

# Reviews

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Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland*, Cambridge 2001, Cambridge University Press, 317 pp., ill., annexes, index. Series: Cambridge Concise Histories.

Two historians of Polish origin but born and working in Great Britain (J. Lukowski is Senior Lecturer in Modern History, University of Birmingham, Hubert Zawadzki teaches history at Abingdon School) have published an outline of Poland's history from the earliest times to the present day in a special series of Cambridge University Press. Their task was extremely difficult, not only because of the vast chronological range of the book (from the Middle Ages to the present time). Poland's complex, intricate history (lack of state continuity, changes in borders and territory, the multiethnic and multidemoninational character of the state up to 1945, the country's situation at the junction of different cultures) makes it extremely difficult to present a concise but full picture that would be understandable to non-professional readers. The authors confess that they were aware of these difficulties and knew they were not fully qualified for the task (they specialise in the history of the 18th and 19th centuries). In the *Introduction* they present some of the difficulties they encountered. Their work had to include the history of territories which no longer belong to Poland and are now independent states (Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine); they had to solve the problem of geographical names (which form to use for such towns as Lwów, Wilno, Gdańsk, Toruń and even Warszawa and Kraków) and to decide whether to Anglicise Polish first names. The solutions they have chosen are not always fully consistent and logical. As regards first names, for instance, it would have been better to stick to the old practice and translate the names of rulers but leave the names of other persons unchanged.

The book has two parts, the dividing line being the year 1795, the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Part I (pp. 1–106) consists of three chapters: 1. *Piast Poland, ?–1385* (the choice of the date is unfortunate for the last Piast king on the Polish throne died in 1370); 2. *Jagellonian Poland, 1386–1572*; 3. *The Commonwealth of the Two Nations, 1572–1795* (1572 is the date of the death of the last Jagellonian king; the Commonwealth of the Two Nations was established by the Sejm of Lublin in 1569; so here too one of the dates may give rise to reservations). Part II, much more extensive (pp. 107–289, the disproportion is rather unfortunate) is divided into four chapters: 4. *Challenging the Partitions, 1795–1864*. 5. *An Era of Transformation, 1864–1914*; 6. *Independence Regained and Lost, 1914–1945*; 7. *Communism and Beyond, 1945–?*. The book ends with *Genealogical Charts of Polish Rulers* (I — The Piast Dynasty, II — The Jagellonian Dynasty, III — Elective Rulers, IV — Rulers of the Partitioned Polish Territories) and lists of heads of state, presidents, Communist Party leaders (1918–2000). This is a very valuable annex for it gives readers unfamiliar with Poland's history a better insight into the subject by identifying the persons at the helm of the state.

The central theme of the book is political history, but it is only briefly and schematically discussed in regard to the Middle Ages. There are some slips in this part of the book; for instance, the authors write "The label Piast was attributed to the ruling dynasty only in the late seventeenth century by Silesian antiquarians", p. 3, fn. 1, whereas all medieval chroniclers wrote about Piasts, and in the 16th and 17th centuries the word "Piast" was a symbol of a ruler's Polishness; hence the appeals to choose "a Piast", constantly repeated at free elections. The Kiev duke Svyatopolk was not Boleslaus the Brave's brother-in-law but his

son-in-law, but this is a smaller mistake. The assertion that royal dignity was not at first appreciated in Poland (p. 8) is questionable; the fact that only three rulers were crowned before 1296 was due to other reasons.

Since the authors do not write about the development of social and economic structures in the 11th and 12th centuries, the information on feudal fragmentation is presented as a personal decision taken by Boleslaus the Wry-Mouthed to avoid family quarrels. Fragmentation was at that time a phenomenon met also in other countries. Poland was no exception in this respect. The question of Poland's international situation and, for instance, the results of Poland's Christian baptism have not been presented at all. The authors have only touched the issue of the development of towns (n.b. peasants were deprived of the possibility of moving to towns slightly later, p. 13). The process of the country's unification, the meanders of the reigns of Ladislaus the Elbow-High and Casimir the Great have been simplified. The chapter on Jagellonian Poland outlines the history of the Polish-Lithuanian union, the conflicts with the Teutonic Knights, and the clashes with the Tartars and Moscow, but not enough space has been dedicated to the establishment of the great Jagellonian empire in East Central Europe and to the broader context of this event. In their account of the struggle for *dominium maris Baltici* the authors say nothing about the foundation and activity of the Polish maritime royal fleet. As far as internal problems are concerned, there is only a very general account of transformations in social structures and in the political system (development of parliamentarianism), the movement for the execution of all established laws and the beginnings of the Reformation. The analysis of the Union of Lublin, an important event on a European scale, is very perfunctory. Culture seems to have been left out both in the account of the 15th century (important changes in the forms of creative work, the emergence of humanism, changes in arts' patronage and in mentality) and in the passage referring to the golden age of the Renaissance. The authors show no interest in pointing out the specific traits of the Polish Renaissance and its contribution to European culture.

Chapter 3 presents the history of the Polish-Lithuanian state up to 1795, again only from the point of view of political events and partly also of the political system. In their presentation of the Confederation of Warsaw (1573) the authors ignore the fact that it guaranteed freedom of conscience (they only say that the ruler was bound to preserve peace between adherents of different religions), even though this was a unique legal solution in a Europe riven by religious wars. Nor do the authors mention the fact that Poland was then an asylum for political and religious refugees from the whole of Europe. The phenomenon of Polish Baroque culture (and the influence it exerted on the neighbouring countries) has not even been noticed. Enlightenment currents have been presented in a few sentences against the background of the Poles' endeavours to carry out political reforms and prevent the impending collapse of the state. The authors do not ask about the causes of the partitions, though it follows from what they say that the Noblemen's Commonwealth was an abortive formation doomed to failure ("The experiment in noble-democracy was over, a resounding failure", p. 105).

Part II opens with a chapter presenting the epoch of struggles to regain independence, a period of great national uprisings (the years 1795-1864). It is clear at once that this is a period which is nearer the authors' own research and their interests. They have succeeded in painting a picture which preserves the right proportions between political and social events. They have even included culture, shown the specific characteristics of each partition zone and found space to discuss the activity of the emigration (in particular in France) and the international contexts of the Polish cause in the 19th century. Chapter 5 presents the transformations which took place in the Polish territories between the defeat of the January uprising (in 1864) and the outbreak of World War I (1914), especially the Russification and Germanisation processes, the partitioners' fight against the Catholic Church which was the mainstay of the Poles' aspirations to independence, and also the exceptional situation in Austrian Poland. The chapter

includes elementary data concerning economic and social development as well as information on changes in mentality. For the first time (with the exception of a short note on colonisation based on the German law in the Middle Ages) the authors discuss the problem of migrations, the economic exodus from Polish territories to Germany, France and overseas (USA, Brazil), the level of literacy and the national consciousness of the peasants. They have also painstakingly presented the development of political parties, especially the socialist movement, in the Polish territories and their attitude to the question of Poland's independence.

In Chapter 6 they have equally competently presented World War I, the interwar years and World War II which for the Poles ended with the loss of sovereignty in 1945. The authors' knowledge and their knack of presenting many momentous events and processes condensed into the space of but 30 years cannot but arouse admiration. The last chapter discusses mainly the Poles' life under communist rule. Briefly but without simplifications, the authors depict the governing methods at various stages of the Polish People's Republic, the problems of reconstructing the country from the war damage, the social transformations promoted from the top, the fight against the Church and opposition movements, the situation in culture and science. The chapter ends with the birth of the Third Republic (establishment of Solidarity, the Round Table conference in 1989) and the events of the 1990s.

The book is undoubtedly a very useful attempt to present Poland's history from the earliest times to the present day in a plain, lucid way. Moreover, it is in the English language, which guarantees it access to the international book market. In view of the fact that even professional historians reveal ignorance of the history of Poland (and also of other Central European countries) in their works, the publication of the book is undoubtedly a happy event. It is a fact, however, that the book is very uneven. Part I, up to 1795, presents a picture which is devoid of important elements; it ignores socio-economic and demographic development and in particular culture (including such important elements as the formation of national consciousness, the birth of the "noble nation", the multiethnic and multid denominational character of the state) and does not show the European context of the processes taking place in Polish territories. Part II has been written with greater competence; it contains the most important elements of the historical process and evaluates facts correctly.

The bibliography at the end of the book contains only books in English, which is understandable. But several items in English could be added. It would be worth while to add *History of Poland* (A. Gieysztor, S. Kieniewicz, E. Rostworowski, J. Tazbir, H. Wereszycki), a collective work edited by S. Kieniewicz (PWN, 2nd ed. Warszawa 1979), a short outline by many authors entitled *A Panorama of Polish History* (Interpress, Warszawa 1982) and also J. Krzyżanowski's *A History of Polish Literature*, PWN, Warszawa 1978 to the section *General Works*. *The Christian Community of Medieval Poland*, ed. J. Kłoczowski, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1981, and M. Bogucka, *Nicholas Copernicus. The Country and Times*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1973 could be added to the section *Pre-1795 Poland*. They would supplement the meagre first part of the book.

We welcome the appearance of the book and hope that it will have a second, revised and improved edition.

Maria Bogucka