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*Peter of Cyprus
and Casimir the Great in Cracow*

For Polish people in the Middle Ages* Cyprus seemed an exotic place. The mention of the Cypriot king in Polish medieval sources does not really present this encounter as very unusual. However, Peter's visit to Cracow in 1364 was by all means an astonishing event and as such it deserves attention. The writings that are devoted to Cyprus and Peter's crusading policy do not treat his stay in Poland as a significant episode. Accordingly, the importance of the rally in Cracow has not been duly emphasized. Polish writings concerning this problem are ample but the language barrier make them inaccessible to foreign scholars. As a result, the dominant opinion in historiography related to this fact has been formed by such influential historians as N. Iorga and R. Hill¹. Basing their insights on Guillaume de Machaut², they offer an opinion that the initiative of the Cracow congress rested with Charles IV of Luxemburg, which would imply that the congress followed from Peter's crusading attempts. Yet, this was not really the case.

When Peter I arrived in Poland in September 1364, in the company of Charles IV, Polish king Casimir the Great was not any more "prince assez faible et malheureux" as Iorga has it³. According to this scholar, the poor position of Polish king was due to the fact that Polish army had

* The article follows from the lecture that I had a pleasure to deliver for the students at the University of Thessaloniki on 15 May 1992.

1. N. Iorga, *Philippe de Mézières et la croisade au XIVe siècle*, Paris 1896; G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, vol. II, *The Frankish Period 1192-1432*, Cambridge 1972.

2. G. de Machaut, *La prise d' Alexandrie ou chronique du roi Pierre I de Lusignan*, ed. M.L. Mas Latrie, Geneve 1877. *Publications de la Société de l' Orient latin. Série historique*, I, 39-42. = S. Zajackowski, *Wilhelm de Machaut i jego wiadomosci do dziejow Polski i Litwy w XIVw.*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", 43/ 1929/, 225-226/ Guillaume de Machaut and His News Concerning History of Poland and Lithuania in the 14th Century, "Historical Quarterly"/

3. N. Iorga, *op. cit.*, 197

been defeated by the Moildavians. As for his apparent misery, it was supposedly caused by famine, which affected Poland in 1362⁴. Jan Dlugosz recorded the Moldavian expedition under the year 1359 but contemporary historians are inclined to see this fact as an expedition of Polish-Hungarian king Louis the Great⁵. It seems that the importance of this military failure and of famine was blown up out of proportion in Iorga's comment. I would like to argue that Casimir the Great's image was far more complex.

Casimir succeeded to Polish throne after his father Ladislas, who had managed to reunite the Polish state after the long period of desintegration. In the moment of take over followed by his crowning in 1333, Casimir was 23 years old and faced with grave political problems⁶. In 1335 the truce with Teutonic Knights and with the Luxemburg House in Bohemia was about to expire. The alliance of these two powers was a serious threat to Polish state. During the rally in Wyszehrad in the same year, the Bohemian king renounced his claims to Polish throne for a substantial sum of money⁷. Casimir was not in position to regain Silesia, therefore he had to face the incorporation of this territory into Bohemia in 1348. His contention with the Tuetonic Order was settled by the peace treaty in 1343, as a result of which a part of disputed territories was restored to Poland. Pomerania, however, was still in Teutonic hands. The alliance with the Hungarian House of Anjou was formed to counterbalance the Teutonic-Bohemian coalition. As early as in the reign of Casimir's father who made a clever use of the conflict between Bohemia and Hungary, Casimir's sister, Elisabeth was married off to Charles Robert, king of Hungary. This unequal alliance was to safeguard Casimir's position in politics. In

4. Ibidem, 197, note 1

5. J. Wyrozumski, *Kazimierz Wielki/ Casimir the Great/*, Warszawa 1986, 98

6. Writings on the subject of Casimir's rule are ample. He occupies a prominent place in the surveys of Polish history. The latest work on that problem is the book by Wyrozumski, quoted in my text.

7. The House of Przemyslid died out in 1306. Marrying Elizebeth, the daughter of Vaclav II, John of Luxemburg took over the privileges of the dynasty, now extinct. The privileges included the claim to the Polish crown, which was seized by Vaclav II in 1300.

1339 it was decided that in case Casimir did not leave an heir, Polish crown would be given to Charles Robert or his sons. This move was to secure Hungarian support for Poland. The fact that Polish state was not in position to regain Pomerania and Silesia, brought about a greater interest in the Eastern border. In 1340 Casimir the Great inherited the possessions of the last prince of Halicz. Hungary and Lithuania also laid claims to this legacy. Eventually though, in 1366 most of the principality of Halicz and Włodzimierz became Casimir's. Hungary was stopped from attempting to seize the Ruthenia of Halicz because of the hope for Polish throne. As early as in 1350 Hungary reserved the right to buy Ruthenia from Poland in case the Anjou did not succeed to Polish legacy. In the political situation that was difficult to handle, Casimir managed to save his authority. In his domestic politics he made repeated efforts to reinforce the central power within the state. A new system of local government was organised in the former principalities which had become parts of the Polish Kingdom. Important administrative posts were given to the King's devoted supporters. Codification of law was the King's major achievement. The statutes set up principles of state organisation and legal norms. Special regulations were provided for military service. It was a time of rapid urban development in the state. The King supported trade and carried out the vast economic programme that was to strengthen the country. In Casimir's times metalurgy and salt mining were greatly fostered. Craftsmen's guilds were becoming increasingly popular. Population boom occurred in spite of the pestilence ravages. Finally, the King founded the University of Cracow, the second University in central Europe/ after Prague/. Unfortunately, Casimir did not create such a powerful state for his dynasty. He did not leave an heir and after his death in 1370, Polish throne was inherited by his nephew, Louis of Hungary.

Arriving at the Polish court in 1364, Peter of Cyprus met a fifty-four year old king, whose rule had made Poland's position stable over thirty years. Peter was not really invited to the rally organised on Casimir's wish. Polish King acted as a mediator between Charles IV of Luxemburg and Louis of Hungary. Polish historiography termed this conflict "the war for woman's honour"⁸. Charles IV publicly offended Elisabeth,

8. R. Grodecki, *Kongres krakowski w roku 1364/ Cracow Congress in 1364*, Warszawa 1939, 105-107; J. Wyrozumski, *op. cit.*, 130-132.

Louis' mother, when the Hungarian envoys arrived in Prague⁹. Still, Louis would use offensive terms in his letters to Charles. In 1362 Hungarian King made an alliance with Rudolph IV of Habsburg against Charles IV. For obvious reasons, Casimir was on the Hungarian side. Yet, the hostilities did not follow. Supposedly then, in May 1363 both sides resorted to Casimir's mediation¹⁰. Before signing the peace treaty, Charles IV married Elisabeth, Casimir's granddaughter. In 1364 the joint mediation of Casimir and Bolko, the prince of Swidnica, resulted in peace and the monarchs' reunion in Cracow. This mediation proved that the Polish ruler had a significant position. It also guaranteed peace in central Europe. The problem of Peter's crusading plan appeared out of the blue, because of his sudden visit to Cracow.

Peter succeeded the throne in Cyprus in 1359 as a thirty year old men. He was descended from the family of Lusignan who had made political career during crusades. They had ruled the island since the end of the 12th century. After the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Cyprus became the easternmost outpost confronted with Muslim world. Unlike his father Hugh IV, whose politics with Egypt were peaceful¹¹, Peter I was taken with the idea of crusade and he attended to dispose other European authorities in favour of his project. He set out from Paphos on 24 September 1362, accompanied by Philippe de Mézières, a great supporter of his crusading plan¹². After a stay in Rhodes, where he gained the support of Hospitallers, Peter went to Venice and he stayed there till the beginning of 1363. He spent February and March in Genoa and at the end of March he came to Avignon, where he met the pope Urban V and gained the support of the French king John II the Good. John declared himself head of the crusade which made it a French venture basically¹³. The pope sup-

9. J. Wyrozumski, *op. cit.*, 130.

10. The dispute must be seen in a wider political context. It concerned the conflict between Louis the Great and Rudolph IV of Habsburg over Aquileia, among other things.

11. G. Hill, *op. cit.*, 302.

12. The description of the journey is provided by Iorga. Cf. also: G. Hill, *op. cit.*, 324-329; H. Luke, *The Kingdom of Cyprus 1291-1369*, /in:/ *A History of the Crusades*, vol. III, ed. H. Hazard, Madison 1975, 353-356.

13. N. Iorga, *La France de Chypre*, Paris 1931, 167.

ported the expedition by means of appropriate letters to the European rulers. Peter's journey did not end in France though. He went off to England in October hoping to gain the English king's approval. Still the only things he got were tournaments and gifts. On his return to France in February 1364, Peter could not really profit by his excellent arrangement with John the Good who died soon and was succeeded by Charles V. Sometime after the crowning ceremony of the latter, Peter set off to Prague, so as to meet the emperor Charles IV. From there he made for Cracow where he came accross Casimir the Great and Louis of Hungary.

Polish sources do not express any astonishment because of that exotic guest. "Rex Cypriensis" is mentioned next to Charles IV, Louis and king of Denmark¹⁴. The presence of other participants than Peter seems obvious because of political and geographical reasons. It is not stated that the king of Cyprus was actually Charles' guest, with whom he appeared in Cracow to everybody's amazement. Janko of Czarnekow who describes the rally in Cracow in 1363, emphasizes the glamour of encounter and confesses that he is not up to conveying everything¹⁵. He also says that the participants of the rally promised "mutuam amicitiam"¹⁶. Apart from the fact that Casimir might have wanted to show off, a purpose of the meeting is not clear. In the "Annals of Saint Cross", under the year 1363, we find the mention of the wedding of Elizabeth with Charles IV in the presence of eminent guests, king of Cyprus included¹⁷. The main Polish historian Jan Dlugosz who wrote in the 15th century, puts together two pieces of information but he is in raptures over the

14. Janko z Czarnekowa, *Kronika/ Janko of Czarnekow, Chronicle/*, /in:/ *Monumenta Poloniae Historica /MPH/*, vol. II, ed. A. Bielowski, Warszawa 1961, 630; *Rocznik swietokrzyski/ Annals of Saint Cross/*, /in:/ *MPH*, vol. III, Warszawa 1961, 80.

15. Janko z Czarnekowa, op. cit., 631, 1-3: "Huic convivio quanta laetitia, magnificentia, gloria et habundantia fuit, describi non potest".

16. Ibidem, 631, 6

17. *Rocznik swietokrzyski...*, 80, 4-7: "Anno domini 1363 Carolus imperator Romanorum et rex Bohemie Cracoviam veniens, contraxit matrimonium cum Elizabeth /.../, presentibus hiis regibus: Lodovigo Ungarie, Kazimiro Polonie /.../, rege de Cipro".

splendour of the party. He particularly highlights the elegant feast that took place in the home of Wierzynek, a Cracow burgher who dazzled the guests with exquisite dishes and gifts. Dlugosz states that the participants of the congress swore the eternal alliance¹⁹ which is dismissed by contemporary historiography as the strengthening of friendly links after the treaty of Brno signed on 13 February 1364 between Louis and Charles IV²⁰. In a document dated 22 September 1364, Louis promised to observe the peace agreement²¹. Writing his chronicle from a certain distance, Dlugosz says that Casimir's name was made famous and his splendour became widely known²². Iorga, who mentions Polish sources in his work, only quotes the 16th century texts of Miechovita and Cromer who used Dlugosz profusly²³.

Polish historians skillfully dissociated the rally in Cracow from Elisabeth's wedding celebrations which had taken part earlier. During the kings' encounter in 1364, Charles' spouse was staying in Prague. Casimir was looking around for a new wife. Women did not take part in the rally because the host queen was missing²⁴. Undoubtedly, the congress brought together five crowned celebrities and a few distinguished princes. Grodecki claims that the purpose of the meeting was to save peace in central Europe and Peter's unexpected proposal directed attention of the disputing parties toward the same goal.

From Peter's perspective Poland was certainly an exotic place. The

18. Jan Dlugosz = Joannis Dlugossi, *Annales seu cronicae incliti regni Poloniae*, liber IX, Varsoviae 1978, 318-321. Cf. S. Kutrzeba, *Historia rodziny Wierzynekow / The History of Wierzynek Family*, "Rocznik Krakowski" / "Cracow Annals", 2, /1899/, 58-61.

19. J. Dlugosz, op. cit., 321: "Diebus autem convivii, qui usque in vicesimam diem tendebantur, peractis, firmata inter se reges et principes amicitia, et icto perpetue pacis facere sacramenti iuramento confirmato".

20. R. Grodecki, op. cit., 94

21. Ibidem, 95

22. J. Dlugosz, op. cit., 321: "Pro ea autem tempestate Kazimiri Polonie regis famosum et celebre erat nomen in singulas gentes ex eo tempore diffusum".

23. N. Iorga, *Philippe de Mézières...*, 173

24. R. Grodecki, op. cit., 65-66

French chronicler, Guillaume de Machaut, who described Peter's visit to Cracow, had already been familiar with Poland from the earlier period. His text proved useful for the exact dating of the rally, i.e. September 1364. Guillaume had served John of Luxemburg and took part in his expeditions to Silesia in 1327 and to Prussia in 1329²⁵. Because of his connections, Guillaume shares the Luxemburg view of situation. It is on the basis of his text that the Charles' initiative in the rally was mistakenly assumed. Poland was beyond the emperor's sway and Charles could not possibly convene a meeting in Cracow²⁶. However, Guillaume de Machaut can be excused because he did not participate in the rally and his knowledge of it was second hand. The text by Guillaume, "La prise d'Alexandrie", does not mention the actual purpose of the rally. The work is in fact full of propaganda in favour of Luxemburg and Lusignan, it presents Charles IV as the major figure, definitely superior to Casimir and Louis.

Guillaume attempts to depict Peter's journey in detail. Not all the place names can be identified nowadays. Yet the text indicates that Peter and Charles set out from Prague and made for Cracow via Silesian towns²⁸. The news about exquisite feast reached Guillaume. He comments on the items of the menu, i.e. wine, poultry, game, fish, other meats²⁹. Basically, Guillaume seems to have retained the information about the fabled feast of Wierzynek. According to the latest historical as-

25. Cf. S. Zajackowski, *op. cit.*, 219; W. Voiséé Guillaume de Machaut w Polsce i o Polsce/ Guillaume de Machaut in Poland and about Poland/, "Muzyka"/, vol. X /1965/, nr3, 53-54.

26. R. Grodecki, *op. cit.*, 20

27. S. Zajackowski, *op. cit.*, 222-223.

28. The confirmed stay in Wrocław. Cf. *Kronika ksiązat polskich/ Chronicle of Polish Princes/*, MPH, vol. III, 526: "Karolus recolende memorie domino regi Cypri, cum secum esset in Wratislavia".

29. G. de Machaut, *op. cit.*, v. 1280-1284: "Comment il furent receu/ Honnoure, servi et peu/ De pain, de vin et de vitaille/ De toute volille et d' aumaille/ De poissons et d' autre viande". The memory of this meeting is still alive in Cracow even today. Located in the market place, the restaurant "At Wierzynek" cultivates the exquisite tradition of Polish cuisine.

sumptions, the feast was organized by the city authorities in Cracow and Wierzynek held it as one of them³⁰. The tournament was organized, to please the participants. Peter was certainly the winner³¹. The honour was not only due to the normal principals of hospitality but also, to the fact that the king of Cyprus was a renowned knight.

What about the crusade, then? The idea of lounching it was not new. In 1363 the pope Urban V addressed the European rulers on this point, but without any response³². According to Guillaume de Machaut the debate in Cracow was public and as such it attracted numerous audience. It may have been held in the cathedral or in the town hall, as was the general custom³³. Guillaume says that he is not able to give a detailed report of the sessions he only mentions the final decisions. Therefore, we are not familiar with Peter's speech, that was delivered before the participants of the rally as a plea for their help. It may be assumed that he sounded as persuasive as in Prague where he had one great approval³⁴. Peter seems to have impressed his audience this time too, because, the emperor was the first to offer support. Charles promised to turn to the electors in the Reich and to the pope with the request for their assistance. Louis of Hungary also promised his support, saying that he and his army would join the crusade when necessary³⁵. Last but not least, the Polish king also expressed his offer of help. Guillaume implies that all the rulers present in the gathering took an oath to confirm their intentions³⁶. Thus, the text by Guillaume de Machaut certainly fills in the

30. J. Wyrozumski, *op. cit.*, 136-137.

31. G. de Machaut, *op. cit.*, v. 1363-1364: "Mais l' estrange roy ot le pris/ Com des armes li mieus apris"

32. Cf. J. Dudziak, *Dziesięcina papieska w Polsce sredniowiecznej/ Papal Tithe in Medieval Poland/*, Lublin 1974, 86. The author's research implies that Polish clergy did not have to submit the tithes for Peter's expedition. Polish tithe was meant to perpetuate the papal rule in Rome. Urban V was the first pope who managed to transfer the papal seat from Avignon to Rome, yet, for a brief period of time.

33. R. Grodecki, *op. cit.*, 76

34. G. de Machaut, *op. cit.*, v. 1203-1210.

35. *Ibidem*, v. 1329-1335.

36. *Ibidem*, v. 1342-1344: "Et tuit li prince qui la furent/ Que volontiers y aideront/ Et que leur pooir en feront"

gap in Polish sources which present the ceremonial side of the congress, not mentioning the crusade. However, only these crusading plans seemed to explain Peter's participation in the congress. Luis of Hungary certainly expressed the greatest interest in the plan. Casimir's promise or even oath could not possibly be fulfilled. It was an act of kindness. The situation of Polish state made it impossible for the king to get involved in the crusade. The danger of Teutonic Order's invasion and conflicts with Lithuanians claimed total attention. Ideology of the crusades could only attract individuals who might be interested in the situation of the Muslim East. It might be worth remembering that Ladislas the White, prince of Gniezko, had made his pilgrimage to the Holy Land exactly in the years 1363-1364³⁷.

Having extracted the promise of help, Peter set out for Vienna and then to Venice, where he arrived in November 1364. He stayed there till June 1365. At that time pope made his second plea for assistance in the crusade, but Europe turned a deaf ear to it. A lot of insignificant knights arrived in Cyprus and this is how the King managed to set up a large army. The expedition that he led landed in Alexandria on 9 October 1365 but it met a dismal end³⁸.

Polish historiography owes a lot to Guillaume de Machaut then. The right date of the rally could be posited due to his text. Polish sources mistakenly dated it for 1363 combining the event with the wedding ceremony of Charles IV with Casimir's granddaughter. As is now well known, the wedding took place earlier. Accordingly, the rally in Cracow attracted people who were somehow related to one another. In fact, Peter faced the family circle so it is not amazing that its participants presented their promise in unison. However, it should be emphasized that the purpose to the rally was not to support the crusade but to put an end to strife in central Europe. The issue of crusade arose due to complete coincidence, i.e. Peter's unexpected arrival in Cracow. The congress was cer-

37. R. Grodecki, *op. cit.*, 64

38. S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. III, The Kingdom of Acre, London 1965, 445-449; G. Hill, *op. cit.*, 331-334; H. Luke, *op. cit.*, 356-357.

tainly a prestigious venture. Casimir's court entertained representatives of the distinguished families which played crucial role in Europe at that time, i.e. the Luxemburg, the Anjou, the Lusignan. Also king of Denmark, Waldemar IV, came in person. It might be assumed that it was during this rally that Casimir announced the opening of the University in Cracow. Indeed, the occasion suggested itself.

Peter of Cyprus appeared in Cracow with scanty or non existent knowledge of Poland. Did he really hope for Poland's participation in his plan? He might have used his presence in Cracow to influence Charles IV and Louis of Anjou in favour of crusade. King of Denmark did not seem to have any relevance for Peter. It appears that Charles who brought Peter to the rally may have wanted to spread propaganda in Hungary or even in Poland rather than in his own state. He was not that interested in the crusade. Negotiations in Prague and the suggestion of Peter's visit to Cracow were just an expression of curtesy and a skillfull political move. Promising his help, Charles wanted to demonstrate the power of his state but the commitment was never fulfilled.

Polish sources may give rise to the mistaken impression that Peter arrived in Cracow to witness ceremony of Charles IV. Mistaken dating aside, the sources inspire such a view. Crusade against the Muslim power seemed quite exotic from Polish perspective. It sounded too much out of this world to win general approval. The northern neighbour of Poland i.e. Teutonic Oeder had already laid bare the mechanism of the holy war. Casimir's state lived a long way from the areas of tension between Christian and Muslim world. This tension was particularly felt in Byzantium and Cyprus. Even though the rapprochement with the Byzantine Church was achieved due to the incorporation of Ruthenia, Poland was far from getting involved in the conflict with the Muslim world.

Peter was a knight errant of the vanishing epoch and also a miserable lover as if out of the medieval romance. In contrast, Casimir the Great was a realistically thinking politician. Peter was the last supporter of the holy war but he never found prominent partners. The idea no longer interested monarchs and it could only attract robbers, who brought great discredit on Peter by their shameless conduct in Alexandria. Peter was trying to save the old order that was nearly gone. Casimir systematically created new situation in central Europe by fostering alliances, which guar-

anteed security on the large territory. In spite of complete different political biographies, Casimir and Peter had something in common. Both of them had a soft spot for women. Beautiful mistresses incurred envy of Peter's wife, who supposedly supported the barons' conspiracy which put an end to Peter's life in 1369. Casimir died as a result of hunting accident a year later. Even though he had been surrounded by charming women, none of them gave birth to an heir. His kingdom was taken over by Louis the Great and Poland formed the personal union with Hungary.