

Robert Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania, i: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2015, 564 pp. + xxii, bibliog., index, maps, ill., table; series: Oxford History of Early Modern Europe

The first part of the two-volume *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania* penned by Scottish historian Robert Frost was published by the Oxford University Press in 2015, in a series on early modern history of European countries. Previously, the series published two-volume studies on the history of Ireland and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, and a one-volume history of Denmark.<sup>1</sup> The study on Poland-Lithuania is subtitled *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union*, which points to the way the topic dealt with should be comprehended. Rather than a textbook on the history of Poland-Lithuania, Frost focuses on the union that lasted four long centuries: from the marriage of Władysław II Jagiello to Jadwiga of Anjou in 1385 till the Third Partition of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations in 1795. In European history, similar examples can only be traced for the British Isles – specifically, the 1707 Union between England and Scotland and the union established between Britain and Ireland in 1800. Apparently, the traits shared by the systems and political communities in the Isles and in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth have propelled the Scottish author to deal more closely with the Polish-Lithuanian union and its history.

Robert Frost has graduated from St. Andrews University and the University of London, submitting his PhD thesis at the latter under the tutelage of Norman Davies. He presently lectures at the University of Aberdeen; previously, he was associated for a dozen years with the London King's College. He has been dealing with the history of East Central and Northern Europe for more than thirty years now, publishing scholarly studies and popularising knowledge about these regions in Britain – with a particular focus on Poland and Lithuania. In contrast to his once-tutor Norman Davies, his focus as a research scholar is confined to the modern age.

*The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union* is a book on political and constitutional history. The first volume describes the origins of setting up a real union between the two countries. Importantly, it discusses the roots of the emerging association between the states at the height of the Middle Ages – the first years of the Jagiellon rule in Poland. Specifically for the history of Poland

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1998); Sean J. Connolly, *Contested Island, i: Ireland 1460–1630* (Oxford, 2007); ii: *Ireland 1630–1800* (Oxford, 2010); Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, i: Maximilian I to the Peace of Westphalia, 1493–1648* (Oxford, 2011); ii: *The Peace of Westphalia to the Dissolution of the Reich, 1648–1806* (Oxford, 2011).

and Lithuania, the temporal caesura is shifted more than a century backwards compared to the other publications of the series dealing with the modern history of European countries. This is an important decision indeed: one would not be in a position to understand the political system and the relationships between the 'Crown of the Kingdom of Poland' and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania without being aware of the occurrences of the period 1385–1569.

This monumental book consists of seven chapters. The first, entitled 'Towards union', discusses the genesis of the marriage between Jadwiga of Anjou and Jagiełło, and the terms-and-conditions of the union concluded at Kreva (Kreva). There is a subchapter 'On unions', presenting the notion of political union against a broader European background, with references to the historiography dealing not only with personal and dynastic unions but also federations, confederations and real unions. Reference to the classical arguments proposed by Georg Jellinek in the latter half of the nineteenth century (*Die Lehre von den Staatenverbindungen* [Berlin, 1882]) is of crucial importance there. The theoretical anchoring of the aforesaid issues in the state and law theory research can be helpful in undertaking comparative studies. As the author remarks, the historiography of the later Middle Ages and early modern time rarely touches upon the topic of union; when it does, it does so from the monarchical and dynastic standpoint. The fact is, though, that the history of political culture in modern Europe should constitute a separate research problem, beyond the historiography of individual countries or states.

Chapter Two, 'Establishing the union', describes the first decades of the functioning of the union, the shaping of institutions, granting of privileges or charters, and details the (reciprocal) policies pursued by Władysław Jagiełło and his cousin Vytautas Kęstutaitis. The structure of the Polish nobility (*szlachta*) is described as well, without however discussing its mediaeval origins in much detail.

The third chapter, 'Crisis', focuses on the second quarter of the fifteenth century, when 'separatist' sentiments intensified not only among the rulers but also among the noblemen of Lithuania and Rus'. The caesurae proposed for the period are 1422 and 1447. In respect of the latter date – marking the coronation of Casimir IV Jagiellon as King of Poland (he was, in parallel, Grand Duke of Lithuania since 1440) – the turn in the prevalent trends is convincingly demonstrated. The date at which the crisis apparently began, 1422 – referring to a peace treaty entered into at the Melno Lake by the Crown, the Grand Duchy and the State of the Teutonic Order – seems somewhat questionable.

The fourth chapter, entitled 'Consolidation and change', presents the history of the union under Casimir Jagiellon's reign and the conflict with the Teutonic Knights, concluded with the Second Peace Treaty of Toruń (Thorn) in 1466. Described are also the strivings of the Prussian elite and the importance of the Privilege of Nieszawa (1454). The final

subchapter in this section is a brief study on the status of peasantry and its influence on the type of economy that developed in the lands of Poland and Lithuania.

The subsequent two chapters – the fifth: ‘Dynasty and Citizenship’, and the sixth: ‘Reform’ – outline the policies of the Jagiellon monarchs in the region’s context and describe the institutional structure based on the parliamentary system. This part of the book offers a synthetic and very short description of the formation of the Sejm (‘From sejmiks to Sejm’) and an analysis of the ways in which the privileges from late-fifteenth century granted to the nobility informed the political system. Significantly, Chapters Four to Six attach special attention to the actions and endeavours of not only Polish nobles but also (if not, at times, primarily) those of Lithuania, Prussia, and Rus’. Finally, the last chapter – ‘Union accomplished’ – deals with the events of the last years before the real union was set up between the two countries. Analysis of the Lublin occurrences and of the very act of the 1569 union crowns the section.

The book has no introduction which would have described the method used by the author and the basic definitions related to history of law and political systems. Instead, these issues are exposed in the respective chapters which serve as peculiar commentaries to the historical events under discussion and the sources under analysis. Frost begins his considerations with the Union of Krevo and the origins of the dynastic union between the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (consistently named ‘Poland’ and ‘Lithuania’ across the book) and ends with the achievements of the real union constructed in Lublin. He provides no final remarks in a separate summary, which might be due to the fact this is not the last volume yet. Admittedly, however, the structure of this book, which includes seven monumental parts without introductory or final remarks, where the argument is narrated in a manner characteristic of *histoire événementielle*, may make the reading quite demanding – especially to those who would be willing to treat this publication as an approachable synthetic compendium.

In consequence of the assumed perspective, which consists in reconstructing the history of the union, comes a very detailed analysis of the language and terms used in the historical sources, ones that have aroused controversies and diverse interpretations among the contemporaries as well as historiographers. Much attention is drawn to explanation of legal terms and notions which can become key to those readers who are unaware of the disputes involving the researchers exploring the history of Poland and Lithuania. There has definitely been no study of this kind available in the English-language literature before. Let us add that in Polish historiography, the last significant attempt at studying the topic in a broader fashion was made by Oskar Halecki, whose book on the history of the Jagiellonian union was published a hundred years ago (*Dzieje unii jagiellońskiej* [Kraków, 1919]).

In his reconstruction of the history of the Polish-Lithuanian union, Frost employs detailed analysis of the sources (the deeds of union, privileges/charters, chronicles) and builds thereupon his interpretations concerning the relationship between the countries and their elites. Emphasised is the role of external conflicts and the policies pursued by each of the rulers. The author has aptly assumed that the union he describes as an association of the two bodies politic was not merely a creation of the rulers but also the result of the citizens' strivings. The citizens were noblemen of, actually, several ethnicities; putting it otherwise, they represented several various nobilities. Consequently, the ethnicity- or nation-centred standpoint of the histories of the countries forming the union is overcome, the prevalent convictions concerning Polish imperialism and colonialism with respect to the eastern territories are broken, and – last but not least – the influence of non-Polish political elites on the shaping of the union is powerfully emphasised (with the resulting upset proportion between the way in which home affairs of Poland are approached, compared to those of Lithuania). Let us add at this point that Prussia and Rus' (Ruthenia), not mentioned in the title, are the background characters of this book.

As a result, the history of the Polish-Lithuanian union is shown in a way that can be described as multi-entity or multi-actor, its 'polyphonic' and polemical historiography being emphasised. Especially the latter aspect may appear of particular importance to the readers who, unaware of the findings of foreign historiographers, are accustomed to one – namely, national – interpretation of the union's history. The pluralism of historiographic opinions proposed by Frost is a remarkably strong point of his study, which will be treated primarily as a handbook on the history of Polish-Lithuanian union and a point of departure for further reading. A good example of the aspects in question is the discussion of how to understand the Latin verb *applicare* in the Krevo union deed (pp. 47 ff.), or the evaluation of the first years of Casimir IV Jagiellon's reign (p. 200). The book is symbolically dedicated to the four great historians who researched into the shared past of the Polish-Lithuanian union, taking various standpoints: Oskar Halecki of Poland, Adolfas Šapoka of Lithuania, Myxailo Hruševsky of Ukraine, and Matvej K. Ljubavskij of Russia.

As Frost announces (p. viii), the second (forthcoming) volume will deal with topics such as humanism and the Renaissance, religion (Reformation), and a most welcome study of cities/urban areas in Poland and Lithuania. Hence, we can expect that the book to come will refer back to the time before the Union of Lublin (1569). This may imply a broken chronological sequence (considering the content of the first volume), which might render the reading more difficult. Let us hope that the second part will describe the Commonwealth's political thought, which emerged in the modern age, as well as the intellectual culture which was important for the development of the idea of the union between the Two Nations and for the Reformation and Counter-

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Reformation movements. The volume under review does not offer a separate study on these issues, and focuses instead on the history of the emerging union. The author has managed to switch from a national into a multinational (multiethnic) standpoint and to clearly explain the problems related to understanding and interpretation of the terms used in the relevant legal acts and privileges. Frost's considerations are an excellent example of traditional political history which, for the purpose of detailed analysis of the impact of events and processes on the shaping of a certain political reality, quits an expanded discussion of other related factors, such as soci(et)al/economic/cultural history. For a comprehensive appraisal of the work, though, one has to be acquainted with the forthcoming second volume.

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