

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 33, No.4 - Winter 1987

Editor of this issue: Antanas V. Dundzila

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1987 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



JOGAILA (1350-1434)

VANDA SRUOGIENĖ - SRUOGA

It has been 553 years since the death of Jogaila,¹ the Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, yet this figure of the remote past is still largely disliked by most Lithuanians today. The perception of Jogaila became especially negative during the period of the Lithuanian "national awakening" in the second half of the 19th century. His marriage to the Polish queen Jadvyga² initiated the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This union was detrimental to Lithuania nationally, politically and culturally. Nevertheless, according to German historian Leopold Ranke, Jogaila's decision to accept Roman Christianity via Poland vs. Eastern Orthodoxy was as significant in the history of Europe as the destruction of Kiev's Russia by the Tatars in 1240. Though controversial, Jogaila remains an important historical figure.

Jogaila, son of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Algirdas,³ was born ca. 1350. After the death of his father in 1377, Jogaila assumed Algirdas' title and throne in Vilnius in a diarchic reign with his uncle Kęstutis.⁴ However, the independent-minded heir of Algirdas and his uncle Kęstutis could not sustain the concord. Capitalizing on the conflict, Lithuania's neighbors, the Teutonic Knights (a German military and religious order called the Deutscher Orden), and to some extent the principality of Moscow, became overly officious. An internal strife eventually erupted. Its culmination occurred in 1382, when Jogaila and his supporters imprisoned Kęstutis and his son Vytautas.⁵ A few days later, Kęstutis was discovered to be mysteriously murdered, while Vytautas managed to escape to German-occupied Prussia.

There are several hypotheses as to who was responsible for this painful drama. The hot temperament of Jogaila's brother, Skirgaila, implicates him as a suspect. Although Vytautas dismissed any allegations which implicated his cousin, Jogaila was still the prime suspect, simply because he would have benefited the most by Kęstutis' death. That implication has shadowed Jogaila's memory through the ages. Finally, the Lithuanian writer Maironis, in his work *Kęstučio mirtis* (The Death of Kęstutis), holds to the theory that Kęstutis was murdered by servants commissioned by the Germans. Lithuanians cannot forget their tragically murdered hero, their beloved *chevalier sans peur et sans reprocher* Kęstutis.

Political configurations began to change at an unusual pace. Vytautas desperately fought Jogaila for his rightful inheritance. Lithuania was faced with mortal danger from the Teutonic Order, the Tatars and Moscow. (Historians often overlook an important event of that time: In 1380, the Russians defeated the Tatars at Kulikov enabling Moscow to expand.)

When Jogaila became the single Grand Duke of Lithuania, he followed Algirdas' political platform of "all Russian lands must belong to Lithuania" (*Omni Russia ad Lituanos debet simplidter pertinere*). However, Algirdas had faltered in his plans and upon his death, it became increasingly more difficult to achieve such a goal. This could be one of the reasons why Jogaila, despite the urgings of his mother—a Russian princess—refused to marry Sofija, the daughter of the Grand Duke of Moscow. Lithuania possessed a vast amount of Slavic lands populated by Orthodox believers. The prospect of being lost in a Russian sea via Moscow's proposal to baptize Lithuanians into the Eastern Rites was not a very attractive one. Acceptance of Catholic faith through the Teutonic Knights would have meant the total destruction of Lithuania. But the time was ripe for Lithuanians to accept Christianity.

Of all the options, the one seeming to carry the least amount of risk involved using Poland as a mediator: After all, Lithuanian and Polish interests coincided in a number of cases. For instance, both nations were neighbors with a common enemy, the German Order. Both nations traded with one another, and this situation led Jogaila to believe that their alliance could aid in the acquisition of Russian lands and shake the German threat. Besides, there also brewed an internal conflict in Poland involving the search for a new king to replace the deceased Casimir, husband of Algirdas' sister Aldona.

Casimir's death brought an end to the Piast dynasty in Poland. A husband had to be found for the young Polish queen Jadvyga, and the most likely candidate turned out to be Jogaila. The ruler of the largest nation in Europe was still single. The honor of bringing Christianity to a pagan nation must have been quite attractive to the Poles. It is most probable that Poland initiated these proposals. Once Vytautas and Jogaila amended their differences, serious negotiations with Poland began. A final decision, known as the Kréva Union Act, was rendered on August 14, 1385. After long deliberations, the following items were agreed upon: Jogaila and the entire nation of Lithuania would accept Christianity; Jogaila would wed Jadvyga, and would be crowned King of Poland. Furthermore, he would unite Lithuania with Poland as two separate states with a common king; he would regain the lands of both nations from enemy hands, pay German Prince Wilhem for breaking his betrothal to Jadvyga and release all Polish prisoners of war. Historically, this agreement was never documented and some historians question its existence.⁶ But, the agreements indubitably occurred. Even without documentation, some of the terminology in the Act has been a source of many an argument. For example, there is a phrase, *Coronae Regni Poloniae applicare* — Annexation of Lithuania to the Polish Kingdom. According to modern historian G. Rhode, and other researchers, the Kréva Union did not annihilate Lithuanian sovereignty, as interpreted by most Polish historians.

Lithuanians probably reasoned that this agreement was only temporary, a kind of wedding formality. A union with Poland did not seem to present any kind of threat to the nation, because Lithuania had five times the territory of Poland at that time, and Poland was a nation renowned for its lack of internal organization. To call Jogaila a traitor is erroneous. His decision to unite with Poland was not his alone, but also one approved by his brothers Skirgaila, Lengvenis, Kaributas and also his cousin Vytautas. Only later did it become apparent that this arrangement brought advantages only to Poland and misfortunes to Lithuania. According to a Lithuanian historian A. Šapoka, Jogaila must have been attracted to the prospect of the crown of a king. The Kréva Union was shortlived and was succeeded by several other agreements between Lithuania and Poland.

Polish political analyst Stanislaw Mackiewicz frankly acknowledges that only the famous Lithuanian Gediminas dynasty was responsible for creating the Polish nation, for their predecessors, the Piasts, had only managed to run the nation into the ground. It was Jogaila and his progeny who elevated Poland to a position of prominence. Mackiewicz considers Jogaila's son Casimir (the father of St. Casimir) to be the greatest king to ever rule Poland. In Polish literature, Lithuania has been compared to a mighty oak, around which Poland sends out its tendrils.

Once the Alliance of Kréva was declared, events quickly proceeded. On February 14, 1386, Jogaila and his gallant entourage, including his brothers and Vytautas, ceremoniously entered the Polish capital of Cracow. The inhabitants were astounded at the richness of the attire of the men and horses which were the opulent gifts for the bride. The day following their arrival, Jogaila was given the Christian name Vladislovas (Wladyslaw), and Vytautas was baptized as Aleksandras (Alexander). On February 18th, Jogaila married Jadvyga, and on March 4th, he was crowned King of Poland. The Poles called him Wladyslaw II Jagiello. At the same time, Jogaila retained his title of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, whereas Vytautas regained only a part of his ruling rights and lands.

The baptism of the Lithuanian nation soon followed. Jogaila, Vytautas, noblemen and Polish clergy traveled to Lithuania in the Fall of 1386. On February 1, 1387, the Bishopric of Vilnius was established. It was generously endowed with land concessions and other holdings. Pagan practices were forbidden. The new Christian religion was taught to the Lithuanians by Polish clergy with the aid of interpreters, including Jogaila and Vytautas. Jogaila is credited for having translated the "Our Father" and "The Apostle's Creed" into Lithuanian. This fact was attested to by the magistrate Kozlowski during his eulogy at Jogaila's death. Thus, Lithuania, except for the territory of Samogitia which was temporarily occupied by the Teutonic Order, joined the Catholic Church. Paganism, however, still clandestinely persisted.

Once the Christianization of Lithuania occurred, other promises made in the Kréva were set aside. This led to antagonistic arguments with the Poles. Vytautas, demanding his rights, once again fell into conflict with Jogaila. Lithuanian noblemen fervently sided with Vytautas on the issue of an independent Lithuanian state. They went so far as to proclaim Vytautas and his wife Ona (Anna) King and Queen of Lithuania during the Salynas conference of 1389. In 1392, after the Astrava agreement, Vytautas gained full rights as ruler becoming the Grand Duke of Lithuania. All that remained was a symbolic tie to Poland which manifested itself in the titles used by the rulers: Jogaila's seal was imprinted with *Supremus Dux Lituaniae* while Vytautas' was imprinted with *Magnus Dux Lituaniae*. This, however, did not alleviate the conflicts with Poland. A new union was attempted in 1401. In 1413, a number of Lithuanian noblemen were bestowed with coats-of-arms as a gesture of kinship. Poland used all kinds of methods to attract the Lithuanians. But, as historian Zenonas Ivinskis has noted, Jogaila unwaveringly collaborated with Vytautas in upholding Lithuania as a separate political entity.

The attacks of the Order devastated both Lithuania and Poland. Vytautas and Jogaila secretly began organizing for war. It is interesting to note that in those days, when transportation was by foot, horse or boat through a web of German spies, the rulers still managed to make war preparations. Weapons were produced, food supplies were stocked and all necessary arrangements were made.

In the summer of 1410 near Plock, Lithuanian and Polish troops with the help of Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Czechs and others joined forces. Even today, experts are amazed at the pontoon bridges across the Vistula and the organization and discipline exhibited by both armies. The siege was planned according to an old strategy of battling in enemy territory. Unbeknownst to the Order, the armies of Vytautas and Jogaila marched into Prussia. On July 15th at Zalgiris (Gruenwald -

Tannenberg), the largest battle ever to occur in Europe during the Middle Ages was fought. The technically advanced German knights were crushed. The Order's Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen was killed. Vytautas, the commander of the joint forces, showed his skill and fearlessness in battle, but Jogaila's diplomatic role must not be ignored. He showed himself to be a true Christian knight—one who humanely treated the defeated and the fallen.

But to this day, scholars are left pondering why the victory was not used to its full advantage. Why was the Order allowed to recover? Whatever the reason, the fact remains that for 500 years after this famous battle, not another German soldier set foot into Lithuania until 1915 during World War I. Jogaila supported Vytautas' demands. Even in 1427, when Vytautas was deciding whether to cede Palanga on the Baltic coast to the Germans, Jogaila wrote, "If you, brother, give up Palanga, then Lithuania, Samogitia, and you yourself should cry."⁷ Palanga remained part of Lithuania, and Jogaila personally traveled to the Baltic Sea.

Jogaila's long rule was very important to Poland. He fulfilled his promises and repeatedly lifted his sword to regain lost lands. He liberally increased nobleman's privileges. This action eventually narrowed his own rights and those of his successors. His most important activity was in the cultural field. In the year 1400, he reestablished the inactive University of Cracow by renewing its deed of foundation and by generously contributing to its existence. To this day the university bears his name "Uniwersytet Jagiellonski". The University's regulations required equal access to Poles and to Lithuanians. The first student to register was the King himself: the first student from Lithuania was Abraham from Rudnia, and the third to register was the chancellor of the University — Vaidutis, Kęstutis' grandson. Jogaila worked towards attracting more young people from Lithuania. At that time the language of instruction was Latin, so there was little threat of Polonization. During the 15th century, about 120 Lithuanians studied in Cracow.

Jogaila did not have an easy time in the Polish capital. He was a former pagan, a foreigner, so the Poles were very suspicious and surrounded him with spies. For this reason, Jogaila had faithful servants from Lithuania close to him. He never became fluent in Polish. Jogaila's greatest foe was Bishop Zbigniew Olesnicki of Cracow. Later, Cardinal, also a statesman Olesnicki tried in every way to incorporate Lithuania into Poland. He blocked Jogaila's acceptance of the Czech crown, which later went to Vytautas, and he refused to allow Vytautas to be crowned as Lithuania's king.

Jogaila's relationship with Lithuania was angrily affirmed by chronicler Jan Dlugosz: "He loved his country Lithuania, and his family and brothers so much, that without hesitation he brought to the Polish kingdom all kinds of wars and troubles. The crown's riches and all it carried he donated towards the enrichment and protection of Lithuania."

In his personal life, Jogaila found no joy. His first marriage to Jadvyga was politically motivated. Jadvyga was forced to break her engagement to Wilhelm and marry Jogaila who was portrayed by the Poles as a wild barbarian who was three times her age. According to some contemporary studies, it seems Jadvyga was actually Wilhelm's wife, not fiancée. This would explain the unsuccessful efforts towards her canonization. What was she like? Her remains show her to have been tall and portly. Reports of her extreme beauty and saintliness seem to be a product of 19th century romantic literature. Jadvyga's nationality is hard to determine. She was a descendant of the Polish Piast dynasty, the French d'Anjou and German Habsburgs. Barely twelve years old and probably precocious, she lived in Vienna and most likely did not speak Polish before arriving in Cracow for the coronation. Early in her marriage, she was accused of adultery. To clear herself, she was forced to take an oath of innocence in the Cathedral.

In 1399, after thirteen years of marriage, Jadvyga gave birth to a girl. Unfortunately, mother and daughter died soon afterwards. After this, Jogaila wanted to give up his Polish crown and return to Lithuania, but the Poles asked him to remain while they attempted to find him another wife. They found him another candidate — Ona, also a descendant of the Piast dynasty. For a long time Jogaila refused to marry her because she was very unattractive. Eventually he agreed, but he did not live with her for long. They had a daughter who died young. Once again left a widower, Jogaila chose his third wife himself. She was a rich, mature woman named Elizabeth Pilecua. The Polish politicians did not like her, and her death was accompanied by bitter remarks from Dlugosz.

Jogaila reached the age of 70, and still no heir to the throne existed. Vytautas, wishing to have a trustworthy person in Poland, persuaded Jogaila to marry his second wife's niece, the Lithuanian princess Sofija known as Sonka. The marriage took place in 1422 in Lithuania and was performed by the Bishop of Vilnius. Before long, a son was born and then another. Once again suspicion arose about the queen's faithfulness, and she was forced, like Jadvyga, to vow to her innocence. Sofija outlived her husband by many years and proved to be one of the most active women in politics of that time in Europe. She stubbornly fought for the rights of her children and herself and was a patron of Jogaila's established university.

Towards the end of his life, Jogaila more and more focused on Lithuanian matters according to Rhode. He attempted to return total independence to the land of his birth. In 1429, when the German emperor Siegmund promised to crown Vytautas, Jogaila approved. Of course, Vytautas' coronation would have meant the absolute separation of Lithuania from Poland, but, according to Rhode, "old Jogaila was a Lithuanian, and he remained one. Such an action, in spite of the consequences, was an idea close to his heart." When Vytautas died in 1430, Jogaila supported his brother Švitrigaila as Vytautas' successor. Jogaila also supported his brother's attempts to gain the crown which was to have been Vytautas'. As prof. M. Hellman⁸ wrote about Jogaila, "... (he) did not follow the rules of the Horodle Union by which the Grand Duke of Lithuania was to be chosen by the Lithuanians and Poles together. Instead, he seated his younger brother Švitrigaila in

Vilnius." This action created opportunities for renewed conflicts with the Poles. Under the leadership of Olesnicki, the Poles occupied Podole (in the Ukraine), which once belonged to the Lithuanians. In retaliation, Švitrigaila established relations with Emperor Siegmund and the Order of the Teutonic Order. He also detained Jogaila in Vilnius. Jogaila immediately sent a secret letter to Podole urging the head of the Lithuanian army not to listen to Polish commands.

A political storm erupted in Cracow. Olesnicki was victorious and in Jogaila's name declared that Podole and Volinija were to be joined to Poland. In Lithuania, a pro-Polish party was formed, which in 1432, managed to oust Švitrigaila and elect Žygimantas,⁹ son of Kęstutis. The aging Jogaila was powerless against these conflicts. He died on June 1, 1434, in Grudek, not far from Cracow. He did not die in Gardinas, as some history books state.

Dlugosz, who frequently wrote about Jogaila in unfriendly terms, left an almost lyrical description of the king's death: "Suddenly, after the mild Spring, it became very cold, as if another Winter had arrived, destroying the Spring crops, the flowers, and the bursting tree buds with the frost. The king, oblivious to the bitter cold, went out into the woods as was his habit, a remnant of his pagan days, to listen to the nightingale and to rejoice in her sweet songs . . . but he caught cold and . . . was taken ill. Finally, fully conscious . . . he fell asleep in the arms of the clergy."

Jogaila was solemnly buried. According to Dlugosz, Jogaila looked exactly as he is portrayed on his tombstone in Cracow Cathedral. This monument, a sculpture by a 15th century Italian artist, represents the oldest authentic likeness of a Lithuanian. Jogaila's and Sofija's remains are also the oldest known Lithuanian remains.

Although we have much information on Jogaila, he has not been exhaustively studied and objectively evaluated. Prof. Ignas Jonynas had stated years ago that there was a need to study Jogaila in greater depth to fully appreciate his historical significance. Along with Z. Ivinskis, he considered Jogaila and Vytautas to be the most renowned Eastern European rulers during the 14th and 15th centuries.

The Poles, with Dlugosz in the forefront, have left conflicting facts about Jogaila. In one respect, they degraded him because he was inordinately Lithuanian and a former pagan. On the other hand, they admired him because he was their king. Since he was a foe of the Teutonic Order, the Germans left many negative accounts of Jogaila.

Dlugosz had written, "He was so far removed from the bloodshed that he forgave even the chief offenders, and to the conquered he was always merciful... His unsensible generosity harmed the country more than did those who were stingy and greedy for wealth ..."

Bishop Zbigniew Olesnicki remarked in these words: "I know that you are gently, pious, noble, patient and forgiving, but even so, your virtues are darkened with malice . . . Because of your court's plunderings, the whole nation suffers ..."

Polish historian M. Kuczynski, noted for his objectivity, stated in his introduction to K. Szajncho's work:¹⁰ "From recent research, a portrait of Jogaila arises: an excellent commander-in-chief, a famous politician, a man of fine features and an expressive face, temperate, of noble character, and by no means illiterate.

"As for his personal well-being, in terms of personal hygiene and demeanor, the king stood head and shoulders above his surroundings. First of all, he did not drink alcohol, which is why he always had a sober mind and was able to control himself. He ate simple foods and dressed modestly. His shirts and handkerchiefs were of fine whitened linen, and his clothes were of a gray woolen cloth imported from either Brussels or England. Wherever he traveled, he always carried a razor, scissors, brushes, and an ivory comb. He shaved his beard daily, and to the surprise of all the Poles, he even bathed every day. Only the haughtiness of the 15th century noblemen and 19th century national chauvinism kept one from observing that the 'wild Eastern barbarian' rose above the Polish gentry."

G, Rhode describes Jogaila in this way: "Even four generations after his established dynasty, some of his individual character traits are still evident — obstinancy, mistrust, propensity for awarding decision, steadfastness in executing established plans and a love for hunting as well as for dwelling in nature."¹¹

According to Hellman, Jogaila had more of a passive nature than an active one. Long range goals were foreign to him. In essence, he was a person of peace, but destiny gave him charge of the historical course of Lithuania and Poland. His death ended the heroic and noble period of the Lithuanian Grand Dukes. He was the most famous heir of the Gediminas dynasty.

1 Also referred to as Jagail, Jagal, Jagiello in various sources.

2 Jadwiga, Hedwig.

3 Olgera, Olgiera.

4 Kustute, Kiejstut.

5 Witowt, Witold, Vitoldus.

6 Pfitzner, J. *Grossfürst Witold von Litauen als Staatsman*. 1930.

7 A. Pzochaska *Codex Epistolaris Vitoldi, Magni Diecis Lituania*. 1881-1878-1929, p. 726.

- 8 Grundzuege der Geschichte Litauens, 1966, p. 50.
- 9 Siegmund, Zygmunt.
- 10 *Jadwiga i Jagiello*, revised edition t. 2, p. 34, 1966.
- 11 Grundzue der Geschichte Litauens, p. 141, 1966.