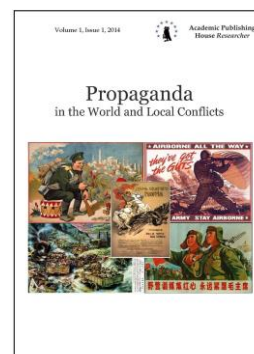


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Seize or Regain: Chernigov and Severian Lands in the Political Thought of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before the Middle 17th century

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Abstract

In 1503, Muscovy acquired the Smolensk and the Chernigov and Severian lands from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) following the war. The substantial loss became for Vilna one of the factors that induced it to ally with Poland and form a union state – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Even before the unification took place, there were vigorous debates among diplomats and intellectuals on what grounds their state should require to return the land. It was in this period when Muscovy’s seizure of the territories was conceptualized as a dishonest act in breach of international agreements. As a result, when Warsaw managed to reconquer the Smolensk and Chernigov-Severian lands, it began to define them as “*rekuperowane*” which meant “regained from the enemy”. The terminology became embedded both in political journalism and official documents of the state. For example, the term “*ziemie rekuperowane*” was already used in the sejm constitutions (official documents of the Sejm of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), although the lands were not yet officially integrated. To ensure a more effective incorporation of the new lands, Warsaw granted the Magdeburg rights to many cities in the region, and the document itself also emphasized that these cities and lands were successfully recovered from the hands of the adversary.

Hence, at first political journalism and historical and geographical treatises of the Kingdom of Poland, and later those of the Commonwealth justified Krakow’s/Warsaw’s right to the Smolensk and Chernigov-Severian lands. When the lands – first de facto and then de jure – became part of the Polish-Lithuanian state, they were described using the term “*ziemie rekuperowane*”.

Keywords: propaganda, political journalism, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Chernigov region, Truce of Deulino, incorporation.

1. Introduction

The Polish-Lithuanian state, Rzeczpospolita, established at the Sejm of Lublin in 1569, immediately received a tremendous geopolitical advantage and not only emerged as one of the potentially most important political players in the Eastern European region, but also inherited major political issues. The issues historically were relations with the Crimea, Ottoman Empire and Muscovite State. While Krakow had no territorial claims to Bakhchisarai and Istanbul, the situation was completely different with Muscovy. After the signing of the Annunciation Truce that led to the loss of the Chernigov-Severian and Smolensk lands, Vilna never stopped regarding them as their “*dedichny*” or legitimate, hereditary domain. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth inherited the vision of the Chernigov and Smolensk regions from the GDL. An additional factor, which nourished

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the desire of the Polish szlachta to regain the Chernigov lands, was that all Ukrainian lands, which were part of the GDL were handed over to Poland following the Union of Lublin. For this reason, the Chernigov lands were viewed as a very promising region for colonization.

Warsaw succeeded in officially regaining the lands in 1618. The incorporation of the Chernigov and Smolensk lands into the Commonwealth was stipulated by the Truce of Deulino, which marked the end of the Polish-Moscow war of 1609-1618, although in fact the Polish rule gained a foothold here much earlier. The territories received the official name “*ziemie rekuperowane*”, i.e. regained lands, and were under the control of Prince Władysław.

2. Materials and methods

The challenge of gaining lands back into the state, conquering or acquiring them through any other means not only has military and political aspects, but also intellectual ones. A claimant country should not only muster an army and devise a war strategy, but also provide an intellectual rationale for its claims. Given this, a question arises as to how the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth justified the restitution of the Chernigov-Severian lands. Such claims should appear in the political literature in advance of the event, they were supposed to explain the reasons behind the developments, and then enact (make legitimate) the new status quo. With the progression of the szlachta democracy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, political literature and journalism began to play an important role. Texts in the genre, as well as historical and geographical treatises should be the research field to scrutinize for references mentioning the Chernigov region, Severia and the legitimacy of the claims of the Polish-Lithuanian state to the lands. As the process is rather lengthy, our research has a broad chronological framework. The starting point is the middle of the 16th century. Beginning in this period, the Polish szlachta stepped up their literary activity, and this explains the choice of the lowest chronological limit. The main driver behind the increased focus, in my opinion, was the realization of the important role literary means played in political agitation. Journalistic texts were inspired by momentous personal/family/state occasions and events.

The upper chronological limit is set for the period of the final integration of the Chernigov lands and Severia into the administrative structure of the Commonwealth.

The research source base includes political journalistic texts, historical and geographical treatises and sejm documents in the specified period. The significance of the source base appears to be self-evident, to my mind. It is the pages of such political texts that mediated the proliferation of political ideas into the socio-political discourse. After some time, this made it possible to refer to such ideas as true ones, because they were written down in books.

3. Discussion and results

We can assume as a working hypothesis that the political and historical literature of this period contains multiple references to the Chernigov and Severian lands particularly with an emphasis on the hereditariness of the lands with regard to the Commonwealth. Authors of the texts underscored that the lands had been taken from the GDL by force, in violation of agreements and consequently should be recovered.

Historical and geographical treatises were popular in the Kingdom of Poland, and later also in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Scarcely any library owners had not such books. This is also evidenced by private library records that survived (Torój, 1997; Kramperova, 1960). For this reason, it would be a mistake to ignore the propaganda significance of such texts. One of the most well-known and widely read annals in Poland was “Chronicles” of Jan Długosz. As an influential Russian historian, Boris Flory, noted, Długosz's text covers relatively much information on the territory of the former Kievan-Rus state. The information is innately ideological and constitutes a part of the author's historical concept. For example, the chronicler defined the East Slavic tribe of Polans, which lived near Kiev, as being the same with Polish Polans from the Gniezno region. Hence, he argues that Kiev was governed by the Polish dynasty, and the Rurikids were mere invaders. Consequently, Poland has historical rights to the territories (Pashuto i dr., 1982: 156).

One of the most renowned historical treatises was the European Sarmatia Chronicles by Alexander Guagnini, an Italian military officer and diplomat on the service of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the text, which describes the events of 1499, the author clarifies the

factors that brought about the Muscovite–Lithuanian war of 1500–1503. The pretext was that Lithuanian Prince Alexander did not build an Orthodox church for his wife Helena (a sister of the Moscow prince). Ivan III then began to rally his allies and Tatars for a war against Lithuania. Taking advantage of the absence of a voivode in Bryansk, Moscow troops overran and burned the city: “This way, the fortresses of Chernigov, Starodub, Novgorod-Seversky and others fell then into the hands of the Muscovite prince”. The narrator calls the forces of the Lithuanian prince alternately either “ours” or “Lithuanians”. For example: “When *lithuania* came to the Vedrosha river, *moscow* saw a small *lithuanian* army”, or “when they saw that *our* troops did not have any reinforcements, they mounted a great battle” (Gvan’ini, 2007: 351) [italics added by me – V.P.]. The spelling “lithuania” and “moscow” without initial capital letters means that they are used as ethnonyms, rather than names of countries.

The outcome of the war for the GDL was the loss of the Severian lands. Guagnini portrays the Severian Principality as “large and wealthy, there is quite enough of various riches”. Once it was “under the authority” of Lithuania, and later – of Poland, but “Ivan Vasilievich, the Grand Prince of Moscow, treacherously took possession of the principality on false pretenses, just as he did with other countries” (Gvan’ini, 2007: 584).

According to Yuriy Mytsik, Guagnini employs Herberstein’s “Notes on Muscovite Affairs” when constructing descriptions of the Chernigov and Severian lands, although he supplements them with his own information (Gvan’ini, 2007: 310).

If compared with the text of Herberstein’s “Notes”, Guagnini’s writing shows minor textual differences that nevertheless have semantic and ideological importance. For example, Herberstein says that the marriage agreement between Alexander and Helena included a clause on the construction of an Orthodox church in Vilna: “*Since they delayed the execution of this for some time, the father-in-law leverage the circumstance as a pretext for a war with Alexander...*” (Gerbershtejn, 1988: 66–67), and the subsequent description of the battle of the Vedrosha not even mentioned either “treachery” or “false pretenses”. Guagnini, in turn, gives the dishonesty and treachery of the Muscovite Tsar a special focus. By doing this, he as if asserts the right of Lithuanians to the Chernigov and Severian lands, because their seizure was dishonest and treacherous.

The Austrian diplomat gives a rather accurate description of the Battle of the Vedrosha River and its implications: “*Lithuanians, filled with fear, were put to flight, their commander with a large part of his suite was taken captive, and the others in fear surrendered the camp to the enemy...*” (Gerbershtejn, 1988: 67). Guagnini, however, does not provide this vivid account. Of course, the Italian in the service of the GDL should do his best to avoid describing the Lithuanian army’s defeat in the “Chronicles”.

Herberstein’s represents the conquest of Severia by the Muscovite prince without any characterization. The author simply narrates the events and makes no attempts to evaluate them in terms of ethics or diplomacy rules (Gerbershtejn, 1988: 140–141).

The de jure transfer of the Chernigov and Severian lands to the Commonwealth took place after the Truce of Deulino was concluded in late 1618. In an effort to smoothly incorporate the newly annexed cities, King Sigismund III began granting the Magdeburg rights to them. A city’s acquisition of the right to self-government was per se a fairly powerful propaganda lever capitalized on by the royal court, as Muscovy had no city autonomy in place, and all cities were considered as “the sovereign’s cities”. This fact contributed to the propaganda component in the very muniments on the Magdeburg rights. The right to self-government was granted to Novgorod-Seversky, Chernigov, Nezhin, Mglin, Starodub. As the document had a typical form, we will use the charter issued for Chernigov as an example. It relates the circumstances of the city’s joining the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: *...za expedicią najaśniejszego królewica Jego Mości Władysława syna naszego pod stolicą moskiewską, jako i ynsze zamki, mista y włości państwa naszego, którebył za prodków naszych dziedziczny nieprzyiacel Moskwiczin pakta złamawszy fortelnie różnemi czsy oderwał y posiadł, tak y nasze miasto Czernihów szczęśliwie z rąk nieprzyjacielskich iest recuperowane y do państwa naszego przywrócone* (Sitij, Alforov, 2013: 116)¹. [put in bold type by me – V.P.]

¹ After the military expeditions of His Grace Prince Vladislav, our son, to the capital of Moskow, as well as to other castles, cities and parishes (volost – administrative unit similar to district) of our state, which the

This interpretation was reproduced in each of the charters issued for the cities of the Chernigov region, and later was repeated in ratification documents.

On the other hand, the Moscow annals, the transfer of the lands to the Commonwealth was described in entirely different, neutral terms. For example, “Novyi Letopisets” (New Chronicler) tells the following of the transfer of the 14 cities: “...and gave the Muscovite cities to Lithuania: Smolensk, Belaya, Nevl, Krasnoy, Dorogobuzh, Roslawl, Pohep, Trubchesk, Sebezh, Serpeysk, Starodub, Nov gorodok, Chernigov, Monastyrevskoy and executed appropriate deeds” (Rabinovich, 2018: 25).

According to Petr Kulakovskij’s findings, the royal chancellery introduced the term “ziemie rekuperowane” in official documents with regard to the Chernigov lands long before the Truce of Deulino. For example, as early as the first Sejm Constitution of 1611, which dealt with the conquered lands, the lands were called “rekuperowane”, that is, regained.

The tradition was maintained in subsequent years. And in 1620, the Sejm adopted a constitution entitled “Regulation on the provinces regained from Moscow” (Ordynacya Prowincyi od Moskwy rekuperowanych) (Kulakovskij, 2006: 52, 54).

The ownership of the Chernigov and Severian lands was over time also enshrined in the official title of the king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For example, Władysław Vasa was titled the Prince of Severia and Chernigov: *Vladislaus Quartus Dei gratia rex Poloniae, magnus dux Lithuaniae, Russiae, Prussiae, Masoviae, Samogitiae, Livoniaeque, Smolenscie, Severiae, Czernichoviaequae necnon Suecorum, Gothorum Vandalorumque haereditarius rex, electus magnus dux Moschoviae* [put in bold type by me – V.P.]. But that was normal practice.

The description of the newly added lands was to change in the historical and geographical treatises some time after the accession. Even Moscow did not raise any questions or doubts with regard to the accession. For example, “Polska albo opisanie położenia Królestwa Polskiego”, the description of one of the most prominent Polish writers of the first half of the 17th century, Szymon Starowolski, lists the Chernigov region in Red Ruthenia, while the Smolensk region – in White Ruthenia:

«Tu trzeba dodać, jak sądzimy, województwo Czernihowskie, za Dnieprem położone, które Władysław IV od Moskwy oderwawszy, do Królestwa Polskiego przyłączyli oprócz starostów miast ustanowił w tym województwie dwóch senatorów, wojewodę mianowicie i kasztelana, wyznaczając im miejsca w senacie Królestwa; ufundował ponadto w wielu miejscach liczne kościoły katolickie i dla kształcenia młodzieży kolegium księży Towarzystwa Jezusowego w Nowogrodzie założył» (Starowolski, 1976: 86)¹.

«Ostatnie tam i największe województwo jest Smoleńskie, które obejmuje Księstwo Siewierskie, ziemię czernihowską (w dwu ostatnich siedemdziesiąt zamków się znajduje) i powiat orszański. Smoleńsk zaś, z całym Księstwem Siewierskim, przed laty około stu zajęty został przez Moskwę, lecz Zygmunt III, król nasz [poprzedni], w roku 1611 odzyskał go drogą wojny, a ponadto wyrwał wrogowi ziemię czernihowską [romnejską i sierpiejską] i do województwa smoleńskiego przyłączył» (Starowolski, 1976: 89)².

We note that the first edition of the treatise, published in Cologne in 1632, had no the paragraph about the Chernigov region at all. An explanation can be, I believe, a change taking place in the administrative and political status of the Chernigov and Severian lands. In 1635, the process of establishing the Chernigov Voivodeship was completed. The “regained lands” were in the possession and under the personal control of Prince Władysław Vasa until that time. But in 1632,

enemy of Moskovit conquered using tricks in the times of our ancestors, our city of Chernihiv is now happily recovered from the enemies and included into our state.

¹ Here we must add, as we believe, Chernihiv province, located beyond the Dniپر, which Władysław IV annexed from Moscow and joined to the Kingdom of Poland. In addition to the elderships in the cities he established two senators, a voivode and a castellan (castle commander) determining their positions in the Senate. He founded numerous Catholic churches in many cities and a college of the Society of Jesus in Novgorod to educate young people.

² The last and the biggest voivodeship, which includes Siverian Principality, the land of Chernihiv (both include 70 castles), and Orsha district. Smolensk and the whole Siverian Principality was under Moscow occupation for the last 100 years. It’s our king Sigismund III (previous) who returned Chernihiv lands due to military actions and joined the lands to Smolensk province.

Władysław was elected king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and initiated the process of setting up the Chernigov Voivodeship. This clarifies why the author, in two paragraphs devoted to the Chernigov and Severian lands, refers to the positions of the Chernigov castellan and the voivode (the positions were called *uryads*) instituted and the corresponding officials introduced into the Senate – with these steps, the establishment of the voivodeship was complete.

We can see further in the text that Starowolski tries to avoid elaborating on how it happened that the lands were previously owned by Muscovy and later returned to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, except for mentioning that the king “wrested them from the enemy.” What reason made the ideologist of Polish Sarmatism reject the opportunity to glorify the Polish army? From my viewpoint, the question of the Chernigov-Severian lands’ possessor was no longer relevant at the time when “*Polska albo opisanie położenia Królestwa Polskiego*” was created. The book was published in Cologne in the Latin language, and the author was obviously intended to reach the European audience and had no need to explain to it the intricacies of the Polish-Muscovite relations. It was sufficient to state the fact that the Chernigov and Severian lands belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Another issue that intellectuals discussed on the pages of their journalistic texts was the administrative and legal reforming of the conquered lands. Petr Kulakovs'kij notes, “political debates on the structure of the Chernigov and Severian regions ensued as soon as the Polish-Lithuanian control was actually restored over them, even before the signing of the Truce of Deulino, and indirectly even earlier – as part of the theoretical-journalistic discussion on the Ukraine colonization methods in the late 16th and early 17th centuries” (Kulakovs'kij, 2006: 78). The researcher gives the names of the discussion participants – Józef Wereszczyński, Petr Grabowsky, Wawrzyniec Gembicki and Szymon Starowolski, and points out that their works voiced ideas that were later employed in the integration of the “*rekuperowane*” territories. The ideas include the required cavalry military service, *volok* reform (regulating the land use rules), possibility of transferring land to foreigners, introduction of the feudal law (Kulakovs'kij, 2006: 78-79).

To my mind, the above authors seldom wrote specifically about the Chernigov region and Severia – they primarily focused on the possibility to reform the Ukrainian lands in the context of the military and political confrontation between Poland and Turkey (Pilipenko, 2010; Pilipenko, 2008).

4. Conclusion

Briefly reviewing the results, we can say that our working hypothesis is obtaining confirmation. The historical and geographical treatises and political journalism texts, created between the mid-16th and mid-17th century, indeed contain information on the Chernigov and Severian lands and their incorporation into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Importantly, the information is ideologically motivated and is dished up in such a form as to make it clear for readers that the Chernigov and Severian regions are the original Polish territory that was snatched away by the Muscovite state, and these lands must be recovered.

I can also point out the viable future outlook of the research as the current text is only an initial effort to approach the problem. A feasible objective for further research is to carry out a more accurate delineation of the source base. I think that the use of political literature from the interregnum (*bezkrólewie*) and the time of the Zebrzydowski rebellion can be highly revealing. Another very promising line of action is the work with sejm documents, such as sejm speeches of influential szlachta party leaders, the king’s writs to local sejmiks (letters of legation) and sejm constitutions. In addition, a large corpus of occasional literary works exists created during the Polish-Muscovite wars of the early 17th century, and, of course, the texts contain information on the Chernigov region and Severia, the then relevant state of affairs and prospects of the lands conquest and integration the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had.

The Chernigov and Severian lands were part of the Commonwealth for only three decades. This time saw changes in the administrative status of the lands – they were initially under the control of Prince Władysław Vasa, and later became a separate voivodeship. With the outbreak of the Khmelnytsky Uprising, the Chernigov region was among the first areas to come under the jurisdiction of Cossacks, and afterwards, to be integrated into the Muscovite state as part of the Hetmanate. Despite the loss of some of the Ukrainian lands, the Polish szlachta retained the fact of

possessing the territories in the historical memory. The long-lasting nature of the historical memory related to the Chernigov region is evidenced by the fact that the position of the Chernigov Voivode existed in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth until the end of the 18th century. The last voivode was appointed in 1783 (Urzędniczy, 2002: 199), while the voivodeship itself had been inside the Muscovite state over more than a hundred years by the time.

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