Art and Architecture in the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1697-1863)

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(based on pre-1939 maps in the Public Domain)

INTRODUCTION

The present study is intended to serve as an introduction for English-language speakers to the art, architecture and culture of the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the period of the Saxon kings in the early 18th century through to the January Uprising of 1863-64 against Tsarist Russia. As in my previous book concerning the period of the Renaissance and Baroque in the Eastern Commonwealth the intention is to make available to scholars who do not have Polish, or other Slavonic, or Baltic languages the historical research produced by East European scholars which is mostly unavailable in English translation.[1]

The geographical areas under consideration consist of the modern states of Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. After the Partitions of the Commonwealth in 1772, 1793 and 1795 these territories were incorporated into the empires of Tsarist Russia and Austria. The third power involved was Prussia which gained the western regions of Crownland Poland in addition to Polish Royal Prussia (Pomerania) on the Baltic littoral. These Prussian areas, as well as the former East Prussia, will not be discussed in the present context because, although East Prussia was ruled by Prussian dukes from the 16th century nominally as a fiefdom of the king of Poland, it was, in effect, an independent state. It consisted of the coastal area around Königsberg (Kaliningrad) on the modern Lithuanian border. Lithuanians have always known the area north-east of Königsberg, including the city itself, as "Little Lithuania." Contemporary Lithuanian historians have restored the history of this region to that of the modern Lithuanian state, but it was never an integral part either of Poland, or of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, unlike Pomerania further to the west. The cultural history of Little Lithuania is not relevant to the present study, nor is that of Pomerania. Under consideration is solely the artistic and cultural history of the former Eastern Commonwealth territories.

The First Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was signed on 5th August, 1772, when Livonia and Lithuania were taken by Russia, while

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[1] Urszula Szulakowska, *Renaissance and Baroque Art and Culture in the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1506-1696),* Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2018).

Prussia seized Polish Pomerania and the western regions of Crownland Poland. The Second Partition involved only the territories of Crownland Poland and their loss was decreed by Russia and Prussia on 23rd January, 1793. (Austria was not involved in the Second Partition.) The Third Partition of Poland, including what was left of the Ruthenian Crownlands, was put into effect on 24th October, 1795. The Commonwealth was destroyed at the request of sections of its own nobility who were fearful for the survival of their legal privileges at a time of Jacobin disaffection in Warsaw. In fact, these self-seeking magnates and nobles were bribed by Tsarist agitators to petition Catherine II to take the Commonwealth into her own hands.

By 1795 Russia had occupied Lithuania as far as the borders of Austrian Galicia in northern Volhynia, including the Belarusian regions and the counties of Vitebsk and Połock. Prussia took Royal Prussia, though Gdańsk in 1807-14 briefly regained independence under Napoleon. Prussia gained the lands between the Kingdom of Prussia and the Margravate of Brandenburg. Prussia also seized Warmia, northern areas of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland in the West) along the Noteć River and parts of Kujawia. The city of Toruń was a special case. Although in 1793 Prussia had annexed it, however, in 1807 Napoleon incorporated Toruń into the Polish Duchy of Warsaw and the city even became its capital in April-May, 1809. The city returned to Prussia in 1814. Maria-Teresa of Austria took the south of Poland (Zator and Oświęcim), part of Małopolska (Lesser/Central Poland) in the regions of Kraków and Sandomierz, as well as Galicia in former western Crownland Rus. The city of Kraków was taken by Austria in 1795 until 1809-15 when it became part of the Napoleonic Duchy of Warsaw. In 1815 Kraków was made an autonomous Free City at the Congress of Vienna and thus existed until 1846 when Austria re-occupied it. Initially, in 1795 Warsaw and central Poland had been taken by Prussia, but in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna they were awarded to Russia.

Prior to 1569 the territories constituting the modern states of Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and of Ukraine west of the Dnieper River (known as the Right Bank) had belonged to the Grand Principality of Lithuania. In that year, the Union of Lublin united Lithuania with the Crown of Poland and the resulting state was known as the Commonwealth of Two Nations, or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In Polish it was always known as "Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów," a term which had the meaning of both the "Republic of Two Nations" and also that of the "Commonwealth of the Two Nations." "Rzeczpospolita" is the Polish translation of the Latin "res publica" from which comes the term "republic." The Poles called their state a "republic," since although there was a king, he was elected by the Election

Sejm of the Commonwealth and had little legal authority. In fact, the literal Polish translation of the Latin name "res publica" has the meaning of a "common (or public) thing," or "common wealth," that is, "shared ownership." So, it was in the latter sense that it was possible to refer to the Polish monarchical system as a "republic," a "common (public) thing," or a "commonwealth," without implying a state without a monarch. In the same manner, the Polish nobility regarded monarchist Britain as being a "republic," since there was an elected parliament without which the king could not govern.

Within the terms agreed by the Union of Lublin, Lithuania retained its independence as a sovereign Principality, preserving its own legal system, social hierarchy, finances and economic policy. This political settlement was fiercely defended by the Lithuanian and Ruthenian nobility against the Crown of Poland. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of the nobles to maintain their independence from Poland, the Lithuanian state began to undergo deep changes in the structure of its ethnic population, since from the late 16th century large numbers of Poles from central Poland began to migrate into Lithuania with the encouragement of the Polish Crown. Their administrative and clerical skills were required for a government increasingly centred on the Polish capital Kraków, rather than on Vilnius (Pol. Wilno). Moreover, the agrarian skills of the Polish peasantry and petty nobility were at a premium in developing Lithuania's poor sandy soils and taking economic advantage of the country's primeval forests and impenetrable marsh-lands.

The Jewish population, particularly bankers and merchants, was especially encouraged to migrate to Lithuania and Crownland Rus so as to manage royal and aristocratic estates and, above all, to provide funds for investment into economic development, particularly agrarian projects and the founding of new urban areas and industry. Jewish banking facilities facilitated the development of lands in Lithuania and 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 the bread-basket of eastern and central Europe. In urban settlements the Jewish community contributed to the defence against invading Turks, Tatars, Cossacks, Russians and Swedes. Above all, the Jews unfolded a rich cultural life. They commissioned synagogues and artefacts from the leading Italian Renaissance architects and Jewish patrons were centrally involved in the development of western artistic styles. Schooling was of special concern to these communities and Jewish scholars produced a significant literary

legacy in the Commonwealth, both religious and secular, and a mystical tradition second to none.

Prior to the Union of 1569, the southern portion of Lithuania, that is, Ruthenia, or Rus, had its own distinctive political, religious and cultural history, since Rus had not always belonged to Lithuania. There were originally several different principalities in the Ruthenian territories and even a royal kingdom under King Danylo I Romanovych (1201-64) who was King of Rus and Prince (Ruth. Knyaz) of Galicia (Ruth. Halych) (1205-55), Peremyshl (1211) and Volodymyr (1212-31). In the early medieval period the lands of Kievan Rus constituted an independent princely state sited on the eastern side ("Left Bank") of the River Dnieper, with Kiev itself situated on the river to the west on the "Right Bank." It was from Kiev that Christianity spread north, east and west into the Russian territories - to the Duchy of Moscow, in particular. From the late medieval era the Tsars were claiming that Muscovite Russia was the legal successor to Kievan Rus and they demanded suzerainty over all of Ruthenia which was known to Moscow as "Little Russia." The Muscovites regarded Ruthenia as being ethnic Russian land (as it still does in the present day with dangerous political ramifications). However, the lands of Rus, both Left and Right Banks including Kiev, were conquered for Lithuania by Prince Vytautas (1350-1430). In 1569 they were absorbed by the Polish Crown and were known henceforward in Polish as "Ruś Koronna" (Crownland Rus.) Rus was integrated legally and administratively into the Polish state, unlike Lithuania north of the region of Volhynia which remained independent and was only loosely co-joined to Poland. Ruś Koronna was governed by the king and the Sejm directly from the Polish capital at Kraków.

In the present context the terms "Rus" as a closer approximation to the original Ruthenian name will be employed, rather than the Polish name "Ruś," except in specific circumstances.

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth there co-existed many different ethnic groups: Ruthenians, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Poles, Balts, Jews, Armenians, Islamic Tatars, Turks, Karaime Tatars, Italians, Germans, Scots, English, Greeks, Moldavians and Wallachians, as well as Balkan peoples, such as Serbs and the descendants of ancient settlements of White Croats. The Commonwealth was a multi-national state and the common way of life, although enculturated by Poles in forms drawn from western Europe, was developed in different ways by a variety of ethnic groups, not all of whom were Europeans. There were also present non-European immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, namely, Armenians, Turks, Tatars and

Karaime. The small Tatar population in the Commonwealth, both Muslim and Karaime, originated with Crimean warriors brought into the region by Polish kings during the 14th century. Their material heritage has survived to a reasonable extent, specifically manuscript material, as also cemeteries and reconstructed mosques. The very small Karaime ethnic group continues to worship in the few extant Karaime "kenese" and their manuscripts and archives are conserved at Trakai castle. The Islamic community has over the centuries successfully retained its distinctive identity despite many conversions to Catholicism and the resulting Polonisation. Other distinctive artistic products and cultural forms were introduced into the Eastern Commonwealth by Armenians whose presence was an important factor in creating economic wealth, enriching the culture of the state and promoting the development of new urban centres. Their presence within the Commonwealth from the late medieval period was indispensable to the development of trade with Central Asia and India.[2] The towns built by Armenian merchants led to the economic development of their hinterlands.

The most numerous ethnic group in Lithuania and Rus, however, were the indigenous Ruthenians who were Orthodox in faith and whose culture was deeply rooted in the Byzantine tradition. They interpreted western Renaissance and Baroque styles in accordance with their own religious views and ethnicity, producing a unique type of architecture not encountered beyond the borders of Rus and Lithuania. In addition, their resourceful approach to western painting produced an original and eclectic mix of Renaissance and Byzantine styles. The Orthodox architecture and iconography of Moldavia and Wallachia on the south-eastern frontier exerted a considerable influence on Eastern Rite art-forms in Rus, whereas the artistic styles of Moscow and the Balkans had minimal effect on Ruthenian material culture. From the 18th century the Uniates (Greek Catholics) were producing innovative designs in their sacred architecture, but after the suppression of the Uniate Church in 1839, most of the existing Uniate churches were remodelled in the Muscovite Orthodox style and new builds followed Russian Byzantine models.

All national groups and religious denominations were influenced by western artistic trends entering the Commonwealth. During the medieval period the Gothic style was introduced by German architects, artists and craftsmen,

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

while in the later 16th century the northern Italian Renaissance style was introduced from Hungary by Italians and Slovaks. Artists and architects involved with the Baroque style migrated to the Commonwealth in the 17th century. Initially, these were Italians who brought with them the monumental forms of the Roman Baroque, followed by German and Silesian practitioners who introduced the lighter styles of southern Germany and northern Italy. In the course of the 18th century southern German and Austrian Rococo styles also arrived in the Commonwealth with artists and architects migrating from Silesia, Dresden, Munich and other German centres. In the meantime, local artists and architects were learning from the foreigners and, in turn, they travelled to art-centres and schools of art in Germany, Vienna, Rome and Paris. French and, indeed, English influences became dominating artistic forces during the 18th century, introduced by local artists who had trained in Paris and visited England. An important influence on artists and architects working even in the farthest reaches of the Commonwealth were printed treatises on architecture and art-theory and, most of all, published engravings of famous art-works. These were eagerly copied, not only by painters and sculptors using western styles, but also to great original effect by the iconographers of the Eastern Rite who were producing art for the Orthodox and Uniate Churches.

French and Italian architects, painters and sculptors were brought to the royal court at Warsaw, many of whom subsequently also worked in Lithuania and Rus. By the late 18th century there were, moreover, a number of indigenous artists and architects who were highly competent and had trained either in the foreign art-centres, or had studied nearer to home at the royal court in the capital city under French, Italian and German artists and architects.

Nevertheless, significant differences emerged from the art and architecture of western Europe as changing styles and the example of migrant foreign artists were received by Polish and Ruthenian artists and architects. First, the various fashions did not arrive sequentially in the Commonwealth, but were introduced piecemeal by individual artists and patrons, so that the different styles were being employed simultaneously. For example, edifices in the Mannerist and Baroque forms were built at the same time. There was no chronological succession of aesthetic style. By the mid-18th century the Neo-classical revival in art and architecture was the major form being popularised in the Commonwealth by practitioners trained in France and Italy, although late Baroque and Rococo edifices still continued to appear. It has to be emphasised that the different national groups and religious denominations of the Commonwealth all patronised exactly the same artists

and architects, irrespective of ethnic and religious divisions, though they respected different liturgical needs. The Byzantine Rite Churches adopted, with modifications, the full range of western architectural styles, from Gothic to Baroque and Rococo and the classical revival.

At first, in the 17th century painters and sculptors were trained in Wilno, or Warsaw, or Kraków. (Lwów did not develop an artistic school of its own in this period.) However, in the 18th century the king and nobility were sponsoring artists to train in Italy, France and Germany. Such foreign schooling at the major centres of academic art-practice was particularly important, indispensable, in fact, for the production of history painting on the heroic scale required for depicting great national and dynastic events. Further, the creation of statuary in the classical style demanded a thorough knowledge of human anatomy and a grounding in the antique manner of the Greeks and Romans ("all' antica"). By the mid-19th century most Commonwealth artists, after preliminary studies in local art schools, continued their training usually in Germany at schools in Dresden, or Dusseldorf and Munich. The more ambitious travelled on to Rome where they studied in the workshops of the most important international masters. Paris was another destination for those eager to learn fashionable French theories concerning art and architecture and to participate in the learning of the French Enlightenment. Their patrons made it as far as London from where they returned with philosophical concepts drawn from the English empiricists. They also adopted the cultured life-style of the landed gentry, in addition to models of classical and picturesque landscape for their country estates.

The Jewish communities of the Commonwealth were never left behind, but created inventive designs for their synagogues. Jewish patrons engaged from the outset with the latest Mannerist Renaissance styles, then with Baroque forms and the classicism of the 18th and 19th centuries. Neo-Gothic and Romanesque revivalist styles appeared in synagogues at the turn of the 20th century, in addition to orientalising fancies in brick-work. From the end of the 19th century there was some distinctive early modernist experimentation which took the form of a brutalist Free-style, very much in the vanguard of European architectural design. As far as synagogues built of stone, or brick were concerned, then in all historical periods Jewish patrons were employing exactly the same architects who were working for Gentile communities. It was a rather different situation in the case of wooden synagogues where, as far as can be ascertained from the remaining evidence, it seems that either members of local, or neighbouring, Jewish settlements were involved in the design and build, or architects and builders

were engaged from more affluent Jewish centres in cities such as Pińsk, or Lwów.

One of the issues discussed in the present study concerns the fate of the artistic and cultural traditions of the Commonwealth during the partition period from 1772. Did the usurpation of political authority by imperialist forces destroy the cultural achievements of Livonia, Poland, Lithuania and Rus? Certainly, there were extreme cultural restrictions placed by the Russian authorities on the Polonised cultures of the Eastern Commonwealth (as there were in Prussia). Initially, these affected primarily the dissident nobility who had organised the insurrections against Tsarist rule in 1794 and 1830, but from 1881 these restrictions became more universal and far more brutal and obstructive under Alexander III in a reaction both to the Uprising of 1863-64 and to the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. Thenceforth, the political order and judiciary, in addition to schooling, literature, the popular press and religious culture were heavily Russified, while the use of indigenous regional languages in any public sphere was forbidden, punishable by confiscation of property and Siberian exile. These restrictions affected in equal measure not only Poles. but also Ruthenians, Jews and Lithuanians. In fact, the political suppression of nationalistic culture mainly affected the written and spoken word. In contrast, the visual arts and architecture were spared reprisals, but only so long as artists avoided political and nationalistic themes. Nevertheless, these became the central topics engaging painters, engravers and art-publishers, although they were presented in a subtle manner so as to avoid legal intervention. In any case, the stylistic conventions of classical architecture and idealistic academic sculpture and painting were a universal language that did not necessarily carry nationalistic connotations. Even so, classical architecture was used in Galicia, especially in Lwów, by the Austrian administration in a rhetorical manner as a means through which to proclaim the rule of Vienna and its supposedly higher culture. By the late 19th century specific architectural styles were used, conversely, to support Polish nationalistic ideology through the adoption of folkish modes and historicist revivals. In fact, after 1867 the political situation in Austria eased with regard to ethnic groups.

In the Russian partition religion was brought into play so as to promote the Russification of Polonised culture. There was a tremendous pressure exerted on the lower classes to convert to Orthodoxy, so that it was in the literary and religious sphere that the main battles were fought over ethnicity.

The patriotic resistance against the Russians on the part of Poles, Polonised Lithuanians and Ruthenians, as well as the Baltic Poles of Latgale, was

unrelenting from the very outset. Popular insurrections were staged in 1794 (Kościuszko Rebellion), then in 1830-31 (November Uprising) and 1863-64 (February Uprising). There was another revolt against the Austrians in 1846 in Kraków and Galicia and then against the Prussians in 1848 in the Wielkopolskie Uprising of Poznania. Painters and graphic artists participated in the rebellions, were wounded, shot, imprisoned and fled into exile to Paris, London and Saxony. Many popular paintings, engravings and lithographs depicted these very same armed struggles. More subtly, historical works were created referring to great moments in Polish history when those imperialist enemies had been shamefully defeated in battle. Even more subtle, there was an ethnographic current feeding into the Romantic movement of the late 18th century and this made itself evident most of all in printed engravings and lithographs. The German Romantic movement was influenced by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) and the French Enlightenment. It spread to all European countries and one of its manifestations was a retrospective quest for national identity. In the engagement of painters with a supposed ethnically-continuous past, historic buildings such as ruined castles, or ancient towns and villages associated with Polish, Ruthenian, German Balt, or Lithuanian nationality, were nostalgically portrayed as lost idylls. People in regional dress populated these romanticised landscapes. Popular paintings were engraved, or lithographed, and widely purchased. The most overtly patriotic depictions of history, landscape and folkish culture were produced in the second half of the 19th century.

From the mid-19th century it was no longer a Polonised Commonwealth that was struggling against Russia, Austria and Prussia, since several different nationalistic movements were conspiring to attain their own nation-states. By the end of the 19th century most Lithuanians were demanding the restoration of their own independent medieval Principality.

The Ruthenians were the most successfully organised in their activism which had, in fact, originated centuries earlier. Since the uprising of Bohdan Khmelnytsky (Pol. Chmielnicki) against the Polish Crown in 1648-57, the Cossacks had been siding with the Russian Tsar against the Commonwealth. This opposition to Polish rule continued and greatly intensified through-out the 19th century and it provided the foundation for the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the early 20th century. In fact, the situation became more complicated in the inter-relation of Ukrainians and Russians, since there emerged a movement to free Ruthenians not only from Poland, but also from Russian-sponsored Pan-Slavism. By the second half of the 19th century many nationalists preferred to call themselves "Ukrainians," rather

than "Rusyni" ("Little Russians") which was an ambiguous name that fed into Russian imperialist claims over the Ruthenians. The movement for Ruthenian/ Ukrainian independence was propagated among the peasantry and lower classes by the Uniate (Greek Catholic) clergy and by means of a flourishing patriotic press. The Austrian government substantially aided the process of political education by means of providing education in the Ruthenian/ Ukrainian language and this encouraged the growth of a large, confident and articulate political leadership. The Austrian government's support of the Uniate Church secured another powerful way of strengthening and further developing the Ukrainian culture of the lower classes.

Nationalistic Issues in the Conservation of the Heritage of the Eastern Commonwealth

The architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries produced in the Eastern Commonwealth is a surprising delight, ranging from palaces on the scale and magnificence of Blenheim in England, to wooden manor houses in antiquated regional styles lost in the backwoods of Belarus.

In the modern successor states to the ancient Commonwealth, the best preserved, or, rather, the most heavily restored architecture is found in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In contrast, in Belarus a condition of ruin is almost universal, though there have recently been undertaken some catastrophic and truly inane programmes of reconstruction and plain fiction with regard to destroyed edifices. The sole purpose of these rebuilds involves neither scholarship, nor the patriotic retrieval of the country's devastated past, but merely the attraction of wealthy German tourists. In Ukraine the devastation incurred during the Second World War and the communist years has been tackled by numerous local initiatives of unequal merit, depending on available financial and labour resources. Once a building has been identified as "Polish" heritage, then since 1989-1990 conservators and restorers have not received financial support from the state government. Instead, the local Polish community has had to rely on aid from commercial firms in Poland, or on Polish government-sponsored programmes concerned with saving the Polish inheritance of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. Most often, it has been the pockets and physical efforts of local Poles that have funded and undertaken restoration. In the case of Orthodox and Uniate churches which are identified by the state as "Ukrainian" heritage, these have been rebuilt in recent decades by local administrations, or from less-available state funding. Local communities

have invariably had to make up the huge deficits themselves. Despite what can only be described as Herculean efforts in conservation and restoration, hundreds of historic castles, palaces, manor houses and urban edifices continue to lie in ruins. What is needed is more capitalist investment, as well as properly-trained conservators: business acumen combined with historical expertise.

Still worse, further damage is continually inflicted on the degraded masonry. As recently as February, 2018, at the great fortress of Kamieniec Podolski a large section of the curtain wall "fell over accidentally" in the course of "restorations." (A crane just "happened" to knock against the wall). As in Belarus, there is a lack of trained conservators and finance in Ukraine so idiotic disasters continue to occur. For example, at the former Jesuit church at Nieśwież in Belarus, water has been allowed to collect in the crypt where the Radziwiłł family are buried in lead and coppers coffins. Equally appallingly, in 2018 during renovations the wall enclosing the Jesuit church in Nieśwież was seriously damaged by a crane which knocked against the top of the enclosure, destroying some decorative urns and several layers of coursed stone-work. Even more careless destruction perpetrated in recent years will be detailed later in the present study.

The problem for the nationalistic government of modern Ukraine is that most of the former landed estates were in the hands of Polish, or Polonised Ruthenian magnate and noble families. Consequently, in Ukraine, until very recently, the older generation of Ukrainians had no interest in conserving the remains of an alien regime as it was negatively publicised by communist authorities and nationalists. This is the same issue in Latvia where all of the landed estates were owned, not by Latvians, but by Baltic Germans, Russians, Poles and Polonised Lithuanians and Ruthenians. Meanwhile in western Poland in modern Pomerania, formerly East Prussia, as well as in the so-called "Regained Lands" of modern Polish Silesia, the lands and cities had formerly been in the hands of Germans. The current Polish heirs of these historic cultures belong to an entirely different and, moreover, to an inimical ethnicity.

In Belarus, conversely, this issue has been resolved by firmly declaring all heritage of any kind whatsoever as "Belarusian," even if had been created and owned by Poles and Polonised Ruthenians with their powerful patriotic commitment to the Commonwealth. It is a fact that by the 17th century the culture and first language of all of the Commonwealth's nobility was Polish and it was from Poland that western European culture reached the Eastern Commonwealth. Consequently, the historical artefacts of Belarus are the

common cultural heritage of Poles, Lithuanians and others, not only of modern Belarusians. Not surprisingly, in view of its antagonism to the Second Republic of Poland after 1918, the modern state of Lithuania has reached much the same resolution as Belarus, leading to the deliberate suppression of the Polish history of these lands. Against this recent cultural colonialism by the successor states, it has to be emphasized that the cultural heritage of the Eastern Commonwealth is the common birth-right of all national groups that once resided in Lithuania and Rus, not least the Poles.

In Latvia and southern Estonia (former Livonia), once the joint possession of Poland and Lithuania, the historical situation was very different. After 1918 this history presented its own problems to the successor states of Latvia and Estonia since the cultural heritage of these lands was created not by the ancestors of modern ethnic Latvians and Estonians. They had remained in the condition of enserfed peasantry through into the 19th century until they were freed by the Tsarist government (Courland in 1819-32, Livonia in 1820-32 and Latgale in 1861). The indigenous Baltic peasantry had been reduced to slavery by the German elite so that it was impossible for them to make any significant contribution to elite artistic and literary culture. As a result, the historical relics of Estonia and Latvia, namely, castles, manors, artefacts, the high arts and literature, are those of the Baltic Germans who were in control of the Baltic littoral from the 12th century. Eventually, in the 1920s they were dispossessed of their estates by the nationalist governments of the successor states. The material culture of Latvia and Estonia is an integral part of German history and to some extent of Poland and Russia as well. The result is that the cultural history of the ethnic Estonians and Latvians has to be analysed and recorded with the tools, not of art-history and literary analysis, but with those of ethnography, folk-lore and social and economic history.

Recent developments in historiography have rejected the antiquated nationalistic models that are still operative in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. Estonian art-historians, in particular, have been in the vanguard of new theoretical developments. Polish historians also since the 1990s have adopted the critical tools of western historiography and have discarded nationalistic narratives. Instead, in these new models it is the history of a geographical region that is at issue, irrespective of the ethnicity of its inhabitants and that of its chief protagonists. The historian Matthew Rampley at a recent conference on the nature of Baltic art-history has noted that nationalistic histories present no more than a generalising view of the actual complicated and conflicted historical processes involved.

> … nationalist histories tend to construct narratives of a continuous tradition of development which gives the sense of a nation as an enduring vehicle of cultural, social and political identity.[3]

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1989-90 and the liberation of the Soviet republics and satellite states led in the 1990s to a quest for new historical narratives. The Polish historian Piotr Piotrowski, in particular, has argued that the real complexity of the inter-actions between patrons, artists and their cultural conditions has to be recognised. The issue of national schools of art must be revealed as a myth. [4] This is especially true concerning the history of the multi-ethnic culture of the Eastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

There are additional problems, moreover, which have to be faced when western scholars approach the history of Eastern Europe. Piotrowski has recalled how after 1945 the post-war political settlement dictated the construction of European history so that Western historians knew nothing concerning cultures on the other side of the Oder-Neisse line. This became an alien Otherness to them and they fell silent as they approached the border between the West and the Soviet sphere of influence.[5] More recently, another Polish art-historian Andrzej Betlej has taken further issue concerning the ignorance of western historians in regard to the limitations on scholarly research enforced by the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. Betlej is specifically concerned with the history of the Jesuit architecture of the Eastern Commonwealth.

> After 1945, due to the new geopolitical situation [the takeover of former Eastern Poland by the USSR], the research could continue only in a very limited scope. Scholars have to realize that about seventy percent of Polish artistic heritage is located in the East, beyond the present borders of Poland. These lands effectively became "off limits" for Polish researchers, closed

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[3] Matthew Rampley, "The Construction of National Art Histories and the 'New' Europe," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* (Studies on Art and Architecture), 19, 3/4, *Special Issue The Geographies of Art-history in the Baltic Region*, ed. by Katrin Kivimaa (selected papers of conference "The Geographies of Art-history in the Baltic Region," Tallinn, Estonia, 2009) (2009), pp. 231-46.
[4] Piotr Piotrowski, "The geography of Central/ East European art" in Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (ed.), *Borders in Art Revisiting Kunstgeographie. The Proceedings of the Fourth Joint Conference of Polish and English Art Historian*s, Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences: Instytut Sztuki [Institute of Art] (2000), pp. 44-46.
[5] Piotrowski, "The geography of Central/ East European art" in Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (ed.), *Borders in Art Revisiting Kunstgeographie* (2000), pp. 44-46.

off by the new border which served as the inner "iron curtain" within the Eastern bloc. Soviet researchers did not tackle the "alien, Western cultural heritage" in their studies, and if they did, the results were flawed by ideological and doctrinal correctness, even as they were, at the same time, often methodologically naive. Meanwhile, the systematic demolition of historical and architectural monuments was ongoing. I do not mean just the Stalinist era of the 1930s and the period immediately following World War II. Ecclesiastical architecture (including Jesuit buildings) was being destroyed even in the 1980s as part of a planned, active battle against the church, in the course of which all its visible signs were to be removed.

Consequently, research on Jesuit architecture focused mostly upon the monuments that remained within the present borders of Poland. [6]

Prior to 1989 in both Eastern and Western Europe Cold-War politics heavily coloured the writing of art-history.

After that date, East European scholars began to demand that their own histories and cultures be recognised by western academics as an integral part of European history. Soon after the liberation of Poland from communism in 1990 Piotrowski was making a particular case that it was the geography of art-production that mattered, not the nationalities of those who produced it.[7] This is the critical approach that has developed among Polish historians in the decades since.

For example, in the past three decades Polish historians have been recording the history of the former German territories of Pomerania, Wielkopolska (around Poznań), Silesia and Mazuria. They are no longer under pressure from communist authorities who had once obliged historians to prove that the "Regained Lands" ("Ziemie Odzyskane") in the west had been occupied and developed by inhabitants of an essentially Polish ethnicity, thereby twisting the historical record by ignoring the majority German population in the towns and cities. This communistic Polonisation of history was essential for the pro-Soviet regime as part of a strategy enforced by the Soviet Union and aimed at obscuring the annexation of eastern pre-war Poland by the Soviet Union in 1940. In order to deflect attention from the Soviet-annexed eastern Poland, the focus of Polish historians was forced

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[6] Andrzej Betlej, "Architecture of Jesuit Churches in the Former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1564-1773," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* (2018), pp. 352ff online https://www.brill.com/view/journals/jjs/5/3/article (retrieved 11. 08. 2021)
[7] Piotrowski, "The geography of Central/ East European art" in Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (ed.), *Borders in Art Revisiting Kunstgeographie,*(2000), pp. 44-46

instead onto the former German lands in the West. These territories were remodelled into THE essential aspect of Polish history, although this had not been the case since prior to the 16th century, because since 1569 the focus of the Polish government had been on Lithuania and Rus, not on Pomerania and Silesia.

This communistic reconstruction of the historical discourse went even further in the project of rebuilding the ruined and gutted cities and towns of the new western Poland. Many German edifices were reconstructed in the form of an archetypal Baroque style that had come to be associated specifically with the Polish inheritance. Anything that smacked too much of German Gothic was toned-down, or obscured, so that, for example, from 1945 to the 1970s town-houses in Gdańsk and elsewhere in the west had their wooden "Germanic" timber-framing removed and were given instead a more curvilinear "Polish Baroque" appearance.[8] This Polonisation process is still underway as Poland of the present day grows economically and belatedly reconstructs her housing stock. For example, in the Poznań region at the town of Krzyż, around the railway station, the original 19th century German red-brick architecture is being re-historicised in a "Polish" mode by the application of white rendering and the addition of little "Baroque" towers and pillared porticoes with pediments.

Rejecting the nationalistic falsifications of the communist epoch, as well as contemporary nationalistic kitsch, modern Polish historians now put forth great efforts in recording and protecting the historical remnants of the former Prussian state, despite the fact that Prussia was Poland's greatest enemy for centuries. For, it is the geography of a region that should engage the attention of historians, ethnographers and sociologists, not a twisted record of one single national group.

It is a fact, nevertheless, that at various periods in history all of these Prussian regions had, indeed, originally belonged to Poland, or, they had been independent duchies ruled, like Brzeg in Lower Silesia, by princes from the Polish Piast dynasty. The Polish Crown had retained a legal claim to all the lands that had once been part of the Crown estates since by a ruling of the General Sejm the former Polish Crown-lands could never be legally alienated. Silesia had been seized illegally in 1742 by force of arms from Austria by Frederick II of Prussia (1712-86) and it was then that these western regions had become part of Prussia. Conversely, it has to be

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[8] See the various essays on this issue Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (ed.), *Borders in Art Revisiting Kunstgeographie* Warszawa (2000), passim.

admitted that these lands had been heavily Germanised since the 13th century, specifically the towns and cities. There remained, even so, substantial numbers of Poles and other national groups in the towns, although they were the majority population only in the rural areas. There also remained in Silesia, Wielkopolska and Pomerania the ancient Polish nobility, although from the end of the 18th century the upper aristocracy (as in the Austrian and Russian partitions) began to reside permanently in the capital cities of the imperialist occupiers.

To their credit, Polish historians in the past thirty years have come to terms with the demands of accommodating German history as an aspect of the history of modern Poland. Indeed, in the past decade a multitude of government-funded conservation projects have rescued the crumbling remains of the German heritage. Most important, this Germanic legacy is regarded with great pride nowadays as am important cultural asset of the modern Polish state and, not least, as a major source of lucrative tourism from the West.

Unfortunately, historians in Belarus and Ukraine and to some extent those in Lithuania have still to accept these new modes of geographical historiography. In part, this is the consequence of having been heavily Russified as member republics of the Soviet Union from 1940-90. Under the communist regime Poland was viewed as Russia's foremost enemy, as had factually always been the case, ever since the beginnings of the Muscovite state. It went further than that, however, since every aspect of the historical record was falsified by Russian historians and by historians in the member republics on the western borders. At the least, history was exaggerated in order to discredit the former Polish nobility and their westernised culture. Such an attitude continues to be a heavy influence on the generations born after the war in Belarus and Ukraine, as also in Lithuania, although there are additional historical reasons in this particular case. The nationalistic histories produced especially in Belarus and Ukraine at the present time have to be read critically with an eye for a biased nationalistic perspective.

The deliberately destructive policy of pro-Soviet governments after 1940 in regard to the Polish legacy of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine has altered the historical record. In Belarus and Ukraine historic buildings with Polish connections have been left to decay, or are currently undergoing some process of restoration designed to alter their character to one more conformable to a Ukrainian, or Belarusian identity (as at the former Catholic cathedral in Ivano-Frankivsk, for example). These types of issues have to

be discussed thoroughly before any "objective" histories can be written. The evidence of such destructive mentalities is recorded in the numerous catalogues produced by the Institute of Art History at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and by other Polish institutions, such as the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. This particular project was initiated by Professor Jan K. Ostrowski at the Jagiellonian University in the 1980s. The whole series is entitled *Materiały do Dziejów Sztuki Sakralnej na Ziemiach Wschodnich Dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Materials for [the History of] Works of Religious Art in the Eastern Lands of the Old Commonwealth) (1993- ongoing), here known as *Materiały*. These volumes incorporate accounts of sacred foundations and their contents in western Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania.[9]

Indeed, the need for this type of cataloguing continues to increase since Polish Catholic (and secular) buildings and artefacts are continually being destroyed, left to fall into ruin, or are remodelled into new forms for secular use according to nationalistic taste and prejudice. Even more telling are photographs illustrating the further degradation of many Polish buildings between the 1960s and the 1990s as a result not of war, but of neglect and

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[9] Jan K. Ostrowski (general editor) et al., *Materiały do dziejów sztuki sakralnej na ziemiach wschodnich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury w Krakówie; "Secesja" (1993- ongoing): Kazimierz Kuczman (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa Ruśkiego*, Part 1, vols. 1-18; Jakub Adamski (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa ruskiego: Kościoły i klasztory Lwowa z okresu przedrozbiorowego*, Part 1, vols. 19-20; Jan K. Ostrowski (ed.), *Katedra Łacińska we Lwowie*, Part 1, vol. 21; Marcin Biernat (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa Ruskiego*, Part 1, vol. 23; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa nowogródzkiego*, Part 2, vols. 1-4; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed (ed.), *Kościoły Nowogródka*, Part 2, vol. 5; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa wileńskiego*, Part 3, vols.1-4; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory Grodna*, Part 4, vol. 1; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed (ed.), *Katedra w Grodnie*, Part 4, vol. 2; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed (ed.), *Kościoły Grodna*, Part 4, vol. 3; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa trockiego*, Part 4, vol. 4; Jan K. Ostrowski (ed.), *Kościoły i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa brzeskolitewskiego*, Part 5, vols. 1-3; Anna Oleńska i Dorota Piramidowicz (eds.), *Kościół katedralny w Pińsku*, Part 5, Vol. 4; And also see Jan K. Ostrowski (ed.), *Sztuka Kresów Wschodnich. Materiały sesji naukowej Kraków, maj 1995*, 2 (Kraków: Instytut Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Koło Naukowe Studentów Historii Sztuki UJ), Kraków (1996). Also Jan K. Ostrowski, "Ćwierćwiecze inwentaryzacji zabytków na Kresach Wschodnich," *Spotkania z Zabytkami*, 1-2 (2016), pp. 44ff.

sheer vandalism on the part of the local authorities. Buildings it is possible to save in many cases, but their decorative schemes, furnishings, other adornments and portable artefacts are usually lost without any possible recourse to restoration. During the last World War and the ensuing communist period the Polish artefacts that endured the most damage were sculptures and paintings, especially frescoes, both secular and religious. The Jagiellonian *Materiały* project has recorded the rescue of many artefacts from the Eastern territories and their relocation to Poland during the "repatriations" of the Polish population from 1946-7. Previously the whereabouts of many of these objects was known only from the oral history retained by a diminishing number of eye-witnesses.[10]

The late historian Tadeusz Kukiz produced a series of catalogues recording the transfer of religious art after 1945 to western Poland, mainly from sovietised Ukraine. These objects were rescued by Polish citizens forced to move from Ukraine in order to colonise the former German territories of the new Poland. Such a very difficult and dangerous endeavour resulted in the rescue of only a small part of the Catholic religious heritage of Eastern Poland, but, nonetheless, many of the rescued images were of considerable historical importance. They were relocated to churches primarily in lower Silesia, to the regions of Wrocław and Legnica.[11] Some of the priceless collections of art and the libraries that once existed in magnate palaces such as those at Podhorce had already been removed to Poland before the outbreak of war in 1939. Although much precious material has now been dispersed to Poland and beyond, the museum collections in Ukraine (Lwów and Olesko especially), as well as in Mińsk and other major Belarusian

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[10] For restoration projects on Polish initiatives in Lithuanian and Belarus see online https://www.Culture.pl
https://www.culture.pl/pl/artykul/jak-chronic-polskie-dziedzictwo-na-kresach (retrieved 26. 02. 2016) The Cultural Heritage Foundation was established on the initiative of Dr. Michał Laszczkowski and Paweł Wilski in 2012. It deals with the protection and promotion of Polish national heritage as part of the European cultural heritage. The Foundation organizes conservation and restoration works as well as conducts educational, publishing and filming activities.
[11] Tadeusz Kukiz, *Madonny Kresowe i inne obrazy sakralne z Kresów w archidiecezji wrocławskiej i w diecezji legnickiej*, 1, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej (2003). See also Tadeusz Kukiz, *Madonny Kresowe i inne obrazy sakralne z Kresów w diecezjach Polski (poza Śląskiem),* 2, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej (2008) and, in addition, see Tadeusz Kukiz, *Madonny Kresowe i inne obrazy sakralne z Kresów w archidiecezji wrocławskiej w diecezjach Polski*, *Suplement*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej) (2008).

towns, have managed to preserve some materials unique to the culture of these regions and which are completely unknown elsewhere.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) and the Problem of the "Kresy"

Over the centuries the Lithuanian Principality absorbed numerous Ruthenian princely states and independent towns in northern and southern Rus, including Włodzimierz (Vladimir), Mińsk, Połock, Nowogródek, Pskov, Pereyaslavl, Pińsk, Turów and Czerwieniec. The Polish Crownlands were territories governed directly by the Polish king and the General Sejm (the national assembly of szlachta (nobility)). Under the terms of the Union of Lublin (1569) the Ruthenian region was alienated from the Lithuanian state and integrated into the Polish Crownlands, namely, Halicz, Wołyń (Ukr. Volhyn), Podole and the Kievan regions east of the River Dnieper. Livonia on the Baltic coastline was disputed between Sweden, Denmark, Russia and Poland. Eventually, southern Estonia and Livonia became temporarily part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569.[12]

The name "Kresy" ("Borderlands") has been (and still is) a name commonly employed by Poles since the 19th century to designate the eastern regions of the Commonwealth. The term originates in the Polish word "kres" meaning "end," or "limit," which probably came from the German word "Kreis," that is, "borderline," or "district". In earlier centuries the designation "Kresy" was never used by the residents of Lithuania who referred to their land either in Polish as "Litwa," or in Lithuanian as "Lietuva." Until the 19th century the name "Kresy" was not applied to southern Rus either. The term employed by the Polish Crown was "Ruś Koronna" ("Crownland Rus"). It should be noted that the term commonly used by foreign observers in the 16th and 17th centuries to denote the entire Commonwealth was "Sarmatia" (Pol. Sarmacja). This name originated among the Polish nobility who believed that as a class their origins lay in Central Asia among the warrior tribes called "Sarmatians" by ancient Greek authors. The term "Sarmatians" (Pol. Sarmaci) was interchangeable with

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[12] Standard English-language authorities 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,* 1: *From the Origins to Sobieski (to 1686),* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press (1950).

"Polish," although not with "Lithuanian."[13] The Lithuanian princes and nobility claimed a completely different (and higher) descent in distinction from their Slavic neighbours, contending that their ancestors were the ancient Roman nobility.

"Kresy" as a term became more commonly used by Poles in the 19th century when it was popularised by the Polish nationalistic poem *Mohort* (1854) written by Wincenty Pol (1807-72). Pol also used this reference in another work, *Pieśń o ziemi naszej* (Song about our land) (1843). However, the author used the name only in reference to the lands lying between the rivers Dniester and Dnieper in Ukraine and he was not referring to Lithuania. In the 19th and 20th centuries there emerged an extensive Polish literature of novels, poetry and historical accounts romanticising the Eastern Commonwealth as a region of Polish nationalistic endeavour. It was then that the name "Kresy" began to carry the emotive significance that it retains in the present day. However, even in the late 19th and early 20th centuries "Kresy" referred only to the south-eastern Commonwealth which consisted of Przemyśl and its hinterlands, that is, the województwa (counties) of Ruś Czerwona (Red Rus), Podole, Wołyń, Ukraina and Galicia, in fact, the lands comprising modern western Ukraine.

It was only under the Second Polish Republic (Pol. "Druga Rzeczpospolita") (1918-39) that the name "Kresy" was extended to all Polish territories east of the Curzon Line established by the Allied Powers in 1918 as 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 1772. On these lands there resided substantial numbers of Polish nationals who constituted a particularly large majority in the regions of Wileńszczyzna around Wilno and Nowogródek, as well as in southern Rus in Halicz-Wołyń and the Lwów area. The Wileńszczyzna region, Belarus 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. It should be noted that the dual state of Poland and Lithuania was never called "Poland" until the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 awarded southern Lithuania and western Ukraine to Poland.

This issue has in recent decades been re-argued in the context of western post-colonial discourses. Polish scholars have uncritically adopted the

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[13] Tadeusz Mańkowski, *Genealogia sarmatyzmu*, Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Łuk" (1946).

theoretical models developed for the analysis of specifically British and other imperialist colonial policies and have applied such critical models to the discourse of the "Kresy." In their support it may be pointed out that Ukrainian historians in the 19th century had already been arguing that the Polish settlement of Rus in the 14th century was a colonising enterprise which had led to the suppression of Ruthenian culture. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Polish scholars had contested such claims, but in the 2000s a new generation experienced a sweeping conversion to western colonialist critiques. Against these contentions it has to be pointed out, first, that conversion to Polish ethnicity was entirely a voluntary process on the part of the Ruthenian upper classes. They adopted Polish culture and the Catholic religion as a way of escaping the pressure of the Lithuanian state's taxation system and the limitations placed by the Grand Princes on their legal rights. Second, there was never a majority settlement of ethnic Poles in Ukraine, or Lithuania and Belarus. The populations of indigenous peoples always far exceeded those of the Poles. The Polish administration never enforced Polonisation on the Ruthenians and Lithuanians prior to the 1930s in the manner that the Tsarist administration enforced Russification after 1772.

Lithuanian historians in the same manner as Ukrainian scholars continue to regard the presence of the Polish state and its culture within the historic borders of the Principality as a usurpation of power. The Unions of Horodło (1413) and of Wilno (1499) between the two states were never accepted by the leading Lithuanian families and this political unification was the cause of centuries of ill-feeling against Poland. However, Polish historians may point out that already from the 13th century Lithuanians were losing their original identity and becoming Russified as part of the process of their conversion to the Orthodox Church. The Eastern Rite had already been established as the religion of the Lithuanian court before Grand Prince Władysław II Jagiełło (Lith. Jogaila) (ca. 1352/62-1434) became king of Poland in 1386, after which he commenced a process of conversion to Roman Catholicism. The Ruthenian language was the written language of the princely court and of administration in the early medieval period. It remained so, along with Latin, in the chancellery of the Principality, eclipsing the Lithuanian language even before Polish was adopted as the language of officialdom in the 16th and 17th centuries.[14] From the historical

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[14] Andrzej Rachuba, Jūratė Kiaupienė and Zigmantas Kiaupa (eds.), *Historia Litwy. Dwugłos polsko-litewski*, Warszawa: Wydwnictwo DiG (2009), pp. 9-10, 25-31