particular qualities of the art-work produced in their own discrete geographical areas.

Piotrowski tackled the western stereotypes of "Eastern Europe" by taking recourse to Jacques Derrida's concept of the parergon as reformulated into that of the "frame" by Jonathan Culler and subsequently re-employed by Norman Bryson. The particular parameters, or expectations, placed around an issue such as the "Eastern European Renaissance" would always produce a subjective historical text, argued Piotrowski. For, such framing expectations are structurally a part of the texts generated and they impede an objective view of artistic production. The issue for any historian is to become more aware of the subjective expectations that any historian inevitably brings to the historic material culture.[14] In particular, Piotrowski asserted that the concept of "national" histories of art had to be dismantled, while the real complexity of the inter-actions between patrons, artists and their cultural factors had to be advanced. The issue of national schools of art had to be revealed as a myth. This was especially true for the artistic culture of the 16th and 17th

14 Piotr Piotrowski, "The geography of Central/ East European art" in Murawska-Muthesius (ed.), *Borders in Art Revisiting Kunstgeographie* (2000), pp. 44-46.

centuries in the Eastern Commonwealth. In actuality, Lwów, Wołyń and Podole had never been mere peripheries to the western European centres of artistic production in Florence, or Rome. Rather, they were always integral components of the entire phenomenon of the Renaissance classical revival as it spread across the European continent and into Russia.

The rigid political character and cultural diversity of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth presents a challenge to the historian accustomed to western historiography in which a single national group is most often held to be responsible for the development of its own internal culture, viz. "the Italian Renaissance," or "the Netherlandish Renaissance," and so forth. In contrast, in the Commonwealth the common culture was developed by a variety of ethnic groups, namely, Poles, Ruthenians, Lithuanians, Wallachians, Armenians, Italians, Germans, Scots, Jews, Tatars, Karaite and Turks. In the first instance it was mostly Italian and German artists and architects who transformed the art and architecture of the Commonwealth in the 16th and early 17th centuries and it was they who trained local artists, architects and artisans, as well as educating their patrons. Another important aspect of the Renaissance and Baroque in Eastern Europe was the cultural activity of Jewish settlers, often refugees, from western and southern Europe and of other immigrants entering from Central Asia and the Caucasus regions, such as Armenians, Turks, Tatars and Karaite.

In particular, Jewish merchants and skilled craftsmen made a significant and unique contribution to European cultural history in many cities, such as Lwów. From the 13th century the Jewish communities were of critical importance to the economic development of these eastern regions. Jewish settlers provided banking facilities for the growth of cities and other urban areas and made possible investment in trade, both internal and with foreign countries reaching far into Asia. Jewish banking facilities facilitated the development of lands belonging to the nobility in Lithuania and especially in southern Rus, most of which were sparsely populated and little cultivated in the 16th and 17th centuries. Grain-production and its export was in the special care of Jewish bankers, merchants and traders and the Ukraine soon became and remained the bread-basket of eastern and central Europe. Jewish estate managers were commonly employed by the nobility in Rus and Lithuania and they were responsible for the organisation of settlement and production while the great landlords were largely absent. In urban settlements the local Jewish community contributed to the defence against invading Turks and Tatars. Above all, the Jews unfolded a rich cultural life. They commissioned synagogues and artefacts from leading Renaissance and Baroque architects and artists and

Jewish patrons were centrally involved in the evolution of western artistic styles through-out the Commonwealth. Schooling was of special concern to these communities. Jewish scholars produced an important literature in the Commonwealth, both religious and secular, and a profound mystical tradition second to none.[15] Unfortunately, there is very little left of the Jewish material culture for the 16th and 17th centuries, though more has survived for the 18th and 19th centuries, mostly due to some important artefacts being rescued and removed to the west. A few priceless treasures of the architecture associated with the former Jewish settlements have survived, too often in a lamentable condition.

The much smaller Tatar population in the Commonwealth, both Muslim and Karaite, originated with the Crimean warriors brought into the region by Polish kings in the course of the 14th century. Their material heritage, while always less visible than the Jewish examples, has survived to a reasonable extent, specifically the archives, as well as cemeteries and some reconstructed mosques and Karaite "kenese." The local communities, whether Islamic such as the community at Czterdzieście Tatarów, or Karaite, such as those at Troki (Lith. Trakai) in Lithuania, have endured from the late medieval period through to the present time. Muslim cultural traditions, moreover, have not only been transferred intact, but are currently even experiencing a revival aided by recent migration into Poland and funds from Islamic charities abroad. In addition, the Islamic community has also gained a new political voice in the affairs of the state. The situation of the Karaite is less robust, unfortunately, and their numbers are in decline.

Other distinctive artistic products and cultural forms were introduced into the Eastern Commonwealth by the Armenians whose presence was one of the most important factors in creating economic wealth, enriching the culture of the state and in promoting the settlement of new urban centres.[16] Sadly, the Armenians lost their distinctive political and cultural identity at the end of the 17th century when they adopted the Roman Catholic faith and integrated with the Polish community. Their language disappeared and many families even changed their Armenian surnames to Polish ones, thereby becoming invisible. Yet their presence within the Commonwealth from the late medieval period had been indispensable to the development of trade with Central Asia and the Far East. The

15 Jan K. Ostrowski, *Kresy bliskie i dalekie*, Kraków: Universitas (1998), pp. 11-15.

16 Krzysztof Stopka,"Ormianie" in Michał Kopczyński and Wojciech Tygielski (eds.), *Pod Wspólnym Niebie. Narody Dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polski Bellona (2010), pp. 115-31.