

Poland-Lithuania According to James I's Britain

Dunee Ko

The study of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's¹ diplomatic relevance and reception by the rest of Europe during the early modern period is a subject with considerable research gaps. Poland's turbulent political past greatly attributed to the current state of its scholarship. First, Poland lost its independence after the Third Partition in 1795 and only regained it after the end of the First World War in 1918. Then, the country lost contact with the West when it became part of the Soviet Union's communist bloc during the Cold War. This led to a decline in interest in Poland and its history in the West. Consequently, academic discussions about the Commonwealth's involvement and impact in Europe's changing religious landscape during the Reformation and the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) became little more than a side note.

Since the early twentieth-century, historians have sought to bring more attention to the history of Anglo-Polish relations during the early modern period as they attempted to build a cohesive and detailed understanding of the Commonwealth's role in the Reformation and Thirty Years War. In 1934, Oskar Halecki summarized the history of Anglo-Polish relations since the fifteenth century to illustrate Poland's far-reaching diplomatic presence in the early modern period.² Later, Otakar Vočadlo and Anita Gilman Sherman contributed to the field by studying early modern English literature's depictions of Poles and especially scrutinizing William Shakespeare's works.³ In contrast, Chester Dunning and Paweł Rutkowski's recent works focused on James I's (1566-1625) shifting diplomatic approaches when the Commonwealth was at war with Sweden, Muscovy, and the Ottoman Empire.⁴ Meanwhile, Beata Cieszyńska examined the British reaction to Sigismund III's (1566-1632) pro-Catholic policies including the alleged repression of

¹ The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth will be simply referred as the Commonwealth.

² Oskar Halecki, "Anglo-Polish Relations in the Past," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 12, no. 36 (April, 1934): 659-669.

³ Anita Gilman Sherman, "Poland in the Cultural Imaginary of Early Modern England," *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (Winter, 2015): 55-89; Otakar Vočadlo, "Shakespeare and the Slavs," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 44, no. 102 (January 1966): 36-50.

⁴ Chester Dunning, "A 'Singular Affection' for Russia: Why King James Offered to Intervene in the Time of Troubles," *Russian History* 34, no. 1 (2007): 277-302; Paweł Rutkowski, "Poland and Britain Against the Ottoman Turks: Jerzy Ossoliński's Embassy to King James I in 1621," in *Britain and Poland-Lithuania: Contact and Comparison from the Middle Ages to 1795*, ed. by Jakub Basista and Richard W. Unger (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 183-96.

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Protestants in the Commonwealth.⁵ In conclusion, previous English language historiography focused on the topics of religion, diplomacy, or literature. However, there has yet to be a study that focused on the overall British reception of the Commonwealth during Sigismund III's reign.

I will examine British perceptions of the Commonwealth during the reign of Sigismund III Vasa (1587-1632.) This period was explicitly chosen because the Commonwealth's territory reached its maximum extent under Sigismund III's reign, and the state became the dominant power in Eastern Europe. Thus, I reasoned that the state's heightened diplomatic prestige as the result of its military success would have generated more international attention. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to analyze the depth of British knowledge about the Commonwealth at that time and how they reacted to Sigismund III's policies and diplomacy.

The reign of Sigismund III was a pivotal period in the Commonwealth's history. For centuries, the state was highly tolerant of those who did not follow the state religion, Catholicism, compared to other European powers at that time. This was a result of laws that guaranteed religious tolerance that were enacted by prior Polish kings before Sigismund III, and the state's nobility who succeeded in limiting the king's authority to interfere with their religious practices.⁶ Consequently, the state's religious environment allowed for a rapid proliferation of Protestant beliefs among its population once the Reformation began. This trend, however, was reversed when Sigismund III ascended to the Commonwealth throne and who would later also inherit Sweden from his father, John III (1537-1592). He sought to counter the Reformation by enacting pro-Catholic decrees and invited the Jesuits into his realms. His religious policy resulted in him losing Sweden to a Protestant rebellion. And in the Commonwealth, the king paved the way for rising sectarian conflict among the state's population – especially in its eastern region which once belonged to Kievan Rus' and whose population were predominantly Orthodox Christians.⁷ Thus, Sigismund III actively participated in religious conflicts that engulfed much of Europe during the Reformation, and so, studying British perspectives

⁵ Beata Cieszyńska, "Polish Religious Persecution as a Topic in British Writing in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century." in *Britain and Poland-Lithuania: Contact and Comparison from the Middle Ages to 1795*, ed. by Jakub Basista and Richard W. Unger (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 243-60.

⁶ Jerzy Kłoczowski, *A History of Polish Christianity* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2000), 94-108.

⁷ Daniel Z. Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State: 1386-1795* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 131-148.

regarding Sigismund III offers a unique opportunity to examine how a state that sided against Catholicism perceived the Commonwealth.

This study relies on primary sources that were published in Great Britain around the period of Sigismund III's reign. Although it was likely to find similar sources much after the king's death, it is more meaningful to keep the search criteria narrow and focus on writings that are as close to what could be classified as first-hand reactions and opinions. The results were mixed. The gathered primary sources were enough to write a meaningful analysis of the essay's topic. However, most of these sources lacked an in-depth discussion of the Commonwealth or Sigismund III and instead focused on broader subjects such as religion, politics, and wars in Europe. Thus, the sources revealed that the Commonwealth was not a topic which received focused and immediate attention from British intellectuals at that time. The reason was most likely due to the geographical distance between the two regions, which would have prevented frequent and direct contacts between them. Nevertheless, the contents showed that the Commonwealth was not completely unknown to the writers. They were interested in news about the state's religious scene, and the wars with its neighboring powers. Perhaps their interest came from the Commonwealth being a fellow Christian state, or Britain's political and trade interests over the Baltic Sea. Regardless, the articles' contents will be discussed in the central part of this essay.

The primary sources used in this essay are a diverse collection of genres including sermons, political manifestos, and travel accounts. The structure of this analysis is divided into three sections: descriptions about the Commonwealth's general characteristics, British opinions on the state's religious policy, and reactions to its wars with neighboring powers. Overall, the study shows that the literate British public at that time had a basic knowledge of the Commonwealth and showed a fascination with its elective monarchy system and diverse religious scene. Their receptiveness to Sigismund III's policy correlated closely with individual author's religious views. The discussion about the state's wars generally contained little religious bias except when the Commonwealth fought the Ottoman Empire – which the authors supported out of Christian solidarity. Ultimately, what this analysis suggests is that Britain did consider the Commonwealth as a fellow polity within Europe's diplomatic sphere. They saw Sigismund III as an active participant in religious conflicts that were the fruits of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Reformation.

The Polish Culture and Elective Monarchy

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In 1614 a posthumous work, *Enquiries Touching the Diuersity of Languages* by Edward Brerewood (1565-1613), an English antiquarian and mathematician from Chester, discusses the Commonwealth's general characteristics.⁸ First, the author described the geographical location of the state in relation to its neighboring powers.⁹ He then listed the historical regions within the state's territory and its vassal states.¹⁰ Brerewood pointed out that the Commonwealth had a significant Protestant and Orthodox population but that the majority of Poles were Catholics.¹¹ Importantly, he explained that Poles were part of the broader Slavic-speaking people who inhabited Europe's eastern and southeastern regions. He further identified Poles as being most similar to Czechs due to their shared usage of the Latin alphabet in contrast to other Slavic languages that used the Cyrillic script.¹²

Brerewood's writing demonstrates that his linguistic knowledge about the Slavs was not extensive enough to allow him to further classify Slavs into subgroups similar to that of modern ethnography, but his writing displayed a basic awareness of the linguistic differences within Slavic population in Europe at that time. Interestingly, in his discussion about the Slavs, he listed Russians and Muscovites as separate people when, in fact, both terms were used to describe the same people by the early seventeenth century.¹³ Considering that the author discussed the significant population of Orthodox Christians living in the Commonwealth's eastern land but did not identify them as people of former Kievan Rus', and since the region along with the territory of the Grand Duchy of Moscow previously formed a part of former Kievan Rus', it is plausible that Brerewood used the term interchangeably for the whole Eastern Slavic people.¹⁴

The next text, *The Glory of England*, by Thomas Gainsford (d. 1624) displays a recurring tendency of British writers to focus on the Commonwealth's elective monarchy and its complex ecclesiastical

⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Brerewood, Edward," by Thompson Cooper, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3335>.

⁹ Edward Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diuersity of Languages, and Religions Through the Cheife Parts of the World. Written by Edw. Brerewood Lately Professor of Astronomy in Gresham Colledge in London* (London: Printed for Iohn Bill, 1614), 7.

¹⁰ Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diuersity of Languages*, 138.

¹¹ Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diuersity of Languages*, 7.

¹² Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diuersity of Languages*, 21 and 59.

¹³ Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diuersity of Languages*, 21. Many primary sources used in this study used the terms Russian and Muscovite interchangeably. I have decided to use Muscovite as the sole indicating term for the Russian Tsardom.

¹⁴ Janet Martin, *Medieval Russia: 980-1584* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 226-7. Since I do not possess an adequate knowledge regarding an ethnographic history of Belarussians and Ukrainians, I will use the former Rus' people as the term to indicate Eastern Slavs in the Commonwealth.

landscape in the early seventeenth century. Gainsford was a traveling soldier and moderately-known historical writer from Surrey. The text was his most well-received publication, and it contains fragmented descriptions of the state's geopolitical realities.¹⁵ His main focus was the state's diplomatic and military situation in respect to the Ottoman Empire and the Grand Duchy of Moscow.¹⁶ He also remarked at length about the geographical flatness of the Polish land, the limited power of a Commonwealth monarch who could not enforce a hereditary succession, and the unusual political strength of the Polish noble class, *szlachta*.¹⁷ Similar to Brerewood, Gainsford also did not recognize the connection between the former Kievan Rus' state and the Commonwealth's large Orthodox Christian population.¹⁸

A noteworthy feature of Gainsford's writing is his incorrect understanding of Polish history. First, the author stated that Poland was less than three hundred years old as a kingdom and that it had experienced a period of fragmentation that lasted for nearly two centuries.¹⁹ It seems that Gainsford based his understanding of Polish history on examples of petty dukedoms that had existed during Poland's feudal fragmentation period. However, his claim runs counter to the fact that Poland was recognized as a kingdom in the early eleventh century with the coronation of Bolesław I (967-1025).²⁰ Furthermore, he appears to have misidentified the name of a Polish monarch because he wrote that Sigismund was titled "the Great" by Poles after the king consolidated Prussia and Lithuania under his rule. This is wrong since Casimir III (1310-1370) was the only king in Polish history who was regarded as "the Great."²¹ Also, the process of vassalizing the Dukedom of Prussia, formed after secularizing the Teutonic Order territory, happened under Sigismund I (1467-1548).²² Later, his successor Sigismund II August (1520-1572) was responsible for the Union of Lublin which integrated the

¹⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Gainsford, Thomas," by S. A. Baron, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10284>.

¹⁶ Thomas Gainsford, *The Glory of England, or a True Description of Many Excellent Prerogatives and Remarkable Blessings... Plainly Manifesting the Defects of Them All in Regard of Her Sufficiencie and Fulnesse of Happinesse* (London: Printed by Edward Griffin, 1618), 30 and 213.

¹⁷ Gainsford, *The Glory of England*, 67.

¹⁸ Martin, *Medieval Russia*, 226-7.

¹⁹ Gainsford, *The Glory of England*, 302.

²⁰ Patrice M. Dabrowski, *Poland: The First Thousand Years* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), 15-8.

²¹ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 5.

²² Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 36.

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Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to form the Commonwealth.²³ Thus, Gainsford's narrative is factually distorted.

In contrast, John Barclay's (1582-1621) remarks about the Commonwealth are more dogmatic than the previous examples. He was a French-Scottish writer who worked in James I's (1566-1625) court as anti-Jesuit Catholic. His *The Mirror of Minds* was a satirical character portrayal of various states around the world that were known in Britain during the early seventeenth century.²⁴ Similar to Brerewood, he described the Commonwealth's geographical features while additionally commenting on a significance of Polish grain exports to the rest of Europe.²⁵ Moreover, he offered an interesting explanation about the etymology of "Poland" and his view about its political structure.

First, it is currently generally accepted that "Poland" is related to the word "pole" which means "field" in Polish. Barclay, instead, suggests that the word originated from the Scythian language.²⁶ Perhaps, this may have been a product of him confusing Scythians with the Sarmatians, a tribal confederation from whom the szlachta nobility believed the Poles were descended.²⁷ If this theory is correct – and since there is no evidence that Barclay ever visited the Commonwealth, his description suggests that Europeans outside the Commonwealth knew about the Sarmatism.

Next, regarding the Commonwealth's politics, he believed that the szlachta's unusually firm grip on power and their king's limited authority were the result of the Poles' barbaric past. He concluded that the state lacked unity and that its nobility were sinful because their king lacked the power to establish proper religious and moral order within his domain.²⁸ Thus, Barclay unfavorably viewed the state's political system because he believed the szlachta wielded too much power compared to its king.

Similarly, George Downname (d. 1634), the bishop of Derry who showed an affinity to Calvinism and was fiercely anti-Catholic, also took an antagonistic view toward the Commonwealth's political structure.²⁹ For him, the main problem was the elective monarchy. He did not believe in its long-term viability and argued that the state's king lacked legitimacy to rule because he is required to swear an oath to respect the szlachta's rights before the Sejm, the Commonwealth's parliament that

²³ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 51.

²⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Barclay, John," by Nicola Royan, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1342>.

²⁵ John Barclay, *The Mirrour of Mindes, or, Barclay's Icon Animorum* (London: Printed by Iohn Norton, 1631), 255.

²⁶ Barclay, *The Mirrour of Mindes*, 255.

²⁷ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 211-2.

²⁸ Barclay, *The Mirrour of Mindes*, 260-1.

²⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Downname, George," by Kenneth Gibson, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7977>.

confirms his right to rule.³⁰ Thus, Downname also took issue with the state's system because its king lacked authority to check the szlachta's power.

In contrast, *A Conference about the Next Succession* discussed the prospects of royal succession following Elizabeth I (1533-1603). The book, which was published anonymously in 1595, viewed the elective monarchy in a more neutral light compared to Barclay and Downname's writings. The author, similar to previously discussed writers, briefly described Poland's past and also wrote about the short reign of Henryk Walezy (1551-1589), the Polonized name for Henry III, who spent less than a year in Kraków before escaping the state to ascend the French throne after his brother Charles IX (1550–1574) died.³¹ The story was part of the writer's lengthy discussion about the benefits and risks of electing a domestic or a foreign prince to rule a state. The book draws upon the Commonwealth's history of electing foreign princes to its throne, which was then compared with examples from the Roman Empire. The examples included Nero and Commodus, who according to the author were born in Rome, then Trajan and Constantine who were born in Roman colonies.³² Overall, the writing itself does not offer an opinion on the elective monarchy, and the discussion is more akin to passive observation.

Based on Edward Brerewood and Thomas Gainsford's descriptions of the Commonwealth's general characteristics, it appears that British intellectuals by the seventeenth century had access to basic and incomplete information about the Commonwealth. This is based on previous analyses where I have demonstrated that both writings lacked accurate explanations about the state's complex ethnic and religious scene compared to the modern historical understanding.

Next, John Barclay, George Downname, and the anonymous author who wrote *A Conference about the Next Succession* all displayed interest in the state's elective monarchy system. The first two authors held it in disdain. To them it was wrong for a king to have limited authority over his noble subjects because they believed that a clear vertical hierarchy must exist between a king and nobility to establish unity and order

³⁰ George Downname, *A Defence of the Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the L. Bishop of Bath and Vvelles Against a Confutation...The Fourth, Maintayning that the Episcopall Function is of Apostolicall and Diuine Institution* (London: Printed by Thomas Creed, William Hall, and Thomas Snodham, 1611), 119.

³¹ Anonymous, *A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland Diuided into Two Partes. Where-of the First Conteyneth the Discourse of a Ciuill Lavyer, How and in Vwhat Manner Propinquity of Blood is to Be Preferred...& of the Noble Order of the Garter*. Published by R. Doleman (Antwerp: Printed by R. Doleman, 1595), 55-6; and Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 121-2.

³² Anonymous, *A Conference About the Next Succession*, 227-30.

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within a state. In their view, that hierarchy did not exist in the state, and they perceived this to be a problem. On the other hand, the third author was mostly interested in the Commonwealth's past history of inviting and electing a foreign prince to rule for the purpose of comparison rather than making an evaluative appraisal. Ultimately, all three authors attempted to study the state's political structure to gauge its impact on the state's ability to govern. In their view, the critical feature of good governance was whether a system promotes social order and unity.

Religious Tolerance and Counter-Reformation

The Commonwealth in the early modern period was a confessional state like the rest of Europe at that time. However, the state was unusual because it had laws that promoted religious tolerance. One example is the 1573 declaration by the Warsaw Confederation. It was an agreement between representatives of the Commonwealth's major religions to respect all religions' right to freely exercise in the state.³³ Before Sigismund III, the tolerant religious environment in the state allowed different faiths to coexist without a severe risk of violent civil unrest breaking out unlike what was happening to the west of the Commonwealth at that time. Thus, the sight of Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Protestants, and even Anti-Trinitarians being allowed to practice their religions in the land must have been a genuinely bewildering, and possibly frightening, sight for outsiders.³⁴

Edwin Sandys (1561-1629) was a prominent politician from Worcestershire who served in England's House of Commons for several decades. He is attributed as the author of *Europae Speculum*, which was published in the year of his death.³⁵ Within the book Sandys wrote that the Commonwealth was a land where men without faith would surely discover one. His discussion is brief, but it displays his perplexed reaction to the state's religious policy. It is important to consider that European societies at that time strongly valued an individual's adherence to an established faith, especially Christian piety. Therefore, his assessment of the state's religious tolerance could not have been positive at all. Sandys's comment conveys his view that the Commonwealth was rife with heathens and heretical beliefs.

On the other hand, British writers appear to have been very interested in voicing their opinions about Sigismund III's pro-Catholic policy—as far more sources are devoted to this topic. The next two sources

³³ Kłoczowski, *A History of Polish Christianity*, 94.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Sandys, Sir Edwin," by Theodore K. Rabb, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24650>.

both mention the king's invitation to the Jesuits to enter the Commonwealth. First, Thomas Scott (d. 1626) was a provocative Protestant preacher who vigorously attacked Catholicism and Philip II of Spain (1527-1598) in his numerous pamphlets.³⁶ Next, Anthony Copley (1567-1609?) was a moderate Catholic who was banished from Britain because of his alleged involvement in the Bye Plot of 1603.³⁷ Both of them separately wrote in disparaging tone about the Jesuits' presence in the Commonwealth on behalf of Sigismund III. They claimed that the king was oppressing his Protestant subjects from freely practice their religion, and believed that the king was conspiring with Philip II to aid the Spaniard's ambition to dominate Europe. It is interesting to notice that despite Scott and Copley's differing religious alignments, both were ultimately concerned with Spain's supposed powerful presence in Europe at that time.³⁸

Similarly, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, Bartholomew Robertson, criticized Sigismund III's religious policies in more detail.³⁹ First, however, it is interesting to observe that Robertson misidentified the Commonwealth's king as Stephen Báthory.⁴⁰ This is apparent because Báthory was a Transylvanian prince who was Sigismund III's predecessor in the Commonwealth, but Robertson was writing about the king facing the Swedish rebellion led by Duke Charles (1550-1611), who was in fact Sigismund III.⁴¹ It is a curious mistake because other writers from this period did not make the same error. Regardless, the writer claimed that Sigismund III lost the Swedish throne because of his decision to bring the Jesuits into Sweden. In Robertson's view, Swedes were rightfully defending their religious conscience by rebelling against Sigismund III. He also wrote about the Commonwealth, where he alleged that Jesuits were sowing misdeeds in its land by forcing Catholicism upon its

³⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Scott, Thomas," by Sean Kelsey, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24916>.

³⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Copley, Anthony," by Michael A. R. Graves, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6268>.

³⁸ Anthony Copley, *Another Letter of Mr. A. C. to His dis-Iesuitied Kinseman, Concerning the Appeale, State, Iesuites...in a Certaine Iesuiticall Libell, Intituled, a Manifestation of Folly and Bad Spirit* (1602), 43; Thomas Scott, *A Second Part of Spanish Practices, or, a Relation of More Particular Wicked Plots, and Cruell,...Wherein the Right and Lawfulness of the Netherlandish Warre Against Phillip King of Spaine us Approved and Demonstrated* (1624), 28.

³⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Robertson, Bartholomew" by Vivienne Larminie, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23788>.

⁴⁰ Bartholomew Robertson, *A Blovo for the Pope, or, a Discourse had in S. Giles Church, in Elgen of Murray at a Conference with Certaine Papists,...with a Short Register of All the Attempts and Murthers vpon Kings and Princes in Our Time by the Persuasion of the Iesuits* (London: Printed by G. Eld, 1615), 70.

⁴¹ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 122-7; 140.

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people.⁴² Robertson's open anti-Catholic view and his criticism of Sigismund III undoubtedly stem from his Presbyterian beliefs. Considering that the aforementioned Thomas Scott, himself a Protestant, also made a similar assessment, it is likely that other Protestant British intellectuals shared a similarly dim opinion regarding Sigismund III's politics.

Edwin Sandys' assessment of the Commonwealth's religious tolerance and its unusual level of sectarian diversity resulting from the former, suggests that British intellectuals would not have held such a lax religious stance in high regard.⁴³ It is important to recognize that achieving spiritual salvation was of fundamental importance for early modern Europeans. The question of what it meant to be a good Christian and to serve God properly was a central conundrum for most European scholars at that time. Martin Luther, whose actions led to the beginning of the Reformation, also was motivated by a desire to achieve salvation.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, those who did not agree with their state's religious dogma were often violently persecuted. Thus, the fact that the Commonwealth was home to so many religious factions must have been seen as a sure sign of the state's impending spiritual disaster in Britain.

This evidence shows that British intellectuals were paying attention to Sigismund III's religious ambition in the Commonwealth. The writings by Thomas Scott, Anthony Copley, and Bartholomew Robertson all denounced the king's effort to strengthen the state's Catholic presence and accused him of oppressing his people's religious conscience and freedom.⁴⁵ Here it is important to notice that the writers have used the word "conscience" and "freedom" only in the case of a supposed forced conversion by the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, it should be recognized that their definition of religious "freedom" did not extend to Catholics, since it was natural for an individual to abandon Catholicism and support the Reformation movement. Also, it is interesting to notice some of the writers' accusations that Sigismund III was conspiring with Philip II of Spain to subvert the Reformation. The veracity of their allegation is impossible to gauge, owing to a lack of sources on the subject. It is, however, more likely that writers were inclined to imagine that the Spaniard was somehow involved in Sigismund III's pro-Catholic policy. Philip II at that time was busy

⁴² Robertson, *A Bloov for the Pope, or, a Discourse had in S. Giles Church*, 70.

⁴³ Sandys, *Europae Speculum*.

⁴⁴ Margaret L. King, *A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe* (North York: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 312-3.

⁴⁵ Copley, *Another Letter of Mr. A. C. to His dis-Iesuited Kinseman*, 28; Robertson, *A Bloov for the Pope, or, a Discourse had in S. Giles Church*, 70; and Scott, *A Second Part of Spanish Practices*.

violently suppressing Protestant rebellions in the Low Countries and was widely recognized as the enemy of the Reformation. Furthermore, England had been recently at war with Spain during Elizabeth I's reign.⁴⁶ Therefore, the Spanish monarch's infamy in Britain is most likely behind his supposed association in the writers' accusation.

The early seventeenth century was a particularly intense period of religious conflicts in European history. Politics, diplomacy, and war were all intertwined with religion, and various powers in Europe fought against each other because of the factional rift that had been created by the Reformation. The Thirty Years War was the culmination of the violence from all the religious disagreements within the Holy Roman Empire. The conflict left the empire in a severely weakened state, and it no longer functioned as a unified political entity.⁴⁷ Sigismund III was no idle participant in the ongoing religious wars. The Commonwealth at that time fought against Sweden, Muscovy, and the Ottoman Empire for different political reasons. Interestingly, the belligerent powers involved in Sigismund III's wars followed different state religions. Sweden was a Protestant kingdom, Muscovy was an Orthodox Christian state, and the Ottoman Turks were Muslims.

The recognition of the Commonwealth's unique geopolitical situation and religion's relevance can be found in Christopher Marlowe's (d. 1593) *The Massacre at Paris*. He was an English playwright and a poet who profoundly influenced the English tragedy scene, which later gave rise to William Shakespeare (d. 1616).⁴⁸ In his play the passage about the Commonwealth is found in the scene where Henry III is elected to the Commonwealth's throne. Marlowe described the Commonwealth as a military state situated at the edge of Christendom faced with the onslaught of Turkish infidels and also, curiously, Muscovites.⁴⁹ Although Marlowe professed himself Catholic, his real allegiance to the faith was dubious due to his alleged spying activity on the English Catholic community.⁵⁰ But as a Christian, his portrayal of the Commonwealth as the bulwark against the Islamic invaders is understandable given centuries of violent conflicts between Christianity and Islam. Yet, it is interesting to observe his exclusion of Orthodox Muscovites as those outside Christendom. Nonetheless, Marlowe's work provides a useful

⁴⁶ *Encyclopedia of Tudor England*, ed. John A. Wagner and Susan Walters Schmid (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), s.v. "Netherlands Revolt."

⁴⁷ King, *A Short History of the Renaissance*, 357-8.

⁴⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Marlowe [Marley], Christopher," by Charles Nicholl, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18079>.

⁴⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris with the Death of the Duke of Guise. As It was Plaide by the Right Honourable the Lord High Admirall His Seruants* (London: Printed by E. A., 1594), 22.

⁵⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Marlowe [Marley], Christopher."

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starting point for discussing Britain's responses to the Commonwealth's wars with its neighboring powers. This essay will now examine whether religion was a crucial factor for the authors when they wrote about the wars in Eastern Europe.

Wars with Sweden and Muscovy

In 1598 war broke out in Sweden between Duke Charles and Sigismund III. This was the beginning of more than a half-century of conflicts between the Commonwealth and Sweden. It was an ironic outcome because Sigismund III inherited the Swedish throne from his father, John III (1537-1592), and his election to the Commonwealth's throne was a collaboration between two kingdoms to cement their military alliance against the growing Muscovite threat. Duke Charles desired the Swedish throne and championed the Protestant cause in Sweden, which had already largely accepted the Reformation. Meanwhile, Sigismund III landed in Sweden from the Commonwealth with mercenaries funded by the Sejm to preserve the personal union between the two countries. The war ended with Charles's victory; Sigismund III was captured after the Battle of Stångebro and forced to flee Sweden. The duke was crowned as Charles IX of Sweden in 1599.⁵¹

Later in 1609 the Commonwealth was once again at war with Sweden when Sigismund III invaded Muscovy. The background of Sigismund III's invasion and Sweden's involvement is quite complex. Muscovy had entered a period of cataclysmic political turbulence when the Rurikid dynasty died out with the death of Feodor I in 1598.⁵² Soon after, a man claiming to be Feodor I's presumably dead younger brother, Dmitry Ivanovich (1582-1591), surfaced in the state. This individual, who is now known as the first "False" Dmitry – the series of pretenders who claimed to be the deceased king's brother, managed to garner significant popular support among Russians while also being sponsored by the Commonwealth. For a brief moment, he entered Moscow and successfully took the throne before he was supposedly killed in the city's uprising in 1606.⁵³ Sigismund III at that point decided to use his state's prior investment in the now-deposed False Dmitry as justification for invading Muscovy. His objective was to take the Muscovite throne for himself, then use its territory to invade Sweden by land. Thus Sweden,

⁵¹ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 139-40.

⁵² Martin, *Medieval Russia*, 415.

⁵³ *Encyclopedia of Russian History*, ed. James R. Millar (Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), s.v. "Czar of Russia Dmitry, False."

fearing the Commonwealth's expansion, decided to intervene on behalf of Muscovy.⁵⁴

James I in Britain also was following the military developments that were unfolding in Eastern Europe. According to Chester Dunning, a historian who specializes in Russian history, James I, despite the animosity toward Catholicism in his cabinet, instead supported Sigismund III in his bid to reclaim the Swedish throne. However, as the Commonwealth army advanced farther into the Muscovite territory, James I started to worry about Britain's vested economic interest in Russian fur exports and the trans-Volga trading companies that were owned by English merchants. James I switched sides and began to support the Swedish-Muscovite cause by sponsoring mercenaries to combat the Commonwealth army. The British cabinet became dismayed over Sigismund III's success and his army's occupation of Moscow, and they contemplated the idea of invading Muscovy to install a protectorate in its northern territories.⁵⁵

An interesting aspect of the Commonwealth's wars with the Kingdom of Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Moscow is that the events could be construed as sectarian conflicts within Christianity – Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians. Therefore, the examination of British writers' interpretation of these wars in the east provides an opportunity to understand whether their affinity toward a particular Christian faction decisively influenced their view of the Commonwealth. Since Britain in the seventeenth century was already sponsoring Protestant political causes within the religious conflicts that had engulfed Continental Europe, the natural assumption is that British writers would have been sympathetic toward Swedes and possibly Russians who were fighting the Catholic invasion.

In 1616 James I wrote a book-length rebuttal against the oration of the French cardinal Jacques Davy Duperron who preached in favor of Catholicism (1556-1618).⁵⁶ Within it the British monarch argued that the Swedes rose up in arms to overthrow Sigismund III because the Polish king sought to oppress their freedom of conscience by attempting to force Catholicism on them.⁵⁷ But even though James I essentially criticized the Polish king for his attempted tyranny, the British monarch did not venture as far as to justify the Swedish rebellion and defend the legitimacy of Charles IX's rule. Instead, James I specifically commented

⁵⁴ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 140-2.

⁵⁵ Dunning, "A 'Singular Affection' for Russia," 277-302.

⁵⁶ *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Jacques Davy Duperron," accessed April 1, 2018.

⁵⁷ James I, *A Remonstrance of the Most Gracious King James I. King of Great Britaine, France, and Ireland, Defender of Faith, ... Translated Out of His Maiesties French Copie* (Cambridge: Printed by Cantrell Legge, 1616), 266.

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that Swedes had committed sedition against the Polish monarch.⁵⁸ Between the Elizabethan era and James I's rule during the early seventeenth century, British law and criminal prosecution did not differentiate between sedition and treason.⁵⁹ Therefore, the comment by James I regarding the rebellion did carry a weight of condemnation.

On the other hand, some primary sources did explicitly support Sigismund III's bid to recover the Swedish throne. The condemnation of Duke Charles and his Swedish allies was written by an English Jesuit named Robert Parsons (1546-1610.) He allegedly converted to Catholicism in his thirties and established an extensive underground Catholic connection in Britain. During the Elizabethan period, Parsons covertly traveled back to England to conduct Jesuit missions and fled when his activity became known and Catholic persecution escalated in 1581.⁶⁰ From his writings that were published in 1602 and 1607, Parsons claimed that Catholics were persecuted for attempting to live peacefully with the Protestants while the latter sought to oppress the former with the usurpation of countries and committing atrocities.⁶¹ He used Elizabeth I's violent repression of Catholic practitioners in England and the Swedish rebellion against Sigismund III to support his claim. He denounced Charles IX and his Swedish allies for violating the Polish monarch's just and lawful claim to the Swedish throne and accused them of harboring treacherous, malicious ambition and singularly focusing on the oppression of the remaining Catholic population in Sweden.⁶²

Turning now to the war that was unfolding in Muscovy, Henry Brereton wrote a piece in 1614 detailing the False Dmitry affair and how the Polish-Muscovite war was progressing. His narration of the first False Dmitry is roughly similar to the description I have provided. However, Brereton believed that this individual was, in fact, the genuine Dmitry Ivanovich himself.⁶³ He also thought that the man claiming to be Dmitry

⁵⁸ James I, *A Remonstrance of the Most Gracious King*, 266.

⁵⁹ David Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious, and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42-43.

⁶⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Persons [Parsons], Robert," by Victor Houlston, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21474>.

⁶¹ Robert Parsons, *A Manifestation of the Great Folly and Bad Spirit of Certayne in England Calling Themselves Secular Priestes...of Which Libels Sundry are Heer Examined and Refuted. By Priestes Lying in Obedience* (Antwerp: Printed by A. Conincx, 1602), 110; Robert Parsons, *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation Towards Catholike-subiectes in England Vöherin is Declared,...Dedicated to the Learned Schoole-deuines, Cyuill and Canon Lavvyers of the Tvo Vniuersities of England* (Saint-Omer: Printed by F. Bellet, 1607), 16.

⁶² Parsons, *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation Towards Catholike-subiectes*, 51.

⁶³ Henry Brereton, *Newes of the Present Miseries of Rushia Ocasioned by the Late Warre in That COUNTRY. Commence betweene Sigimond Now King of Poland...Together with the Memorable Occurrences of Our Owne Nationall Forces, English, and Scottes, vnder the Pay of the Now King of Swethland* (London: Printed for Iohn Bache, 1614), 13.

had safely escaped Moscow after losing the throne in 1606 and re-emerged later near the Commonwealth's border. This second claimant has historically been identified as the second False Dmitry instead.⁶⁴

In his writing Brereton is sympathetic to the False Dmitry. And his warm attitude toward the pretender is understandable since he believed the person to be a genuine heir to the Muscovite throne. To him, Poles were the villains who caused Dmitry's downfall. He wrote that Polish soldiers, who accompanied Dmitry into Moscow, caused the rebellion because they mistreated the city's inhabitants and undermined the prince's popularity through treachery.⁶⁵ Sigismund was also the villain in his story. He criticized the king for invading Muscovy and spreading miseries upon its people. He also wrote that Swedes were not helping the matter since they were exacerbating the already dire conditions in Muscovy.⁶⁶ Overall, Brereton's assessment of the Commonwealth in his story is negative. However, the manner of how the state was portrayed had more to do with the writer's assumption and sympathetic view about the False Dmitry than the state's religious alignment.

The second source is a travel account by an unknown English soldier. He was part of a mercenary company that was hired by Sweden to fight the Commonwealth army in Russia.⁶⁷ His story is quite fascinating because it provides a glimpse into the harsh life of mercenaries in early modern Europe. This mercenary and his companions traveled via ship through the Danish Strait, then passed through Swedish ports on their way to Finland.⁶⁸ They then ventured by foot into Russia to join with the Muscovite army and other mercenary companies. The only battle in his narrative is likely the Battle of Klushino, which took place near Smolensk in 1610.⁶⁹ This is supported by his account in which he describes a disastrous charge by Russian cavalry as the reason behind the Muscovite's defeat, and how he and other remaining mercenaries acted as pockets of resistance before surrendering to the Commonwealth army.⁷⁰

The most noteworthy aspect of the English soldier's travel account is that he is the only individual in this study who undoubtedly had direct interaction with Poles. In the story he witnessed numerous Russian villages that had been pillaged by the Commonwealth army as the

⁶⁴ Brereton, *Newes of the Present Miseries of Rushia*, 12-20.

⁶⁵ Brereton, *Newes of the Present Miseries of Rushia*, 8-11.

⁶⁶ Brereton, *Newes of the Present Miseries of Rushia*, 31.

⁶⁷ Anonymous. *Svvetland and Poland Vvarres a Souldiers Returne Out of Sweden, and His Newes from the Warres...with the Fortunes and Successe of Those 1200. Men That Lately Went Thither* (London: Printed for Nathaniell Butter, 1610), 7.

⁶⁸ Anonymous. *Svvetland and Poland Vvarres a Souldiers Returne*, 9-12; 15-6.

⁶⁹ Dabrowski, *Poland: The First Thousand Years*, 168-9.

⁷⁰ Anonymous. *Svvetland and Poland Vvarres a Souldiers Returne*, 19-20.

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mercenary company ventured deeper into the Muscovite territory.⁷¹ Considering the tone of his account, it does not appear that he was personally hostile to Poles due to what he witnessed. Perhaps, this is because the atrocities inflicted upon Russian civilians were unfortunately a common occurrence in warfare in Europe at that time. Otherwise, he provided very little indication of interacting with Poles before he was released and returned to England. Overall, the story offers no indication of whether his religion impacted the author's view of the Commonwealth.

Previously, James I's writing revealed that he believed Sigismund III lost Sweden to the rebellion because he tried to force Catholicism upon the Swedes, violating their religious conscience.⁷² However, despite James I's hostility to the Roman Catholic Church, he did not go as far as showing support to Charles IX's legitimacy nor denouncing Sigismund III for warring against his former subjects. From James I's perspective, it seems logical to assume that he refrained from supporting the Swedish cause because making such a political stand could have damaged his own rule over Britain. As Dunning explained, James I for the most part, actually supported the Polish king's bid to retake the Swedish throne until Sigismund III decided to invade Muscovy.⁷³ The British monarch's motive probably stemmed from his rule over both Scotland and England, which before his ascension to the English throne, were separate political entities. Both countries had different established Christian churches, and Britain still had a considerable Catholic minority.⁷⁴ Therefore, supporting Sweden out of Protestant solidarity would have undermined his legitimacy.

Perhaps, then, James I's motives may explain why other British writers refrained from supporting Charles IX and Sweden—because Britain had no direct political interest in the war. Both Henry Brereton and the anonymous soldier's writings addressed the topic of Sweden despite their central theme being the Polish-Muscovite War.⁷⁵ Their narratives did contain descriptions of military atrocities the Commonwealth army was committing in the Muscovite territory. But as it was noted in a soldier's story, it would be difficult to claim that such narratives are noteworthy because military atrocity was a standard feature of war, especially during the seventeenth century with the Thirty Years War raging in the Holy Roman Empire.

⁷¹ Anonymous. *Sveethland and Poland Vvarres a Souldiers Returne*, 17-8.

⁷² Robertson, *A Bloov for the Pope, or, a Discourse had in S. Giles Church*, 70.

⁷³ Dunning, "A 'Singular Affection' for Russia," 277-302.

⁷⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Persons [Parsons], Robert."

⁷⁵ Anonymous. *Sveethland and Poland Vvarres a Souldiers Returne*; Henry Brereton, *Newes of the Present Miseries of Rushia*.

Instead, the author who openly took a side in the Polish-Swedish War was an English Jesuit, Robert Parson. Since he spent much of his life attempting to bring England back to the Roman Catholic Church, it makes sense that he supported Sigismund III's bid to reclaim Sweden.⁷⁶ Thus, Parson had a personal stake, which stemmed from his devotion to Catholicism, in his support of Sigismund III and ultimately the restoration of Catholicism in Europe. Therefore, he was different from other writers in this study, which for them, the Commonwealth was a distant state in which Britain only had marginal political interests.

The Polish-Ottoman War

This final section will discuss the military conflict between the Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire. In 1620 the two states warred over control of the Principality of Moldavia, which was the extension of the Moldavian Magnate Wars that started in the late sixteenth century.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the pool of available primary sources by British writers that discussed the Polish-Ottoman War is small. However, the discussion warrants a separate section because the war belonged to centuries of the religious wars between Christianity and Islam to the Europeans at that time. Ever since the disintegration of the Kingdom of Hungary after the Battle of Mohács in 1526, the Commonwealth assumed the primary role of the defense of Christendom against Ottoman invasion while the Holy Roman Empire was reeling from internal strife due to the Thirty Years War.⁷⁸

According to a Polish historian Paweł Rutkowski, Sigismund III and the Sejm were greatly distressed by the news of the Polish defeat near the Romanian town of Cecora in the autumn of 1620. The Polish government experienced a critical shortage of resources to replenish its army in order to resist the Ottoman incursion because the Commonwealth was embroiled in war continuously with its neighbors. Meanwhile, the Ottoman army entered the state's southern lands in hope of conquering its vast flatland and possibly the rest of the Commonwealth. Sigismund III sent out ambassadors across Europe to plead for military aid against the Islamic invaders.

James I responded enthusiastically to the Polish plea. In early seventeenth century international politics, James I was famously known for his open disdain for the Ottomans and their presence in Europe despite begrudgingly accepting the pragmatic reality that maintaining a

⁷⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Persons [Parsons], Robert"; Parsons, *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation Towards Catholike-subiectes*.

⁷⁷ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 144-5.

⁷⁸ Dabrowski, *Poland: The First Thousand Years*, 82.

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friendly relation with the Ottomans was necessary for the sake of British merchants. Rutkowski argued that the British monarch despaired at the fractured religious landscape of Europe due to Reformation and saw the need for the establishment of a *corpus christianorum*⁷⁹ against the Islamic aggressors from North Africa and Anatolia. James I wrote a letter strongly condemning Osman II's (1604-1622) intrusion into the Polish territory and threatened to raise a significant military intervention if the Ottomans continued to offend the Christian Poles. Even though he was aware of its impracticality, he nonetheless sent military aid to the Commonwealth, which was squandered due to the Danish king's refusal to allow its passage through the Danish strait.⁸⁰

In *Five Pious and Learned Discourses*, the author Robert Shelford also condemned the Ottomans because they attempted to invade the Commonwealth. He was a clergyman of the Church of England, and his book, which was published three years after Sigismund III's death, attracted a significant controversy in Britain because his writing contradicted the prevailing Protestant thought at that time. Overall, the most interesting point he makes was that Catholics and Protestants needed to find reconciliation despite all the violence that was ravaging Europe.⁸¹ Interestingly, Shelford wrote about the Polish-Ottoman War as a precondition for the impending arrival of the Antichrist. It appears that he believed that the Ottoman Empire was the second empire after ancient Rome to herald the Antichrist's arrival.⁸² Unfortunately, his writing is entirely devoted to the explanation of his theological view of the world, and it is difficult to gauge his views about the war. However, since he was not entirely hostile to the Roman Catholic Church, and considering his apocalyptic tone, he likely would have wanted to see the war concluding in the Commonwealth's favor.

In 1621 the war ended in a stalemate, and in that year two papers were published that relayed news about the war. The first is titled *True Copies of the Insolent, Cruel, Barbarous and Blasphemous Letter Lately Written by the Great Turk*. Its content is comprised of a short preface by an anonymous author followed by a lengthy section that presumably is a direct translation of the Sultan's letter to the Commonwealth as the declaration of war. The title alone displays the author's distaste for the

⁷⁹ Rutkowski defines the term as the military alliance amongst states with an ancient Catholic heritage.

⁸⁰ Rutkowski, "Poland and Britain Against the Ottoman Turks," 183-96.

⁸¹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Shelford, Robert," by Arnold Hunt, accessed April 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/65825>.

⁸² Robert Shelford, *Five Pious and Learned Discourses 1. A Sermon Shewing How We Ought to Behave Our Selves in Gods House...5. A Treatise Shewing the Antichrist Not to be Yet Come* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1635), 275-8.

Ottoman Empire. In the preface the writer narrated the events in Moldavia that led to the conflict, then denounced the sultan for imprisoning Sigismund III's ambassador at Constantinople.⁸³ Also, it should be noted that the writing mistakingly attributes the piece to Ahmed I instead of Osman II. Regardless, the paper fundamentally showed support for Sigismund III to defeat the Islamic invaders.

The next source is a pamphlet by yet another anonymous author titled *News from Poland*. Much of its contents are devoted to the events in Moldavia and how the war progressed and concluded. First, the writer effusively praised Sigismund III for proving his divine worthiness by driving out the infidel Turks from his realm through bravery and piousness (although, in reality, the king never participated in any of the battles during the war).⁸⁴ Next, he downplayed Commonwealth army's devastating defeat at Cecora and instead wrote about the fictional events that halted the Ottoman advance. The pamphlet interprets these events as signs of divine intervention in aid of Sigismund III.⁸⁵ Regardless of the veracity of the pamphlet's claim, its contents demonstrate that the author viewed the war primarily from a religious angle and also supported a fellow Christian state.

Rutkowski commented that British Protestants were discontent with James I's open support of the Commonwealth during its war against the Ottomans. He countered that they would support further weakening the Catholic faction in Europe even if that meant a further Islamic gain in the continent.⁸⁶ In contrast, the writers here denounced the Ottoman Muslims for invading a Christian state. Robert Shelford, despite serving for the Church of England, supported the Catholic king, Sigismund III because he believed that the Ottoman domination of Europe would lead to the coming of the Antichrist.⁸⁷ These two pamphlets also took the Polish side and praised Sigismund III for halting the Ottoman advance.⁸⁸

Conclusion

⁸³ Osman II, *True Copies of the Insolent, Cruell, Barbarous, and Blasphemous Letter Lately Written by the Great Turke, ... With a Short Preface, Declaring the Vniust Cause on Which This Turkish Tyrant, and Faithlesse Enemy of Christendom, Now Layeth Hold to Inuade It* (London: Printed by Authoritie, 1621), 3.

⁸⁴ Anonymous, *Newes from Poland Wherein is Truly Inlarged the Occasion, Progression, and Interception of the Turks Formidable Threatning of Europe... Euen to This Present Moneth of October: as is Truly Collected Out of the Originall* (London: Printed for B. Downes and William Lee, 1621), 3-4.

⁸⁵ Anonymous, *Newes from Poland Wherein is Truly Inlarged the Occasion*, 12-6.

⁸⁶ Rutkowski, "Poland and Britain Against the Ottoman Turks," 192.

⁸⁷ Shelford, *Five Pious and Learned Discourses*, 275-8.

⁸⁸ Anonymous, *Newes from Poland Wherein is Truly Inlarged the Occasion*, 3-4; Osman II, *True Copies of the Insolent, Cruell, Barbarous*, 3.

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Scrutinizing the inaccuracies that appeared in some of the primary sources, the writers' faults appear to fall under two categories. The first is the confusion of monarchs' names. The initial example of such was observed in Bartholomew Robertson's book in the section that was devoted to the Commonwealth's religious policy. In it he confused the Polish monarch Sigismund III with Stephen Báthory.⁸⁹ Similarly, a pamphlet on the Polish-Ottoman War mistook the Osman II with Ahmed I.⁹⁰ Their mistakes might appear careless if one assumes that information about some of the most powerful monarchs in Europe in their time would have been accessible. However, this recurring problem points instead to the possibility that perhaps such knowledge was not widely available for British intellectuals. The next category of error arises out of the limitations of academic knowledge during this period. For instance, Edward Brerewood described Muscovites and Russians as separate people.⁹¹ Meanwhile, Thomas Gainsford claimed that Poland was a kingdom that is no more than three hundred years old.⁹² Lastly, John Barclay believed the etymology of Poland came from a Scythian word.⁹³ These discrepancies cannot be labeled as mistakes because only modern historical analysis has revealed more nuanced understandings. Therefore, understanding the nature of their inaccuracies will require a deeper level of academic expertise, and an approach from different perspectives such as Slavic ethnography, early modern European intellectual history, or perhaps a separate study of the British perception of Eastern Slavic people in the same period as this essay.

In the end, what this study illustrates is that British intellectuals did have an interest in the Commonwealth's political structure and religious scene. They were motivated to compare themselves with the Commonwealth for the purpose of determining which form of governance resulted in a more orderly and pious society. Furthermore, Britain's reaction to the Commonwealth's wars with neighboring powers demonstrates that they considered the state to be a relevant power in European diplomacy and also within their sphere of political interest. They also saw Sigismund III as a major player in the continent's religious wars and viewed him in a mixed light. On one hand, he was an enemy who defended the Roman Catholic Church's interest. On the other, he was Christianity's defender who stopped the Ottoman Empire from further encroaching upon Christendom. Ultimately, this paper shows that

⁸⁹ Robertson, *A Bloov for the Pope, or, a Discourse had in S. Giles Church*, 70.

⁹⁰ Osman II, *True Copies of the Insolent, Cruell, Barbarous*.

⁹¹ Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diuersity of Languages*, 21.

⁹² Gainsford, *The Glory of England*, 302.

⁹³ Barclay, *The Mirroure of Mindes*, 255.

discussions about the Reformation and religious wars need to be broadened to include the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's involvement in order to better understand the topic on a larger scale.

Dunee Ko graduated from the University of Arizona in 2018 with a Bachelor's degree in History. As an undergraduate, he studied early modern Western Europe, industrial Great Britain and the United States, and modern East Asia. He devoted much of his independent study to learn the history of Poland and its neighboring states since the fifteenth century. He is interested in studying how societies respond to developments of their socioeconomic structures, and external factors like climate change, foreign influence, military campaigns, and territorial changes. He is also interested in the history of nomadic peoples in Central Asia and the historical development of nationalism and ethnic identity in East Asia. He is planning to apply for graduate school in the future to further develop his understanding of early modern to contemporary Central European history.

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