

Bar, Přemysl

Diplomacy, law and propaganda in the Late Middle Ages: the Polish–Lithuanian Union and the Order of Teutonic Knights at the Council of Constance (1414–1418) : summary

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SUMMARY

Diplomacy, Law and Propaganda in the Late Middle Ages

The Polish–Lithuanian Union and the Order of Teutonic Knights
at the Council of Constance (1414–1418)

The history of the Order of Teutonic Knights in Prussia (*Ordensstaat*) and its relations with its neighbours the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is foreshadowed by a conflict which in older historiography was the subject of research marked by a strong ideological bias. In German research, the predominant conception of the Order was as a disseminator of civilized Western European values in Eastern Europe. In contrast, Polish historiography highlighted the militaristic aspect of a religious body which was only implementing its expansionist aims.

These extreme assessments resulted from different interpretations of the long-standing conflict (from the early 14th to early 16th century) between the Order on the one hand and Poland or Lithuania on the other, which was periodically interrupted by short or relatively long periods of peace or truce. In recent decades, research has not only focused on the political events in this history, but has also attempted to capture this phenomenon from other perspectives, such as warfare, diplomacy, law, education, culture, identity and political thinking.

The interaction between the authorized deputations of the Order and the Polish–Lithuanian Union at the Council of Constance (1414–1418) represents one of those historic moments when a conflict on the edge of Western Christendom came to the forefront of the European public's attention. Research to date has highlighted prominent personalities: the Dominican friar John of Falkenberg and

the case against his anti-Polish pamphlet entitled *Satira* (Hartmut Boockmann) or the Polish jurist and rector of Cracow University Paweł Włodkowic, author of several scholarly treatises criticising the Order (Stanisław Franciszek Belch, Ludwig Ehrlich). However, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the content of the polemical treatises without taking into account the diplomatic context and the question of whether the texts in question were actually published. As for Zenon Hubert Nowak, he viewed the interaction between the Order's delegation and the Polish–Lithuanian delegation at the Council as a continuation of the arbitration headed by King Sigismund of Luxembourg from 1412 on.

This book attempts a more joined-up view of the interaction between the two delegations at the Council of Constance, which it looks at from three basic perspectives which intertwine with one another: diplomacy, law and propaganda. This is not just about determining the appropriate relationship between the various aspects of the process at Constance, but also about the extent to which the Prussian–Polish dispute contributed to establishing the Council of Constance as the first European congress in history.

Among the sources, the following are of crucial importance: the report from the Order's procurator general Peter Wormditt (1403–1419), the political correspondence of the pope, the Council, the grand master, the Polish king and king of the Romans, and the conciliar chronicle of Ulrich of Richental. The legal aspects of the dispute cannot be understood without juristic treatises, experts' reports and articles of complaint. By contrast, the official conciliar acts only very occasionally report on the dispute.

A key component of late-medieval diplomacy was the deputations and emissaries (*ambaxiatores, oratores, nuntii*) furnished with authorization and other documents for negotiations before foreign lords or with other deputations. The grand master Michael Kūchmeister (1414–1422) on one side and the Polish king Władysław II Jagiełło (1386–1434) and the Lithuanian grand duke Vytautas (1401–1430) on the other sent several deputations to the Council of Constance. Prosopographic analysis of these deputations forms a substantial part of the book. There are also separate chapters devoted to the more significant figures within the deputations. From the Order's deputations: John of Wallenrode, archbishop of Riga, Peter Wormditt, procurator of the Order, John Abezier, provost and (later) bishop of Warmia, Caspar Schuwenpflug, canon and (later) provost of Warmia, and Henry Holt, commander of Gdansk and Elbing. From the Polish–Lithuanian deputations: Nicholas (Mikołaj) Trąba, archbishop of Gniezno, James (Jakub) of Kurdwanow, bishop of Płock and decretalist, Andrew (Andrzej) Łaskarzyc, bishop of Poznań and decretalist, Paweł Włodkowic, decretalist and Cracow rector, and two Polish knights, John of Tuliszków and Zawisza the Black of Garbów. The major criteria for selecting specific individuals for the deputations were their experience of previous diplomatic missions, contacts with the pope and king of the Romans or direct

affiliation to the papal curia or Sigismund's court, and loyalty to the leaders of the Order or to the Polish king.

The success of a deputation was primarily contingent upon financial resources, which were not only used to cover travelling expenses and accommodation but also gifts for influential individuals (the pope, the king of the Romans, cardinals, etc.). We are best informed about financial matters in the case of the Order's deputation, which constantly complained of a lack of money in the reports it sent to Malbork. The Polish-Lithuanian deputation does not appear to have suffered from this problem, but in its case the fragmentary sources do not allow for precise calculations. One extraordinary gift from the Polish king to Sigismund of Luxembourg was a bison captured in the Lithuanian woods, whose transportation to Constance is visually immortalized in Ulrich of Richental's chronicle.

Another important element in the work of the deputation was its communication with decision-making centres (Malbork or Cracow). The surviving reports (mostly from the Order's deputation) reveal that some members of the deputation (e.g. Peter Wormditt and Paweł Włodkowic) did not merely carry out the instructions given to them but also tried to influence the decision-making of the authorities they served.

From the legal point of view, an important aspect was the resumption of arbitration, which had been suspended in spring 1414, when both sides opted for a military solution to the dispute. Since the military operations did not bring about a clear victory for anyone, a two-year truce was concluded in October 1414. As a result of political pressure from Pope John XXIII and King Sigismund of Luxembourg, the truce included a proviso that the dispute would be handed over to an arbitration judge. Whether that judge was to be the pope, the king of the Romans, the Council, or one of the ecclesiastical or secular princes, was a matter to be decided at the Council itself. The dispatching of a deputation to Constance, therefore, did not come about at the initiative of the grand master and the Polish king or the Lithuanian grand duke, but was rather the result of the subordination to the will of the two Western authorities – the pope and the king of Romans.

The time limit set for the truce was inadequate and tough negotiations were held about extending it. Without the truce, there was a threat of renewed war and it was impossible to commence arbitration. The Order was seriously worried about military intervention, so the Polish-Lithuanian delegation used the truce talks to press the Order's deputation for certain territorial concessions, although ultimately in vain.

Not even the extension of the truce was a guarantee that arbitration proceedings would commence. Two insurmountable barriers stood in the way. The delegations were unable to agree on who would act as arbiter. Since Sigismund of Luxembourg increasingly favoured the stance taken by the Polish-Lithuanian side, they insisted exclusively on him, while the Order's deputation sought to have the

dispute placed in the hands of the Council or the pope. The second point of contention was how the arbitration was to be conducted. Of the two options – by way of the law (*via iuris*) or by way of conciliation (*via amicabile compositionis*) – the Polish–Lithuanian deputation was only authorized to accept the second method. However, in light of the papal and imperial privileges and existing peace treaties, the grand master and the Order insisted on the first option, inasmuch as they did not wish to permit their revision. The Polish king and the Lithuanian grand duke made intensive efforts to contest the privileges awarded to the Order and to have the existing peace treaties revised.

The subject matter of the dispute can be divided into three thematic groups: 1. In the articles of complaint and the responses to them, the issue of the legitimacy of the Order's rule over the territory laid claim to by the Polish–Lithuanian side was dealt with in practical terms. 2. In connection with the appearance of the recently baptized pagans from Samogitia at the Council, the Polish–Lithuanian delegation waged a dispute with the Order's deputation about which side was more effective in spreading the Christian faith among pagans and schismatics in Eastern Europe (the *propositio Polonorum* and *propositio Samagitarum*). 3. Two lists of articles of complaint from the latter half of 1416, which in the end were not published, contain crimes which were supposed to prove the sectarianism and heresy of the Order.

In addition to the specific articles of complaint, the conclusions (*conclusiones*) of the Polish jurist and Cracow rector Paweł Włodkowic were presented to the Council; he questioned the very meaning of the Order's existence, the legitimacy of its rule and the campaigns against the pagans resulting from papal and imperial privileges. Just as in the case of the articles of complaint, the only tangible outcome was the Order's responses, but these had little effect.

Propaganda was an integral part of the activities of both deputations, and the Polish–Lithuanian delegation was more active in this regard. In sermons (John of Wallenrode) given before the pope and the king of the Romans, the Order was presented as a bastion for Catholic Christians which was threatened with destruction unless the two authorities of Western Christianity extended it special care. The speech for the Polish–Lithuanian delegation was delivered by Andrew Łaskarzyc, who confidently described the Polish king and the Lithuanian grand duke as the most faithful sons of the Roman church, who zealously spread the Christian faith among pagans and schismatics and were prepared to help the pope, the king of the Romans and the Council to establish unity within the church and its reformation.

One very effective tactic was the spreading of slanderous rumours. In leaflets which were nailed to the doors of churches in Constance, several Polish knights protested against the defamation of the Polish king and the Lithuanian grand duke. They had apparently exhorted their troops to profane the sacraments and

commit inhuman crimes against pregnant women on the territory of the Order. The Order's delegation protested against the anonymous accusation, thereby confessing to having spread these rumours. The sources do not reveal who spread gossip in Constance about the Polish king, who allegedly wanted to marry his daughter to the son of a Turkish sultan, but surprisingly the dissemination of these rumours was actively opposed by Sigismund of Luxembourg himself.

Two other acts of propaganda initiated by the Polish-Lithuanian side aimed to strike at the very heart of the existence of the Order's domain in the Baltics. The delegation of Samogitian neophytes in Constance was intended to discredit the Order's missionary role and demonstrate, by contrast, the efficiency of the Christianization of the region under the leadership of the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Due to the establishment of a new bishopric in Samogitia, this territory was permanently politically attached to Lithuania. As for the Order, it was to be relocated to other places where it would battle against the pagan nations. The second act was sending the metropolitan of Kiev, Gregory Tsamblak, to the Council of Constance to evoke the impression of great authority which his backers, the Polish king and the Lithuanian grand duke, enjoyed in the Orthodox world. This authority was to enable them to secure the obedience of Orthodox Christians to the Roman church.

An appendix at the end of the book presents a list of texts which arose in connection with the interaction between the two delegations at the Council of Constance. The extensive body of written material is broken down according to formal criteria into juristic treatises and polemics, articles of complaint, proposals for resolving the dispute, speeches, sermons and leaflets. Attached to each text is information about surviving manuscripts, editions and literature, a detailed transcript of the content, and comments, mostly related to dating and authorship. One exception is the leaflets, which have been preserved in a single manuscript (DOZA Wien, Hs. Nr. 142) and are published here in the form of an edition.

translated by Graeme Dibble