

## LITHUANIA AND POLAND THROUGH THE AGES

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IT is a rather rare occurrence in the history of mankind when the interests of any two nations are as closely interwoven as are those of Lithuania and Poland. Their destinies were actually intertwined; yet historical literature is very inaccurate in its presentation of this peculiar relationship. To discuss this singular entanglement fully in one short article is quite impossible. Therefore, we shall confine ourselves to the discussion of the relationship of Lithuania and Poland from the beginning of their political association in 1385 to its consequent dissolution in 1795.

### LITHUANIAN REGENT ON THE THRONE OF POLAND

A CLOSE tie was inaugurated between Lithuania and Poland at the end of the 14th century when Poland chose as its King, Jogaila, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, who started the dynasty which ruled Poland for nearly 200 years. At the end of the 14th century, for all practical purposes, Lithuania was still a pagan country, in spite of the missions and churches that were built there earlier. Poland, on the other hand, had been a Christian country since the 10th century. At this time, however, Poland had come to a critical point in its history — the end of its royal dynasty. After the death of Ludwig d'Anjou, ruler of Hungary and Poland (1370—1382.), the heir to the Polish throne became his young daughter Jadvyga; and Jogaila, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, was chosen to be her husband. This was purely a marriage of convenience. Both countries were having troubles with their foreign possessions. For several decades they had been vying with one another, occasionally coming to actual battles, for the territory of Western Ukraina. Poland surmized that once the Lithuanian regent became its King the argument would automatically be settled. Another factor that strongly favored a closer association between the two nations was the threat of a common enemy — the Teutonic Order. This was of vital importance to Lithuania, who had been fighting a war with the Order in Prussia and Livonia for the last 150 years. Lithuania was also interested, with the help of Poland, in breaking through the Order blockade which cut Lithuania off from Western Europe. As for Jogaila himself, he was concerned with the prospects of his future dynasty. At that time Poland, though far from being Lithuania's equal territorially (much smaller), was not an unfavorable asset to the widely practiced "matrimonial policy" of the Gediminas dynasty.

Consequently, in 1385, at the castle of Kreva in Lithuania, the marriage contract was signed with the envoys from Poland. In it Jogaila promised, in the event that he was chosen king of Poland, to let himself — and also his brother — be baptized; he promised to baptize his whole country, and to join all the territories under Lithuanian control to those of Poland (*coronae regni Poloniae perpetuo applicare*).

This contract presupposed another document which Jogaila should have drawn up in order to carry out his promises in the marriage contract but we have no evidence of this document, and it seems most likely that Jogaila never did draw it up. Further developments in the relationship of these two countries were directed not so much by acts and contracts as by life itself, although written documents are also very numerous.

### THE LOOSENING OF THE TIES PROPITIATED BY JOGAILA

In 1386, Jogaila went to Poland, was baptized and given the name of Vladislovas, married Jadvyga, and decided to remain in Poland. But he soon saw that it would be impossible to rule Lithuania efficiently from Poland. Consequently, Jogaila returned to Lithuania the next year, took care of the matters pertaining to the Church, and made Skirgaila, his brother, his co-regent in Vilnius (capitol of Lithuania) during his absence. Five years later, however, Jogaila was forced to appoint his cousin Vytautas as his co-regent in Lithuania in place of Skirgaila.

After ten years of struggle for power, the energetic Vytautas would no longer remain subject to Jogaila. Never openly denying the claims of Jogaila in Lithuania, Vytautas slowly fortified himself to such an extent that not only did he chase out the brothers of Jogaila, but he also forced Jogaila himself to lose all actual power in Lithuania.

Jogaila was not very much disturbed by this state of affairs. It was the Poles who began to realize the futility of the promises made at Kre-va in 1385, at the signing of the marriage contract, to annex Lithuania to Poland and that Lithuania was in no way coming closer to being a province of Poland. Vytautas even went so far as to reclaim certain territories from Poland which had formerly belonged to Lithuania. In other words, he reclaimed them from the King in whose name he was supposed to be ruling in Lithuania. When Poland began to complain about his audacity, Vytautas was always ready to proclaim that he was subject to the king of Poland. In one of his proclamations, he goes so far as to state that his sole purpose of writing it is put an end to the complaints (*volentes ora oblo-quentium... obstruere*). And such proclamations became quite numerous. At the same time, Vytautas exacted certain documents from Poland by which "he insured his position in Lithuania. The Acts of 1401 guaranteed his supremacy in Lithuania until his death, and those of 1413 conferred on Lithuania the power to select the successor of Vytautas. In other words, this was a factual liberation of Lithuania from the rule of Poland, although the claims of Jogaila on Lithuania were not annulled. At the end of his life, Vytautas wanted to make this liberation still more complete by having himself crowned King of Lithuania. In the event that Lithuania became a kingdom, the promises of Jogaila in the marriage contract of 1385 to annex Lithuania to the crown of Poland would be completely annulled — it would become meaningless. Consequently, it is quite natural that Poland attempted to prevent the coronation from taking place, but their attempts did not weaken the determination of Vytautas. It was death that finally prevented the coronation of Vytautas, an old man (about 80 years of age), for he died while preparing himself for the coronation.

## **PERSONAL UNION**

VYTAUTAS died (1430) leaving Lithuania an independent state. He failed to completely annihilate, through his coronation, the contract of 1385; however, as a result of the Acts of 1413, the future independence of Lithuania was assured — the successor of Vytautas was guaranteed. Consequently, the fact that Lithuania did not fall into the hands of Jogaila after the death of Vytautas has no revolutionary connotation.

The first successor of Vytautas was Švitrigaila, a brother of Jogaila, king of Poland. Švitrigaila not only disregarded all former acts of alliance with Poland but also ignored all the claims of Jogaila. He did not even hesitate to come to open war with his brother's kingdom. Poland.

Lithuania and Poland were again brought together, not through any former treaties, but through the emergence of a common ruler. Failing to find a better candidate to succeed Švitrigaila, Lithuania chose, in 1440, Kazimieras, the younger son of Jogaila, as the Grand Duke of Lithuania. Several years later Vladislovas, the king of Poland (son of Jogaila and brother of Kazimieras), was killed in war with the Turks, and Poland elected Kazimieras, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, to its throne. From then on, until the death of Žigimantas Augustas in 1572, Lithuania and Poland were ruled by the same person (with minor exceptions). Lithuania always tried to elect as its Grand Duke one of the direct descendants of Jogaila (since the family of Vytautas and his brother had completely died out), and Poland always made it a point to crown him her king.

In the course of these 125 years, several attempts were made to settle the relationship of these two nations more definitely by an act of jurisdiction; several documents were drawn up pertaining to this question, but not one of them received any final significance — none were ratified by the Lithuanian Diet. Consequently, the only tie that existed between these two countries was vested in the person of the ruler. In other words, they did not have any other institutions, social or political in common, apart from the kingship. A somewhat closer and more definite connection was evolved by the treaty of Liublin in 1569 — considered a parliamentary union by some historians. This treaty regulated and defined clearly the relationship of these two countries till the end of their existence (1795) as independent nations.

## **LITHUANIA AND POLAND AFTER THE UNION OF LUBLIN**

THE UNION of Liublin in 1569 did not spring up very abruptly. As has already been mentioned there were several unsuccessful attempts (during the one-ruler period), to sign a treaty which would bring about a closer union of the two countries. In fact, several such treaties were formulated but were just as quickly dissolved when they came in contact with the conflicting demands of the two nations. Poland was pressing for as close a union as possible, going so far as to propose the annexation of Lithuania to Poland as a Province of Poland. Lithuania, on the other hand, was pressing for as much independence from Poland as possible, agreeing only to have a common ruler and a joint diet to settle common problems, with each nation retaining its own national diet.

Thanks to Žigimantas Augustas (Sigismundus Augustus), the last of the Jogaila lineage, who did not wish to die before settling the future of the two countries more definitely, the negotiations of 1569 were fruitful. It was feared that, with the death of Žigimantas Augustas, who left no heir, the dynasty of Jogaila would end, and both countries would again select their own rulers. Consequently, all the remaining ties would be completely severed. For this reason, Žigimantas Augustas almost forced Lithuania to sign the treaty.

The negotiations at Liublin were very difficult. Lithuania was driven to the point of breaking off all negotiations, but, urged by Žigimantas Augustas, returned and agreed to accept the conditions of the treaty. Any resistance would automatically imply a rebellion against the Grand Duke, and it was impossible to declare war on Poland since, at that moment, Lithuania was involved in a war with Moscow. In fact, Lithuania was hoping to get help from Poland.

Whatever the circumstances may have been, the treaty was not a complete defeat of Lithuania. It was more or less the product of a compromise on both sides. What still remained in it that was not acceptable to Lithuania, Poland tried to rectify later on. There were two main points in the treaty: the first was the establishment of one monarch and one diet for both countries. One monarch was no novelty, and even Lithuania was used to that idea by now. The difference was in the manner of election. According to the treaty, the king was to be elected by both countries jointly, crowned king of Poland, and given the title of the Grand Duke of Lithuania during the coronation ceremonies at Krokow, the capital of Poland, without any similar ceremonies taking place in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania.

The second main point of the treaty, however, was something new, and that was the establishment of a joint diet by fusion of the two national ones into one common to both, and a prohibition against calling separate diets. Needless to say, this was the most important decree, having the greatest practical influence on the future development of the two nations, especially in the blending of the nobility into one social stratum.

All else was left as it was in both countries. Each nation retained separate executives, separate Houses, separate courts, and separate laws (although these laws were made by the common diet), separate national armies, and national treasuries; the money systems were independent of each other, and each court had its own national dignitaries. Therefore, Lithuania and Poland, during the period of this Union, did not have any other common organ, apart from the one king and one diet for both countries. No other part of the government or any senator had any power in both states. Even the dignitaries of the court had to change when the king crossed the border — those of Poland were replaced by Lithuanian dignitaries when the king crossed from Poland to Lithuania. The Lithuanian army had its own generals — hetmans; the Lithuanian treasury was controlled by Lithuanian officials; the diplomatic relationships with neighboring countries were conducted by Lithuanian chancellor, etc. Not one penny could be taken out of the Lithuanian treasury to be used by Poland. Even the money that was granted to the king for his expenses could not be spent in the Polish court. If the king wanted to avail himself of this money he had to go to Lithuania and make use of it right there. Only in the middle of the 17th century, with the consent of both countries, was the matter changed.

Some of the other points in the Union of Liublin never became effective at all, e.g., the treaty provided for the establishment of a common monetary system, but this was never even attempted. Consequently, the value of the Lithuanian florin was always 25% higher than that of the Polish. The union also annulled all of the Lithuanian laws which prevented the Poles from holding government positions or owning estates in Lithuania. The Poles were to be just as free to establish themselves in Lithuania as the Lithuanians had been in Poland. However, in the third Lithuanian Statute in 1588, in spite of the provisions of the treaty of Liublin, the old laws prohibiting Poles from settling in Lithuania were again reinstated, and they were in use until the fall of both nations. Consequently, even during the period of Union, Lithuanian laws prevented the Poles from holding any position or owning any property in Lithuania.

Yet, in general, it must be said that the Act of 1569, although it advocated a complete union and blending of Lithuania and Poland, essentially guaranteed an independent life to both nations. The so-called Diet of Reforms of 1788—1792 again attempted to unite the two countries more definitely. However, its decrees were never brought into actual practice. These reforms gave rise to conflicts with the neighboring nations, and Lithuania and Poland were finally destroyed.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF THE UNION**

THE CLOSE political tie between Lithuania and Poland, lasting for 400 years, could not fail to influence the relationship of the two nations even to the present day. During these 400 years a number of problems presented themselves, some of which are still vital today. The most important consequence of this relationship was the absorption of the Polish social structure and the acceptance of Polish ideology by the Lithuanian nobility, and its consequent loss of national spirit and habits. When the new democracy of Lithuania was rising, the Lithuanian nobility firmly opposed it, opposing also the idea of an independent Lithuanian state. Poland also adhered to the old idea of the Union and refused to recognize the independence of Lithuania. As a result of this old unionistic thinking of the nobility, the relationship of these two nations in the 20th century was not of the best and created new problems, some of which have not yet been settled. But the discussion of these problems falls outside the scope of our topic.