

**THE ISSUE OF THE SENATE OF THE POLISH–LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH IN THE LATE 16<sup>TH</sup> - 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES IN  
RUSSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY****ZLATISLAVA STRAKHOVA****ANDREY GLEBOV****Voronezh State University, Voronezh, Russian Federation**

*This article is focused on the Russian historiography of Polish parliamentarism in the late 16th–18th centuries. Particular attention is paid to the specifics of the vision of the political institutions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the late 16th - 18th centuries, taking into account the political realities of different stages of Russian historiography. The periodization of the study of the Polish political system is provided. The specifics of the perception of Polish history by Russian researchers is determined.*

The political system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with its distinctive structure, is of considerable interest to historians, political scientists, legal scholars, and researchers in many other fields of humanities. In particular, these issues have been considerably addressed by Slavic studies. As one of its disciplines, historical polonistics entered the phase of its formation only in the early 19th century and was developing at a slow pace until the 1860s. The increase in attention to the Polish issue, in particular, to the history of the Senate of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was associated with the preparation of the reform programme in the Russian Empire and the bleak events of the Polish uprising.

Traditionally, Russian historiography of the study of the Polish Senate is divided into three periods: the imperial stage, the Soviet times, and the contemporary period. The aim of the article is to characterise each of these stages, highlighting the main scholarly traditions, concepts, and research findings.

Considering the first period of Russian historiography of this matter, it should be taken into account that the experience of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, most notably, the reforms of the Senate, were of immediate interest to the top of the Russian government, which itself followed the path of transformations of the estate-representative bodies and, moving in this direction, sought to adopt the positive experience of Poland, which was more developed in this aspect. Almost all the most prominent historians of the Russian Empire expressed their thoughts on this issue: N.M. Karamzin [1], M.P. Pogodin [2], V.I. Guerrier [3], S.M. Soloviev [4], A.L. Pogodin [5], A.A. Kornilov [6], V.O. Klyuchevsky [7], and many others.

To determine the so-called "Polish issue" as a scientific problem was a major achievement of Russian historiography of the first half of the 19th century.

The "Polish issue" remained topical throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries due to the permanent political crisis that occurred immediately after the incorporation of the main territories of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw into the Russian Empire "in perpetuity" by decree of 3 May 1815. From then on, the territory of Poland was called the Kingdom of Poland.

The aim of the academic community was to develop recommendations for the integration of the distinctive Polish nation into the Russian political and socio-economic system. In this vein, it is worth noting the works studying the first steps of the Russian monarchy in this direction. For example, M.K. Lubawsky's monograph "The Kingdom of Poland and its Constitution of 1815", published in 1912 in Moscow [8].

Despite the wide autonomy, the Constitution and many privileges, the majority of the population of the annexed territories opposed joining Russia. Therefore, the national liberation movement did not stop in Poland until independence in 1917. These contradictions, especially during the aggravation of the crisis, for example, during the uprisings of 1830-1831, 1863-1864, caused a surge of interest among researchers in the history of Poland and its estate-representative bodies, in particular the Senate. These issues, in particular, were addressed by N.I. Pavlishchev, the author of the first national textbook for gymnasium students and a number of fundamental studies on the history of Poland: by O.M. Bodyansky, who read a course of lectures on the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at Moscow University; and A.S. Alekseev, who studied the process of legal formation of the institution of a limited monarchy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth [9].

Russian historian and sociologist N.I. Kareev, analysing the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Polish Sejm in 1888, noted that the concentration of all public power in one hands, which, moreover, do not have any control over themselves, and "... the seizure of supreme power in the state by one estate and the inability of this estate to organise the supreme power in their hands – these are two phenomena in the development of the Polish state, which were reflected in the peculiar character of the Sejm that existed there, and

then he concluded that these factors ultimately led to the disappearance of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the political map" [10, p. 155].

Interesting observations about the formation of the Senate of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were made by V.O. Klyuchevsky. He noted that under the current political structure of Poland, "legislation, as well as the direction of the entire political life of the country, was directly influenced by the Polish-Lithuanian gentry", which maximally tightened the conditions of villeinage of peasants on their private estates. As the historian wrote, "the gentry appropriated the right to life and death over its peasants: killing a villein for the gentry was the same as killing a dog" [7, p. 410]. Assessing the consequences of the partitions of Poland, V.O. Klyuchevsky points out that the destruction of the Polish state did not save Russia from the struggle against the Polish people during the Patriotic War of 1812 and during the Polish uprisings of the 19th century. As a result, the historian concludes that the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth only made mischief between the Russian and Polish peoples and that the Polish state should have been revived [7, p. 638].

After the October Revolution, the topic of the Polish Senate left Soviet historiography for a long time. Only after the Second World War, the topic was studied in more detail in connection with Poland's accession to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact.

The years of Perestroika and the contemporary era are an important period in Russian historiography of the history of Polish parliamentarism. After the abolition of ideological clichés and restrictions on foreign travel, Russian historians gained access to foreign archives and were able to familiarise themselves directly with the Senate documents and materials of the Polish Sejms.

The debates that unfolded in historiography since the early 1990s both regarding the issues of common European history and the history of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the modern period, and the history of Poland, Russia, and Polish-Russian relations, determined the most important areas of research in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. One of the leading topics discussed by historians was the matter of the internal and external reasons for the "weakness" of the Commonwealth, which led to the partitions of the gentry republic. According to Russian researchers, one of the reasons is the general European crisis of the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, associated with the emergence of capitalist relations, the growth of production, and the external expansion of major powers. In these new conditions of the struggle "for a place in the sun", centralised powers with an absolute monarchy, tightly controlling the aristocracy and the army, had the advantage.

Since the early 2000s, a comparative analysis between the "gentry democracy" and the democracy of bourgeois society has become an important direction of Russian polonistics, as well as the definition of the concept of "Polish-Lithuanian federalism", which, as historians have concluded, was rather limited feudal privileges of individual aristocrats, lands, and provinces.

The greatest contribution to the study of these issues was made by A.V. Lipatov in the study "Literature among Gentry Democracy", published in Moscow in 1993 [11], M.V. Leskinen in his monograph "Myths and Images of Sarmatism. The Origins of the National Ideology of the Commonwealth", published in Moscow in 2002 [12], and S.I. Nikolaev in the article "Polish Humanism of the 16th - 17th Centuries: a View from Moscovia", published in 2009 [13].

Thus, issues related to Polish history are still among the most topical in Russian Slavic studies. The interest in Polish parliamentarism first arose among scholars in the Russian Empire in connection with the annexation of the Kingdom of Poland in 1815. The attention to the Polish issue was fuelled by Russia's reforms of the 1860s–1870s and the national liberation movement in Poland throughout the 19th century.

With the establishment of Soviet power, interest in the Polish issue almost disappeared. A new stream of research on the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was associated with the formation of the socialist bloc after the Second World War. Researchers of the 1950s–1980s, however, took almost no interest in the matters of the Sejm and the Senate, focusing mainly on the peasant movement and the foreign policy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Studies of the contemporary stage of Russian historiography touch upon a wide range of issues of the past of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, including a comparative analysis of the processes of formation of the political systems of Russia and Poland.

On the whole, Russian historiography recognises the original nature of the power structure in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, this unique experience is assessed in two ways. On the one hand, the Sejm and the Senate, by limiting the power of the monarch and his administration, enabled a wider part of society to take part in governing the state. On the other hand, under weak kings, the Senate virtually suppressed the institution of the monarch, paralysing the adoption even of the most important political decisions. The constant conflicts and disputes within the representative body paralysed its work and made the Polish authorities less flexible, which was particularly damaging during the military confrontations with Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and the Crimean Khanate, which were frequent in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

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