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Edited by W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, R. Dyboski  
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THE  
CAMBRIDGE HISTORY  
OF POLAND  
1697–1935

# THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF POLAND

FROM AUGUSTUS II TO PILSUDSKI  
(1697–1935)

EDITED BY  
W. F. REDDAWAY  
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O. HALECKI  
R. DYBOSKI

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*To*

THE MEMORY OF  
HAROLD TEMPERLEY

## PREFACE

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF POLAND, to be completed in two volumes, owes its origin to the initiative of Professor Harold Temperley and to friendly meetings inspired by him of Polish and British historians at Warsaw and in Cambridge. To his sponsorship was also due the generous help and encouragement received from the Polish government and, in particular, from their Ambassador, Count Edward Raczyński. The Editors deplore Professor Temperley's untimely death and dedicate to his memory the work which he saw far advanced but not completed. Planned in the autumn of 1936, it was designed to trace from the earliest times the antecedents of a nation which had lately been restored to liberty and which was building up a stable and progressive State. In 1939, when the narrative approached completion, however, Poland was suddenly subjected to a new partition, far more malicious and violent than those redressed by the Allies twenty years before.

Since the outbreak of war all literary communication with Poland has ceased. We know that all our Polish contributors have undergone great suffering. Many have been arrested or even flung into concentration camps. On 23 November 1939, Professor Dembiński died under the menace of deportation, and on 28 December Professor Estreicher, after enduring it. In this country, Miss Monica Gardner perished through enemy action in April 1941. Of the Editors, Professor Dyboski was cut off by the occupation of Cracow, and Professor Halecki, for several months, by the downfall of France. As it happens, however, the later half of the projected history has suffered less than the earlier and, as a study of the decline, the servitude and the rebirth of Poland, it now receives separate publication.

For the benefit of students unacquainted with the stages by which Poland reached her zenith in the sixteenth century and then declined, a brief Introductory Note has been inserted. Chapters III and IV throw light on her position in 1697, when the formal narrative begins. It is carried to the death of Marshal Pilsudski in 1935, very succinctly for the latest decade except on topics such as literature and

art where the sources are already fully known. In the volume dealing with the period before 1697, a political bibliography and a geographical survey covering the whole history will be included.

In the difficult question of nomenclature, the Editors' practice has been to print in their familiar form names which are commonly Anglicised, and, so far as possible, to present others as the several contributors desire. Alternative forms are often added in brackets, and thanks to the invaluable work of Mr A. P. Goudy, most difficulties may be removed by consultation of the index.

W. F. R.

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

**T**HE year 1697, when after an interregnum, the Saxon Augustus succeeded John Sobieski (1674–96) as king, is universally regarded as a landmark in the decline of Poland. The Polish ruling class, incapable as then organized of a successful domestic or foreign policy, with elaborate ceremony entrusted its highest office to an unworthy German prince. Two Saxon reigns (1697–1763) brought Poland within sight of dismemberment and in 1795 she ceased to be a constituent state of Europe. With both German and Russian statesmen it had become an axiom that despite their eight centuries of history the Poles were for ever incapable of independence.

The long tragedy of which the final act began in 1697 originated at least as early as the era of the Reformation. Few can now doubt that the “golden freedom” of the Polish squires was chaos thinly gilded, or that their pride in a constitution which as they held drew the best from monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, sprang from failure to comprehend any of the three. The downfall in 1697 seems the more tragic that it followed swiftly on the resplendent triumph of 1683, when Polish troops led by a Polish king once again saved Europe from her invaders. The rescue of Vienna from the Turks by Sobieski was indeed the most famous achievement in all Polish history. Foreign nations could know little of the victor’s domestic failures, or of the malorganization which was soon to paralyse both Poles and Turks. They could as little foresee the imminent advance of Russia. For Poland the rescue of Vienna was the last gleam of the setting sun.

By 1697, indeed, it was obvious that the Polish empire had failed to maintain the full amplitude of the early seventeenth century. Before Gustavus Adolphus (1611–32) had, in his later years, taught the Poles that Sweden was no longer “a petty foe”, their empire had become the most spacious in Europe, comprising more than double the 150,000 square miles which were restored to them after the Great War of 1914–18. On the west, Poles and Germans faced each other across a frontier like that of 1922, in the north somewhat more ample but lacking the Silesian acquisitions further south. Towards the Baltic, however, East Prussia, like Danzig, was a Polish vassal, while modern Lithuania, Latvia and southern Estonia formed part of Poland. The tsardom of the Romanov dynasty in 1613 followed days in which at least the partition of Muscovy seemed imminent, and the sight of Poles in

occupation of the Kremlin did much to rouse the popular revolt which gave it birth. None the less, the Polish eastern frontier lay close to Pskov and embraced the vital fortress of Smolensk together with Kiev, the Jerusalem of the Russian race. Southern Poland included the Carpathians, and through its Dnieper region gained contact with the Black Sea.

A short half-century, however, sufficed to show the weakness of this vast domain. While the Swedish warrior-kings lopped off provinces in the north, formed leagues of spoliation and even marched into Galicia, the Hohenzollerns contrived to master East Prussia, and the Romanovs detached great areas in the east and south-east. After 1660 Poland renounced all Livonia save a southern fraction. In 1657 East Prussia was substantially conceded to the Great Elector, Frederick William of Brandenburg. The peace of Andrussow (1667) transferred to the Tsar a broad belt of White Russia, comprising Smolensk, Czernigov, Kiev and Pultava, and inevitably suggesting further advances along lines of race, geography and religion.

The fundamental cause of Polish retrogression was undoubtedly the overwhelming preponderance of the squires in the Polish state. There were other nations in Europe where history had given the acres and the administration to the warrior class. Only in Poland, however, did that class monopolize the wealth, the power and the administration, secular and spiritual, social and political, of the whole countryside. When the growth of the grain trade opened new perspectives to Poland the squires were the producers. Titles of nobility were banned and, although the economic preponderance of a dozen families made them petty kings, every gentleman was eligible for the double hierarchy of offices which the Polish-Lithuanian state maintained. A Polish squire, dictator to his serfs and deeming the king his equal, was warranted in regarding himself as the joint ruler of the nation.

The “gentry outlook” fostered by the circumstances of Polish life might well be heightened by consciousness of the glories of Poland’s past. Few nations in the first six centuries of their history have produced so many distinguished rulers. From Boleslas the Brave (992–1025) to the Hungarian Stephen Batory (1576–86), a monarch unsurpassed in vigour and success, the list is punctuated with considerable names. Casimir the Great (1333–70), Jadwiga (1384–99), who founded an empire and may yet be canonized a saint, Sigismund I (1506–48), famed both for extending the boundaries of the empire and for advancing Polish culture, his son Sigismund Augustus (1548–72), under whom Poland reached her zenith—these

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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are perhaps the chief of the hereditary kings. Among great uncrowned Poles, Copernicus (1473–1543) and Stwosz (better known as Veit Stoss, 1438–1533) rank high in Europe, while Łaski and Zamoycki are but the foremost in the superb galaxy of the sixteenth century, Poland's golden age.

National achievements were no less brilliant. The overthrow of the Teutonic Knights at Tannenberg (Grunwald) in 1410 was the Trafalgar or Waterloo of Polish history. The attraction of Lithuania and her incorporation in 1569 shaped the future for generations. Batory's triumphs over Tartars and Muscovites, followed by the creation in 1596 of the Uniate Church, which enabled Greek Catholics to become subject to the Pope, made the last quarter of the sixteenth century resplendent. With or above these notable collective achievements may be ranked the establishment, by centuries of evolution, of certain salient national characteristics. Eloquence, sensibility, artistic talent, hospitality and charm—these the Poles share with other branches of the Slavonic race. In tolerance, in fortitude and in capacity for family life they had already become unsurpassed.

The seventeenth century none the less saw Poland ripen for her downfall in the eighteenth. The curtailment of her empire had but begun. How could a disintegrating nation resist vastly increased pressure from without?

In domestic disintegration and in foreign pressure the long reign of Sigismund III, the first Swedish king of Poland (1587–1632), has a sad pre-eminence. The so-called "King of the Jesuits" identified with aggressive Romanism a state formerly famous for tolerance. Such a policy challenged both Sweden, fundamentally Lutheran, and Muscovy, which was no less fundamentally Greek, while the tolerant Hohenzollerns of Berlin were Polish vassals for Protestant East Prussia. Before Sigismund died the Swedes had conquered Riga and paved the way for the amazing incursions of later years. The Hohenzollerns and Romanovs, however, were to be yet more dangerous foes, the one through the military monarchy which the Great Elector (1640–88) initiated, the other, because all the eastern Polish borderlands were Russian in speech and faith. When Little Russia joined with Moscow, Poland lost much of her Ukraine. In combating Russia, moreover, the Poles were handicapped by the inexorable decline of the unprogressive Turkish power, the Muscovites' natural foe.

Poland's most dangerous enemies, however, were the laws and customs in which her squires embodied their victory over all other forces in Church and State. The aversion of the gentry from trade was

fatal to Polish town life or maritime endeavour, while their greed for power and revenue kept benefices in their hands and caused the enslavement of the peasants. To safeguard their individual and collective independence, parliament became a mere conference of their envoys. By exercising his *liberum veto*, a single deputy could “explode” the assembly and annihilate the legislation of a session. Of the fifty-five biennial sessions after 1652, forty-eight were thus destroyed. The Polish remedy of “confederation”, the formation of an armed league for effecting public aims, seemed to foreign observers merely legalized rebellion. Worst of all was the shattering of that monarchy which for several centuries had done most to render Poland great. When the Jagiellon dynasty (1386–1572) died out, the squires made the crown elective, binding every king-elect by *pacta conventa*, agreements by which he assumed new burdens and ceded ancient powers. In order that the sovereign might be weak and taxation light, the standing army and the national revenue became derisory. In a century and a quarter Poland experienced all the classic defects which have made elective monarchies “beacons of warning in history”. Choice by a vast body of gentry assembled under arms meant faction fights, intrigues, corruption by foreign candidates, and the impulsive or fantastic choice of men. A king of Poland, wrote an Irish resident, is styled a king of kings and lord of lords, since he hath no better than companions and equals for his subjects.

Such was “the nation”, gifted but misguided, proud alike of its past history and “crazy constitution”, which assembled in May 1697 to fill the throne of Sobieski.