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0521544025 - After the Deluge: Poland-Lithuania and the Second Northern War, 1655-

1660 - Robert I. Frost

Excerpt

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Introduction: Poland–Lithuania in the mid-seventeenth century

In the summer of 1655 the second-largest state in Europe collapsed. The Commonwealth of Poland–Lithuania had struggled for seven years to contain a massive Cossack revolt led by Bohdan Khmelnytskyi which had broken out in the Ukraine in the summer of 1648. Khmelnytskyi, unable after six years of inconclusive fighting to achieve an acceptable settlement, had looked to Alexis, tsar of Muscovy (1645–76), to break the deadlock. By the treaty of Pereiaslav (18 January 1654), the Cossacks put themselves under the tsar's protection; shortly afterwards Muscovite armies swept into the Commonwealth. The military reputation of Poland–Lithuania had been shaken by the Swedish victories of the 1620s and the failure to defeat Khmelnytskyi, but nobody expected the collapse which followed: by the summer of 1655 Alexis had occupied most of Lithuania, while joint Cossack and Muscovite forces in the Ukraine had driven the Poles back to Lwów. On 9 August 1655 the tsar's triumphal entrance to Wilno, capital of Lithuania, crowned a remarkable campaign which had upset the whole balance of power in eastern Europe.

The *coup de grâce* was administered by Sweden, whose vulnerable Baltic empire was directly threatened by the Muscovite drive into Lithuania. Sweden's new status as a major power was based on slender resources; shortly after the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, conscious of the growing cost of maintaining garrisons on the far side of the Baltic, the government in Stockholm began to consider fighting a new war to counter the domestic pressures it faced as it adjusted to the problems of defending its empire in peacetime. Queen Christina's unexpected abdication in 1654 brought to the throne her ambitious and more belligerent cousin, Charles X. The Commonwealth's apparently imminent collapse gave Charles the opportunity to forget his domestic problems by countering what appeared to be a real threat to Swedish security. In July 1655, he invaded to preempt Alexis and ensure that Sweden would enjoy its share of the spoils.

The result exceeded Charles's greatest expectations. He hoped to seize Royal Prussia and prevent Alexis, who already controlled most of Lithuania, from reaching the Baltic; instead, within three months he controlled the whole of Poland. The Polish king, John Casimir (1648–68), had attracted widespread blame for failing to defeat Khmelnytskyi and for needlessly provoking the Swedish attack by refusing to resign his claim to the Swedish throne, thereby missing an opportunity to ally with Charles against Muscovy. When two Swedish armies under Arvid

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Wittenberg and the king himself entered Poland in July and one under Magnus de la Gardie entered Lithuania from Livonia, John Casimir was abandoned by large numbers of nobles who saw Sweden as their potential saviour against Muscovy. At Ujście on 25 July, the Great Poland *levée-en-masse* led by Krzysztof Opaliński, palatine of Poznań, surrendered to Wittenberg. The palatinates of Poznań and Kalisz were placed under Charles's protection; he was to be accorded the loyalty and obedience due to the king of Poland. A month later, a similar treaty was signed at Kiejdany by Janusz Radziwiłł, palatine of Wilno and Lithuanian grand hetman.¹ Other palatinates swiftly followed suit as John Casimir went into exile at Oberglogau in Silesia, where he arrived on 17 October, nine days before the main Polish army surrendered to Wittenberg near Cracow. The Commonwealth had succumbed with scarcely a fight.

Charles, however, found Poland easier to conquer than to control. He showed little inclination to take the offensive against Muscovy; indeed, Swedish envoys began talks with Alexis. The necessity for Sweden to make the war pay for itself rapidly alienated the nobility, as the army levied contributions from noble and royal estates alike, demonstrating the insincerity of Charles's promises to respect noble privileges. There were not enough Protestants in the Commonwealth to provide a solid nucleus of support, and Sweden was unable to exploit religious divisions in the way it had in the Empire during the Thirty Years War; indeed, Swedish outrages perpetrated against the Catholic Church did much to turn opinion against the invader. Encouraged by the spread of resistance, John Casimir returned to Poland in early 1656; by the spring, Opaliński and Radziwiłł were dead, and most Poles had abandoned Sweden.

To defeat the Swedish army, superior in training, discipline and equipment, required more than the return of the will to fight. Although the Poles waged a daring and effective guerrilla war, it proved impossible to inflict a major defeat on the Swedish professionals in open battle, while Polish deficiencies in artillery and infantry made the reduction of occupied cities a long and slow process. From the outset, the Poles were forced to seek foreign aid; it was only after they won support from Austria, Denmark and Brandenburg that Sweden was eventually forced to make peace at Oliva in 1660. Meanwhile, the willingness of an important part of the Cossack leadership to reach an accommodation with the Commonwealth after Khmelnytskyi's death in 1657, owing to concern at Muscovite aims in the Ukraine, improved the situation on the eastern front. The treaty of Hadiach (1659) envisaged the creation of a duchy of Ruthenia as part of the Commonwealth, which guaranteed Cossack rights and decreed that the Cossack hetman would sit in the senate as palatine of Kiev. Hadiach and Oliva opened the way to the great campaign of 1660–1, in which the Muscovites were swept out of much of Lithuania. It seemed that disaster had been averted and that the crisis was over.

¹ 'Articuli Pacis & Conventionis inter Illustrissimis et Excellentissimis Dominum Arfid Wittemberg . . . & Palatinatum Posnaniensem et Calicensem' AGAD AKW, Szwedzkie, k. 11b no. 21; 'Akta ugody kiejdańskiej 1655 roku' W. Konopczyński and K. Lepszy (eds.), *Ateneum Wileńskie* X (1935) p. 3.

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It was only just beginning. The Commonwealth never really recovered from the blows inflicted during the Second Northern War (1655–60) and the Thirteen Years War with Muscovy (1654–67).² Despite the apparently favourable terms of Oliva, which granted Sweden nothing it had not possessed *de facto* already, and the successful campaigns of 1660–1 which drove the Muscovites out of most of Lithuania, the so-called ‘Swedish Deluge’ of 1655 triggered the Commonwealth’s precipitate decline. The cycle of wars which had begun in 1648 did not end until 1721. Almost immediately after a disadvantageous peace had been made with Muscovy at Andrusovo in 1667,³ resurgent Ottoman power involved the Commonwealth in a series of wars which lasted until the peace of Karlowitz in 1699, only to be followed by the Great Northern War (1700–21), largely fought on Polish territory. In 1648, as the rest of Europe emerged from the wreckage of the Thirty Years War, Poles had looked with pride on their political system and had felt secure in their boundaries; by 1721 their political system was the object of scorn throughout Europe, Russian influence was predominant and they were unable to prevent their neighbours from marching armies through their territory at will. Seventy-five years later, the Commonwealth no longer existed.

The central purpose of this study is to examine why the Commonwealth should have failed so spectacularly to overcome the political and military crisis it faced as a result of the Cossack rising and the Muscovite and Swedish invasions. Most European states struggled to adjust to the new demands of warfare in the early modern period and most underwent a comparable crisis at some point between the late sixteenth and the last quarter of the seventeenth century. All governments struggled to raise the vast sums of money required to support the new-style armies; many faced violent political upheaval, civil war, or foreign intervention in consequence, without experiencing long-term political degeneration. Indeed, comparable crises were often important for the establishment of more effective systems of government, frequently stimulating the expansion of central authority under a king who could act as a national rallying-point against internal anarchy or foreign invaders. The French Crown emerged from the wars of religion and the Frondes with its authority strengthened, as challenges to its position in the form of religious or noble rebellion failed to provide a viable alternative to a hereditary monarchy which acted as guarantor of the social and political order. The ‘Time of Troubles’ in Muscovy, just as traumatic as what came to be known as the Swedish Deluge in Poland–Lithuania,

² There were three periods of general warfare in the Baltic region between Ivan IV’s invasion of Livonia in 1558 and the end of the Great Northern War in 1721: the First Northern War (1563–70), usually called the Seven Years War of the North in Anglo-Saxon historiography; the Second Northern War (1655–60) and the Great Northern War (1700–21). To emphasise the essential continuity between the three wars, I prefer the Polish, rather than the Anglo-German convention, in which the conflict of 1655–60 is sometimes called the First Northern War.

³ Hadiach had proved abortive, and the Ukraine was divided along the Dnieper, with Muscovy keeping Kiev, initially for three years, in fact for good: it was surrendered *de iure* in 1686. Andrusovo also saw the loss of Smolensk and the palatinate of Chernigov.

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ended with the establishment of the Romanov dynasty upon the throne, while failure in war opened the way to the introduction of royal absolutism by *coup d'état* in Denmark in 1660 and with the consent of the diet in Sweden in 1680. Absolutism did not always ensure the acquisition or maintenance of great power status, or even military success; nevertheless, it could protect states from the kind of foreign interference experienced by the Commonwealth.⁴ If other states, including Spain, Denmark and Sweden, experienced relative decline as bigger and more powerful neighbours proved better able to meet the challenges posed by military change, none experienced paralysis of central government on such a scale, and no other major European state disappeared from the map in the early modern period.

What was different about the Commonwealth? There appear to be no compelling socio-economic reasons why its political development should have diverged so dramatically from the central and east European norm in which central authority was extended through the development of a symbiotic relationship between ruler and nobility, and noble service in the army and the royal bureaucracy was rewarded by the extension and maintenance of peasant serfdom. If, as Anderson argues, service provided vital aristocratic unity for nobilities in eastern Europe which lacked a western-style feudal hierarchy, and if the absolute state in eastern Europe was the repressive machine of the nobility and a necessary device for the consolidation of serfdom, why did it not appear in Poland, where the legal basis of serfdom was complete by the early sixteenth century, and why did it appear in Russia, where the central components of the absolute monarchy were in place long before the final legal consolidation of serfdom took place in 1649? Poland, as much as Russia, lacked a western-style feudal hierarchy, and Anderson begs the question in the case of Russia of how the monarchy acquired sufficient power in the first place for the nobility to need any compact.⁵

The similarities in the socio-economic base of European states east of the Elbe are more striking than the differences. Production of grain, timber, hemp and other primary products was characteristic of all economies of eastern Europe in the early modern period; all suffered from the downturn in the European economy after the 1620s. Both Brandenburg-Prussia and Muscovy, like Poland-Lithuania, were economically backward, poorly urbanised and politically dominated by the nobility, yet both managed to develop successful systems of government by the early eighteenth century, in which standing armies and relatively efficient administrations were maintained with the support and cooperation of the nobility. Both emerged as significant powers in the eighteenth century despite, or perhaps because of, their serf-based economies. When Frederick William, the Great Elector of Brandenburg and the Commonwealth's vassal in Ducal (East) Prussia, created a small force of 8,000 men during the Second Northern War, there was little to suggest that

⁴ J. Gierowski, 'Rzeczpospolita szlachecka wobec absolutystycznej Europy' *Pamiętnik X Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich* 111 (Warsaw, 1971) p. 111.

⁵ P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974) p. 195.

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Brandenburg-Prussia could ever rival its huge neighbour, despite its good showing in support of the Swedish army in the battle of Warsaw in 1656. By 1713, however, the Prussian army had grown to 40,000, small in comparison to the forces maintained by Austria (*c.* 100,000) or Russia (*c.* 200,000), but twice the size of the Polish-Lithuanian standing armies, limited from 1717 to 24,000 (18,000 for Poland, 6,000 for Lithuania), a figure which was purely notional: the actual size of the army was much smaller. By the accession of Frederick the Great in 1740, the Prussian army had grown to 83,000, dwarfing that of its erstwhile master: while eighteenth-century Prussia maintained three to four soldiers per 100 inhabitants, Poland-Lithuania supported one for every 500-600.⁶ There appear to be no convincing socio-economic reasons why Poland-Lithuania should not have evolved in a similar direction to its neighbours.

It was the unique political structure of Poland-Lithuania in the early modern period which set it apart most clearly. The major structural differences stemmed essentially from the series of constitutional changes between 1569 and 1573 associated with the extinction in the male line of the Lithuanian Jagiellonian dynasty. Poland and Lithuania had been joined in a loose personal union since 1385, which had survived until the mid-sixteenth century largely due to common defence needs: both states had been threatened in the late Middle Ages by the crusading states of the Teutonic knights along the Baltic coast, while the sparsely populated grand duchy of Lithuania welcomed Polish military support in its battle with Muscovy over the remnants of Kievan Rus, shattered in the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. Although the Poles asserted the elective nature of their monarchy after 1385, they remained attached to the dynastic principle, electing members of the Jagiellonian house until its extinction in the male line with the death of Sigismund Augustus in 1572.

The union, reaffirmed and strengthened at Horodło in 1413, proved reasonably successful. In the fifteenth century, the challenge of the Teutonic knights had been broken, first at the battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg) in 1410, but particularly during the Thirteen Years War (1454-66) which saw the Poles recapture Danzig and Royal Prussia. The Muscovite threat proved more dangerous, however; by the end of the fifteenth century Muscovy had united the eastern Russian principalities under its rule and liberated itself from Tatar control; now the self-styled tsars of All the Russias could turn their attention to those Russias ruled by Lithuania. The Lithuanian victory at Orsza in 1514 could not compensate for Muscovy's seizure of the great fortress of Smolensk a year earlier. Fighting continued spasmodically and inconclusively until a five-year truce in 1537, later extended until 1562, which left Muscovy in control of Smolensk and Seversk.

Ivan IV's invasion of Livonia in 1558 persuaded Sigismund Augustus (1548-72)

⁶ E. Rostworowski, 'War and society in the noble Republic of Poland-Lithuania in the eighteenth century' in G.E. Rothenberg, B.K. Király and P.F. Sugar (eds.), *East-central European Society and War in the Pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth Century* (Boulder, Colorado, 1982) p. 165.

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to take action to establish a closer union, since the personal link between Poland and Lithuania was threatened by his lack of heirs. The support of the Polish nobility and the lesser Lithuanian nobles, who wished to share the extensive privileges enjoyed by their Polish counterparts, was sufficient to overcome the opposition of the great Lithuanian and Ruthenian magnates. The Union of Lublin (1569) created a central diet for Poland and Lithuania, although Lithuania kept its own administration, army and legal system. In the struggle to overcome magnate resistance, the Lublin diet had transferred control of Volhynia, Podlasie and the Ukraine to Poland, henceforth known as *Korona* (the Crown), to distinguish it from the grand duchy of Lithuania.

The Union of Lublin established a unique political structure. While multiple kingdoms were common in early modern Europe, they usually consisted of dynastic unions, in which the monarch provided the sole common political element between his diverse territories. The establishment of a common diet predated the Anglo-Scottish union of parliaments by 138 years and provided rulers of the Commonwealth with a series of problems not faced by any of their European contemporaries. The existence of a central diet with wide powers which met regularly made opposition to royal demands easier to coordinate and meant that the king could not play off one estates body against another, or move separately against each, as monarchs could elsewhere. Furthermore, although there was a common diet, the existence of a separate government in Lithuania, which duplicated exactly the great offices of state in Poland, made the coordination of royal policy difficult. Finally, the continuing dependence of envoys to the diet upon the instructions of the dietines, whose delegates they were, meant that the diet was limited in its ability to enforce its will.

Thus Sigismund Augustus's success in creating a more united and centralised state through the union was only partial: Lithuania was tied more closely to Poland but was not absorbed, while the issue of where power ultimately lay, with the king, the diet or the dietines, was left unresolved. The imperfect political union was matched by a similarly incomplete social and cultural union. Although the Lithuanian and much of the Ruthenian nobility underwent steady cultural polonisation after 1569, regional loyalties remained strong despite the spread of the Sarmatian myth after 1569, which claimed a common descent for the Polish and Lithuanian nobility from the ancient Sarmatian tribe.⁷ The different social structure of

⁷ For an introduction to Sarmatism, see S. Cynarski, 'The shape of Sarmatian ideology in Poland' *Acta Poloniae Historica* 19 (1969). The vital question of Lithuanian identity between 1569 and 1795 has not, on the whole, been well researched. The development of modern nationalism in the lands of the partitioned Commonwealth after 1795 and the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the creation of independent states of Poland and Lithuania in 1918 have created a legacy of bitterness above which scholars have often proved unable to rise: see, for example, the debate in *Slavic Review* 22 (1963). Polish scholars after 1945, forced to work in a Marxist framework, frequently overstressed the impact of Sarmatism, taking this ideological superstructure to reveal the existence of a genuine class-unity whose economic basis, let alone its political expression, is dubious to say the least. For a recent view of

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Lithuania and the Ukraine, where the nobility was much less numerous and its leading members, the great magnates, far wealthier than in Poland, meant that these figures exercised much greater political influence than their Polish counterparts. After the absorption of Volhynia, Podlasie and the Ukraine in 1569, the influence of Ruthenian magnates in Poland was disproportionate to their numbers, while Lithuanian magnates, still smarting over the loss of these territories, jealously defended what remained of Lithuanian autonomy. Unlike the British union, so clearly dominated after 1707 by England, the Union of Lublin was between better-matched partners, despite the transfer of such vast territories in 1569.

It was in those eastern territories that the crisis began. Although large magnate estates had been built up and colonised in Lithuania and Belorussia in the fifteenth century, and nobles had been granted extensive rights over their serfs in a series of edicts between 1387 and 1547, it was not until after 1569 that the vast lands of the Ukraine were developed on a large scale, a process stimulated by the growing demand for agricultural products and raw materials from western Europe and facilitated by the transfer of the Ukraine to Poland, which opened it up to Polish colonisation. The Ukraine, not being served by the great rivers which flowed into the Baltic, did not play a large part in the export of grain but developed as an important cattle-rearing area. The resultant development of large-scale estates and the imposition of serfdom upon the peasants reached its climax in the 1640s, by which time the battle by landlords to extend their control had tied down many who had originally fled to the Ukraine to escape the harsh conditions elsewhere.⁸

The 1648 rising received massive support from Ukrainian peasants, but it was not the direct result of peasant discontent. Peasant risings elsewhere in the Commonwealth, in protest against the harsh conditions of serfdom, were not uncommon but they tended to be highly localised and easy to control. In the Ukraine, however, it was not just the peasants who were discontented. Not every member of the Ukrainian elites benefited from the union after 1569, since not all who considered themselves noble were subsequently recognised as such. Ukrainian society came to be dominated by the increasingly polonised elite of magnate families, such as the Wiśniowieckis, Ostrogskis and Zbaraskis, and families of Polish origin such as the Potockis, Koniecpolskis, or Zamoyskis. As the estates of these families grew, largely due to their access to royal patronage, so did their power and influence over the indigenous petty and middle nobility, which provoked widespread resentment.

the problem, which reflects the difficulties without entirely abandoning an inappropriate nineteenth-century concept of nationhood, see J. Ochmański, 'The national idea in Lithuania from the sixteenth to the first half of the nineteenth century: the problem of cultural-linguistic differentiation' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10 (1986); cf. J. Tazbir, 'Die Polonisierungprozesse in der Adelsrepublik' *Acta Poloniae Historica* 55 (1987).

⁸ The scale of the expansion was staggering. In 1630, the Wiśniowiecki family estates in the Ukraine comprised 616 settlements. By 1640, this figure had risen to 7,603; in 1645, the Wiśniowieckis controlled 38,000 settlements, with some 230,000 'subjects'. Z. Wójcik, *Dzikie pola w ogniu. O kozaczyźnie w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* 3rd edition (Warsaw, 1968) p. 140.

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The Zaporozhian Cossacks constituted another, more dangerous, elite which became increasingly alienated. Originally adventurers and freebooters who lived largely by mounting raids against their Tatar neighbours, the Cossacks by the seventeenth century constituted a substantial military force which was vital for the protection of the Commonwealth's south-eastern border. Although the core of Cossack society was Ruthenian, it was composed of many different ethnic and social elements. Based on their stronghold, the Zaporozhian Sich below the great rapids on the Dnieper river, the Cossacks constituted an independent force which was difficult to control.

As such, they were of constant concern to the Polish and Lithuanian nobility and especially to the magnate elite of the Ukraine. The diet attempted to control the situation from the late sixteenth century by the maintenance of an official register: only those on the register could bear arms and fight as Cossacks and enjoy the privileges of the Cossack elite. Most registered Cossacks lived in the frontier towns of the Ukraine, however, and the Zaporozhian Sich remained largely independent of control. The exclusion of many from the register increased tension, provoking discontent and periodic risings. While registered Cossacks had every incentive to support the government, the increase in their number in wartime and the reduction of the register in peacetime, or after risings, undermined the trust of all Cossacks. The cutting of the register to a mere 6,000 following the crushing of the 1638 rising caused simmering resentment in the Ukraine, which finally boiled over in 1648, when Cossacks, nobles and peasants joined in a massive revolt which the Commonwealth was wholly unable to control.⁹

Religion provided vital ideological cement for the rebels. The Union of Lublin created a state which enjoyed a religious pluralism unparalleled in early modern Europe. In sweeping up the western remnants of Kievan Rus in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the pagan Lithuanian elite had come to rule over a large number of Orthodox subjects. In order to win the Polish throne in 1385, however, Władysław Jagiełło converted to Catholicism and introduced the Catholic hierarchy to his Lithuanian and Ruthenian lands. Although much of the Lithuanian nobility converted to Catholicism after 1385, many nobles and the vast majority of the peasantry remained Orthodox, especially in the Ukraine, where Orthodoxy continued to flourish, and Kiev reestablished itself as a leading centre of Orthodox learning and culture.

Apart from this large Orthodox minority, the Commonwealth also contained Armenian Christians, Jews and Moslem Tatars. The situation was further complicated by the spread of Protestantism: first Lutheranism among the German inhabitants of Royal Prussia, then Calvinism, Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism

⁹ For the background to the revolt see F. Sysyn, 'The problem of nobilities in the Ukrainian past: the Polish period 1569–1648' in I.L. Rudnytsky (ed.), *Rethinking Ukrainian History* (Edmonton, 1981) and T. Chynczewska-Hennel, 'The national consciousness of Ukrainian nobles and Cossacks from the end of the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10 (1986).

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among the nobility. Protestant nobles claimed that religious freedom was part of the liberties of the nobility and full religious toleration was established by the 1573 Warsaw Confederation. Nevertheless, legal toleration did not mean that relations between the confessions were harmonious and anti-Protestant feeling among the Catholic majority enabled Sigismund III (1587–1632) to launch a great Counter-Reformation offensive, spearheaded by the Jesuits. From a late-sixteenth century peak, in which over half the chamber of envoys (the lower house of the diet) had been Protestant, the number of Protestants declined rapidly, as the Court, especially under Sigismund III and John Casimir, discriminated heavily in favour of Catholics in the distribution of patronage.

It was not just Protestants who were affected. The Union of Lublin, which transferred the Ukraine to Polish control, opened it up to the forces of the Counter-Reformation. Orthodox nobles were also affected by the growing monopoly on royal patronage enjoyed by Catholics, and a number of leading Orthodox families turned Catholic. The situation was further complicated by one of the great triumphs of the Counter-Reformation, when the establishment of the Greek Catholic or Uniate Church at the Union of Brest in 1596 sought to end the schism between Orthodox and Catholic: the Commonwealth's Orthodox hierarchy agreed to accept the authority of the Pope in return for being allowed to follow the Orthodox rite. The great hopes inspired by the union were soon disappointed, however. Catholic prelates in Lithuania and the Ukraine jealously guarded their jurisdictions against their Uniate counterparts, while the state lacked the means to enforce the ban on Orthodoxy. Much of the Orthodox hierarchy became Uniate but the bulk of the parish clergy and the vast majority of the people did not. A clandestine hierarchy was soon established, and Orthodoxy continued to flourish. Few great nobles became Uniates, preferring either to turn Catholic or remain Orthodox. Although Władysław IV (1632–48) restored legal recognition to the Orthodox Church in 1632, the damage had been done. The Uniate Church remained to complicate Catholic–Orthodox relations, the gap between the Orthodox mass of the population in the Ukraine and an increasingly Catholic high nobility had widened and the Cossacks, denied recognition as part of the Commonwealth's ruling elite, could portray themselves as the defenders of Ruthenian and Orthodox culture, as well as the upholders of peasant rights against their magnate landlords.¹⁰ Thus, while the union worked tolerably well in Lithuania, whose cultural and political autonomy was protected to an extent and where both the Uniate and Catholic Churches proved more successful in weaning the people away from Orthodoxy, it failed in those lands transferred to Polish political control in 1569, a failure whose extent only became apparent after 1648.

¹⁰ For the religious problems of the Ukraine see F. Sysyn, *Between Poland and the Ukraine. The Dilemma of Adam Kysil, 1600–1653* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985) pp. 26–32 and H. Litwin, 'Catholicisation among the Ruthenian nobility and assimilation processes in the Ukraine during the years 1569–1648' *Acta Poloniae Historica* 55 (1987).

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The Commonwealth's political system was dominated by one class: the nobility, which constituted between 6 and 8 per cent of the population.¹¹ Noble power had first asserted itself after the extinction of the native Piast dynasty on the death of Casimir the Great in 1370, when, like their Hungarian and Bohemian neighbours, the Poles established the elective nature of their monarchy. Henceforward, the Polish *szlachta* (nobility) demanded substantial political and social privileges as the price of royal elections or in return for permitting mobilisation of the *levée-en-masse*: at Košice (1374), where Louis of Anjou exempted the nobility from all taxation without their consent, beyond a symbolic payment of two *groszy* for every *łan*,¹² Czerwińsk (1421), Jedlno (1430), Nieszawa (1454) and Piotrków (1496).

From 1374, the need for noble consent for extraordinary taxation necessitated the assembly of local or provincial dietines (*sejmiki*) and of a central diet which soon claimed a role in safeguarding noble privileges. The Privileges of Nieszawa required the king to seek the permission of the dietines before calling out the *levée-en-masse*. The diet, composed of envoys from local dietines, met ever more frequently thereafter, usually to agree to taxation. It was finally guaranteed a central place in the political system by the statute of *Nihil Novi* (1505), which decreed that no new law could be introduced without its consent.

The diet's composition was determined with the definitive adoption of a bicameral structure at Piotrków in 1493 and with the admission of the Lithuanians in 1569. Henceforward, it was composed of three estates: the king, the senate and the chamber of envoys. The senate was based on the old royal council and, from 1635, numbered 150: the two Catholic archbishops (of Gniezno and Lwów), fifteen Catholic bishops, thirty-five palatines (provincial governors) and the starosta of Samogitia, who performed the same function, thirty-five major castellans, who exercised judicial and administrative office in the main cities of each palatinate, fifty-two minor castellans and ten government ministers (the chancellor, vice-chancellor, grand marshal, treasurer and marshal of the court, each office duplicated in Poland and Lithuania). The chamber of envoys had no fixed number of members: although most palatinates sent two envoys, some sent as many as six, while there was no limit on the number that could be sent by the palatinates of Royal Prussia. From 1635, the chamber had 172 members (118 from Poland, forty-eight from Lithuania and six

¹¹ The size of the Polish nobility is a matter of some debate. Rostworowski has recently questioned the figure of 8–10 per cent of the population which is usually given for the eighteenth century, rounding it down to some 6–6.5 per cent before the First Partition. E. Rostworowski, 'Ilu było w Rzeczypospolitej obywateli szlachty?' *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 94 (1987). The percentage was much higher in Royal Prussia and Poland proper than in Lithuania and the more sparsely populated eastern lands. The percentage of noble inhabitants for the Commonwealth as a whole was far higher than elsewhere in Europe, with the exception of Spain and Hungary.

¹² In the mid-fourteenth century, one *groszy* was the price of two chickens: H. Cywiński, *Dziesięć wieków pieniądza polskiego* (Warsaw, 1987) p. 38. The *łan* was a measure of land: for details see glossary.