Introduction
Classical Republican Tradition and the Polish Republican Discourse

> *Civilis disciplina, nihil aliud est, quam vitae nostrae, civitatisque bene et iuste gubernandae scientia . . . Finis civilis disciplinae est, bonum civitatis, scilicet ipsum iustum: id autem est, publica utilitas.*[1]
>
> Wawrzyniec Grzymała Goślicki

The political theory that developed in Poland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can be read as primarily a theory of the *libera res publica,* a free, well-ordered commonwealth. The term *res publica* was widely used in both its Latin version and Polish calque (*rzeczpospolita*) and indicated that with the rise of the Renaissance prominence was given also in political theory to the heritage of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophy and its key political and ethical concepts. The Kingdom of Poland, which by the sixteenth century was already being called the *Rzeczpospolita* and would be transformed into the *Rzeczpospolita of the Two Nations* (Poland–Lithuania) as the result of the 1569 Polish–Lithuanian Union of Lublin, was to follow the republican discourses that developed widely in the Italian city states. In fact, as the analysis I present here will indicate, it developed its own republican discourse centred around the concept of a *res publica* which reflected both the influence of the ancient and early modern republican tradition and the specific sociopolitical realities that gave rise to the language of liberty and civic virtue.

This study focuses primarily on the Polish republican discourse that flourished in the sixteenth century, and presents a richness of political works with a very strong theoretical component. As my interpretation suggests, this theoretical component needs to be studied as essentially 'republican', that is, shaped by reference to the ideas and concepts of the ancient and early modern republican traditions which the Polish sixteenth-century political discourse adopted in order to develop a theory of the best

[1] Wawrzyniec Goślicki (Laurentius Goslicius), *De optimo senatore libri duo* (1568), Basel, 1593, p. 89.

political order, to help to understand the singular political development and experience of Poland at the turn of the sixteenth century and in subsequent decades. Influenced by the concepts of politics found in Aristotle, Polybius and Cicero as well as in early modern republics, the vision of a well-ordered commonwealth found especially fertile ground to develop in the mixed polity of the *Rzeczpospolita* with representative structures strengthened at the beginning of the sixteenth century, as well as in the growing civic consciousness among the upper strata of Polish society.

The aim of this book is to present a comprehensive analysis of the political discourse that involved a number of authors whose political treatises and political writings contributed to the body of works with a strong republican character. In order to achieve this goal, I engage in both the conceptual analysis and contextualisation of the republican discourse, and examine its affinity with other similar discourses at the time, including its Venetian, Florentine and English counterparts. The purpose of such an examination and comparison is to present the republican character of the sixteenth-century political discourse in Poland–Lithuania and its original contribution, largely overlooked by scholars, to the early modern republican tradition. The sixteenth century can be seen as the most distinctive age in the history of Polish political thought. During that period, the main political ideas built into the republican language of politics and its rhetorical structures reflected a growing awareness that a unique political development was taking place in Poland, which could only be compared by its contemporaries with the experience of the republics of Rome and Venice. Republican political theory developed several major concepts, such as the *res publica,* liberty, the supremacy of the law, civic virtue, the mixed constitution, citizenship and self-government, which in the early modern period were translated or adjusted to specific empirical contexts and focused thought on the required political order. Almost all of the works I discuss were written by political thinkers who were educated in Italy (Florence, Venice, Rome) or France (Paris) as well as at the University of Cracow, and their studies included rhetoric, law and classics, including the great works of the Greek and Roman philosophers and historians. Their background was no different from that of other humanists and republicans. They also pursued a similar aim in their works, often meant as advice books for kings, senators, diplomats or simply citizens, or were concerned with the well-being of the commonwealth. Whichever genre they belonged to, their point of reference was the same: they referred to the classical Greek and Roman authors, and sometimes to their contemporaries, such as

Gasparo Contarini and his reflections on Venice. In search of the most suitable patterns of political thinking, they found the best source of inspiration in Arisotelian and Ciceronian concepts, which let them elaborate on the normative foundations of *de optimo statu rei publicae*, the best possible and attainable commonwealth.

The sixteenth century marks the height of Renaissance humanism and republicanism, both of which were deeply influenced by the classical heritage of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. In contrast to later periods, the term *res publica* was used to depict the good political order of a mixed form and a free political community. The *res publica* was not meant to be the antithesis of a monarchy. Even in Venice, which was not a monarchy, the monarchical element of its constitution, the doge, played an important role in providing balance and harmony within the mixed constitution of what could perhaps be called an aristocratic republic.[2] The very term *res publica* became popular in the Renaissance through the political writings of Cicero and was understood in the Ciceronian manner, which I discuss in Chapter 2. In the Polish context it denoted a free, independent and self-governing political community, a *civitas libera* that guaranteed liberty in its two crucial dimensions. The first dimension of liberty concerned the *societas civilis* itself, a free commonwealth not dependent upon any external master, but free to follow its own will. The second dimension concerned the liberty of the citizens, who enjoyed personal freedom, and had property and political rights, and the only power they were to respect came from the law. In other words, they had no master except the law, but they were also supposed to share in a commitment to the preservation of the commonwealth and the obligation to work for the common good.[3] The Venetian version of this formula became a prototype of republican order for other Renaissance polities, a top-down process of establishing liberty which had taken place in the eighth century when the Republic was founded. In Poland, on the other hand, it was a grass-roots process that secured civic and political liberties for the *szlachta* (nobility) and culminated in the second half of the sixteenth century with the Henrician Articles and the principle of

[2] Gasparo Contarini himself suggests that, saying 'it plainly appears, that in this commonwealth of ours the form of an aristocracy is much more excellent than the popular government' (Contarini, *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, trans. Lewes Lewkenor, London, 1599, bk 1). See also Elisabeth G. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome and Reform*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 169.

[3] Quentin Skinner, 'The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty', in Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, Maurizio Viroli (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 300–3.

elective monarchy.[4] Consequently, the Polish institutional structure of mixed monarchy was seen as successful by the upper strata of society because it provided a foundation for the liberty of the citizens whose polity turned firmly against absolutism. A mixed commonwealth was to be based on the supremacy of the law as the guiding principle of the polity, and aimed to preserve the liberty of its citizens, which became the major political goal of the nobility. Good theoretical grounds for a republican understanding of politics were provided already in the fifteenth century by Cracow commentators on Aristotle's *Politics* who noted that politics was 'the domain of the people who are free, equal by nature, enjoying the same rights and the same equality'.[5] An appreciation of the usefulness of political knowledge came with the claim that once a method was discovered to distinguish between the good and the bad type of rule, it would be obvious to all that good government was established when the polity was organised in the best possible way.[6] This quest for political knowledge, which Wawrzyniec Grzymała Goślicki called *scientia civilis*, quoted in the epigraph above, was facilitated by the institutional development of the Kingdom of Poland, the education of its citizens and their growing awareness that they could shape their own commonwealth themselves, along with its norms, customs and institutions, for which the necessary condition – as they well knew – was the absence of arbitrary power. In the sixteenth century it became evident that the Commonwealth was supposed to be 'the kind of government which has regard not only for the power and authority of a king, but also for the liberty of its citizens'.[7] This remarkable development brought about a rich political discourse whose conceptual analysis presented in the next four chapters will be based on two assumptions or theses. The first concerns its clear affinity with and indebtedness to the republican concepts of politics that belong to what is here called the

[4] For more see Zbigniew Rau, Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski and Marek Tracz-Tryniecki (eds.), *Magna Carta: A Central European Perspective of Our Common Heritage of Freedom*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 127–66. The Henrician Articles (*Artykuły henrykowskie*), named after the first elected king, Henri de Valois (1573), were a set of conditions to which every newly elected king was obliged to agree before his coronation. These conditions guaranteed the constitutional rights and liberties of the *szlachta,* and were supplemented by particular conditions set for individual kings in their 'Pacta Conventa'.

[5] Cited in Paweł Czartoryski, *Wczesna recepcja 'Polityki' Arystotelesa na Uniwersytecie Krakowskim*, Wrocław: PAN, 1963, p. 188.

[6] Ibid., p. 161.

[7] *Christophori Varsevicii De optimo statu libertatis libri duo* (1598), in Krzysztof Koehler (ed.), *Krzysztofa Warszewickiego i Anonima uwagi o wolności szlacheckiej* (Latin text), Cracow: WAM, 2010, p. 210.

classical republican tradition. The second assumption or thesis concerns the comprehensive nature and singularity of the Polish republican discourse and its contribution to the early modern republican tradition. Before discussing the model of interpretation that will be applied, I will first refer to the way in which the classical republican tradition is generally understood and has attracted a lot of scholarly attention in recent decades.[8]

The Classical Republican Tradition

The first vital question that must be addressed at the outset concerns two major categories: 'the classical republican tradition' and 'the order of a *res publica*' (the order of a commonwealth), since both categories are vital for the model of interpretation applied here, and both can easily be contested. I will attempt to clarify their meaning and significance for research on republican ideas and republican discourses in the early modern period. I define the classical republican tradition as a tradition of political thinking that originates in Aristotle's reflections on politics and ethics, and is further developed in ancient Rome, especially by Polybius, Cicero, Seneca, Livy and Sallust. Its main ideas and concepts return during the Renaissance, especially in the Italian city republics such as Florence and Venice, but animate political thinking also in other parts of Europe, where Renaissance humanism took root in the local culture and intellectual life. Republican concepts and ideas evolved in the early modern period and were impacted upon by historical, social and political circumstances, but their core categories remained the same. These included above all a teleological view of a political community aspiring to the attainment of the best political order, that of a *res publica,* a self-governing, mixed polity regarded as the common good of all of its members. In this tradition politics is

[8] See especially J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1: *The Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vols. 1–2; Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002; John Maynor, *Republicanism in the Modern World*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003; Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992; Bill Brugger, *Republican Theory in Political Thought: Virtuous or Virtual?*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999; David Wootton, 'The True Origins of Republicanism: The Disciples of Baron and the Counter-Example of Venturi', in M. Albertone (ed.), *Il repubblicanesimo moderno: L'idea di repubblica nella riflessione storica di Franco Venturi*, Naples: Bibliopolis, 2006, pp. 271–304.

understood as an activity driven by the main goal for which political communities exist: that is, the attempt to build and sustain a political order based on law and equity, which hence could be qualified as just. This was a common theme in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. The republican tradition can then be understood as combining both ancient and early modern republican ideas and visions, among which the most prominent was the concept of the *res publica*. It was first developed by Cicero, but its origins can be traced back to Aristotle's *politeia*.

As such, the republican tradition is different from republicanism as the term that pertains to modern political theories which have a strong anti-monarchical component and bring a different approach to the political order shaped to a large extent by modern individualism and the Enlightenment. Such usage of 'republicanism' is evident in the approach presented in the two volumes of *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage,*[9] which treats republicanism primarily as a modern phenomenon that developed from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The term *res publica,* which does not have an anti-monarchical component, seems to be much better suited to the sixteenth century and the dominant aspiration of the republican understanding of politics at that time. In order to avoid confusion, the term republicanism will not be used here. Instead I will widely apply the term 'republican tradition', as explicated above.

The category of the *res publica,* which is central to this tradition, concerns a just political order that exists for the attainment of the common good of a political community. Its legal and institutional mechanisms, such as the *forma mixta* and the supremacy of law, are also manifest to secure liberty both for the citizens and for the commonwealth. Even though both terms, the 'classical republican tradition' and the *res publica,* have been dismissed by some scholars as misleading,[10] many others have used them in their analysis of the political discourses that developed in the early modern period. In the model of interpretation applied here they are of key importance, but are in fact treated as conceptual tools which allow for a comprehensive and comparative approach to the political discourses of the Renaissance, an intellectual project that made the heritage of ancient

[9] Skinner and van Gelderen (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*.

[10] Wootton, 'The True Origins of Republicanism', pp. 272–86. Cf. James Hankins, 'Exclusivist Republicanism and the Non-Monarchical Republic', *Political Theory* 38(4), 2010, pp. 452–82; Per Mouritsen, 'Four Models of Republican Liberty and Self-Government', in Iseult Honohan and Jeremy Jennings (eds.), *Republicanism in Theory and Practice*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

culture and philosophy its central focus. It is perhaps a matter of convenience for scholars to call the tradition that links Leonardo Bruni with Marcus Tullius Cicero, and Goślicki with Plato and Aristotle 'republican', but it also allows for comparison across contexts and for seeing certain patterns in political thinking and political culture.

The classical republican tradition is also contested as regards its origins and the question of whether it should be traced back to Aristotle, or solely to the tradition of the Roman Republic of Cicero and Polybius.[11] The first major formulation of the republican ideal can be found in Aristotle and his understanding of politics as the activity whose aim is to search for justice and the highest good of a political community.[12] Moreover, Aristotle's conception of the rule of law and the mixed constitution preceded similar concepts formulated by Cicero. Early modern republican theories, especially those which will be discussed here, drew on both these authors and their visions of a good political order. Aristotle's *politeia,* a mixture of democracy and oligarchy, and Cicero's *res publica* were understood as well-ordered civic communities that pursued a substantive goal described simply as the good and happy life or well-being of the community, facilitated by such institutional principles as fairness and the rule of law. In early modern republics including the *Rzeczpospolita,* these concepts would be taken for granted, as those which best depicted a certain political experience for the attainment and preservation of a *libera res publica*.

With the experience of the Italian city republics, the republican vision of politics gained a new dimension and a new theoretical scope which was presented in numerous political treatises in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[13] Until Francesco Guicciardini and Paolo Sarpi[14] its point of departure was always the tradition and experience of the Athenian *polis* or the Roman Republic, and the ideal of a *polis* or *res publica* used to describe a just and civil political order that was considered by thinkers in various historical and social contexts. *Libera res publica* or *civitas libera* is a common normative model built into different republican projects, as we

[11] Especially in the work of Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2; *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2: *Renaissance Virtue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; and *Liberty before Liberalism*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[12] Such an interpretation can be found for example in Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment,* and Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[13] Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 116–21.

[14] Paolo Sarpi, *Istoria del Concilio tridentino* (1619), vols. 1–2, Turin: G. Einaudi, 1974.

would call them today. The ideal of a *res publica* is normative, for it pertains to the substantive dimension, to a political order as it should be once its proper goals are recognised. In the republican theory these goals always include justice and liberty understood as the absence of arbitrary power, two conditions necessary for human progress, for the good and happy life described in Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*. The *res publica* was to take the form of a self-governing polity, a republic as opposed to a monarchy or principality, so that it could preserve the liberty of its citizens. The republic that re-emerged in the civic humanist thought 'was at once universal, in the sense that it existed to realize for its citizens all the values which men were capable of realizing in this life, and particular in the sense that it was finite and located in space and time'.[15] The republican tradition emerged when the normative model of the *res publica* was used over time to shape and reflect upon a certain historical reality and political experience. In this sense, the case of the *Rzeczpospolita* (Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth) is similar to the case of republican Rome or republican Venice, as a conscious effort to shape its citizens' political knowledge and political experience in accordance with the normative model of a free commonwealth which requires constant reflection on the foundations of such a commonwealth and the ways to preserve it. This effort is evident in numerous works by sixteenth-century political writers flourishing in the *Rzeczpospolita,* many of whom were actively involved in the civic and political life of their commonwealth.

Polish Republican Discourse: The Model of Interpretation

Participants in the political discourse in the sixteenth century did not know that they were contributing to what I call an early modern republican tradition, but they were aware of the sources of their ideas and concepts and the purpose for which they were used. Like other Renaissance authors, they were particularly indebted to Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, but they also widely read other thinkers including Greek and Roman historians as well as Italian humanists. Sharing in this circle of readership made them participants in the same tradition of political thinking which had its revival in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries especially in those political communities which aspired to the attainment of the Ciceronian model of a *res publica,* of which republican Rome was the epitome. What I mean by 'republican discourse' is a certain type of reflection and argumentation on the essence

[15] Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment,* p. 3.

of a good political order that is both ideal and temporal. It concerns ideas present in the political and social context shaping reflection on politics, institutions as well as civic awareness and political culture. As elsewhere in Europe, beginning in the fifteenth century, learned Polish statesmen and scholars increasingly turned to historical knowledge and experience as a source of political wisdom. Chronicles of Polish history as well as other universal histories, such as histories of Rome or Venice, were used to reflect not only on the past, but also on contemporary developments and current political vocabulary, of which a notable example is the work of Marcin Kromer (Martinus Cromerus), *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum libri XXX* (1555) and *Polonia sive de situ, populis, moribus, magistratibus et Republica regni Polonici libri duo* (1577). Knowledge of the past became an invaluable resource for the formation of civil or ecclesiastical institutions and effective policy, and for general education.[16] The republican discourse in Poland also played this role, contributing to the development of the political culture and political awareness of the citizens, many of whom were not only recipients of political treatises and historical narratives such as those by Kromer, but also active participants in the discourse and engaged in writing political pamphlets, letters and orations. Although these lesser contributions will not be examined here in much detail, it is worth mentioning that they often corresponded with the major political treatises which will be discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, and which developed what I call a republican theory of politics.

The model of interpretation I apply provides for a conceptual analysis of the major works written by numerous political writers in the sixteenth-century *Rzeczpospolita* and their affinity with the wider republican tradition. My analysis is centred on the key ingredient of the republican discourse – the concept of the *res publica* and its normative and institutional order. The term 'order' is an analytical tool that allows for a close examination of the normative and institutional foundations of a free commonwealth. For republican authors, the establishment and flourishing of a *libera res publica* was the primary goal of political and constitutional developments, which was very clearly established in Machiavelli's *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*, today regarded as one of the most important republican works of the early modern period.[17] What Maurizio Viroli said about the nature of Machiavelli's republicanism

[16] Nicholas Popper, 'European Historiography in English Political Culture', in Malcolm Smuts (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Age of Shakespeare*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[17] See for example Bock, et al. (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism*; Viroli, *Machiavelli*, pp. 114–41; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Machiavelli and Rome: The Republic as Ideal and as History', in John M. Najemy,

could easily be said about the major republican works written in Poland in the same epoch:

> a commitment to the ideal of a well-ordered republic – that is, a republic which is kept in order by the rule of law and by constitutional arrangements that ensure that each component of the polity has its proper place; it is a commitment to the principles of the political and civil life (*vivere politico, vivere civile*) and to a conception of political liberty understood as an absence of personal dependence, which he inherited from the jurists, the theorists of communal self-government and the civic humanists of the Trecento and the Quattrocento.[18]

Thus it can be argued that the very concept of the *res publica* concerned both the normative and institutional foundations of the best possible political order.

It is the recognition of the nature or essence of the true *res publica* combined with reflection on historical examples of such order that we find in republican treatises such as Machiavelli's *Discorsi*. Let us now elaborate on the very term 'order' and its appropriateness as regards republican visions of politics. As defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of English,* an order is 'a state in which everything is in its correct or appropriate place', and in a more general sense, it is 'the arrangement or disposition of people or things in relation to each other according to a particular sequence, pattern, or method'.[19] For a political community such an arrangement applies to its very foundations: the way they are organised to produce a harmonious unity. Philosophically, the category of order was first introduced as *logos* by pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, such as Heraclitus, for whom *logos* was as an active rational and spiritual principle that permeated all reality, the *cosmos*. In Greek tragedy and in Plato, the *cosmos* was the symbol of perfection that arises from harmonies combining to form a - unity.[20] In Plato's *Republic,* order understood as perfect harmony exists first in the human soul and then in a republic, which due to the harmony between its constitutive elements becomes a perfect or perfectly ordered commonwealth.[21] Both Plato and Thomas Aquinas shared the view that human categories reflect objective order, the structure of the universe which

The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 144–56.

[18] Viroli, *Machiavelli,* p. 116.

[19] Online: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/order. Accessed 30 Apr. 2019.

[20] John M. Major, *Sir Thomas Elyot and Renaissance Humanism*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964, p. 180.

[21] Plato, *The Republic,* bk IV; and especially Plato, *Gorgias,* 507e–508a.