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Crown of the Kingdom of Poland at the time of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Kartli

Upon the arrival of King Constantine II of Kartli's envoys in Vilnius in the end of the XV century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, under the rule of Alexander Jagiellon (1461-1506), was no longer bound to the Crown of the Polish Kingdom by a personal union. The unifying factor among these states was the threat posed by a common external enemy – Turkey. However, a military expedition to the south led by the Polish king John I Albert (1459-1501) in 1497 ended in defeat, leaving the Polish people with the saying “Under the Albert king, the nobility became extinct”. This well-educated, ambitious and courageous ruler has been judged by history in the harshest terms. Even the Polish nobility remembered him critically, although it was during his reign that a chamber of parliament was established within the Sejm, which significantly strengthened the status of this privileged state. The monarch's untimely demise precluded any opportunity for him to reclaim his reputation.

Keywords: *Grand Duchy of Lithuania, king John I Albert, Crown of the Kingdom of Poland, Georgia, Kingdom of Kartli*

For centuries, Georgia maintained contacts with European countries through Catholic missionaries and travelers who reached the country. Relations were also developed through the regular sending of legations to Europe¹. By the time of the arrival of the diplomatic mission of the Kartlian King Constantine II at the court of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Alexander Jagiellon (Polish: Aleksander Jagiellończyk) in the end of the XV century, Lithuania no longer had any formal relationship with the Crown of the Polish Kingdom. In fact, the personal union between the two states was severed after the death of Casimir IV, known as Casimir IV Jagiellon (Polish: Kazimierz IV Jagiellończyk), in 1492, when John I Albert (Polish: Jan I Olbracht, Jan Albrycht²), ascended the

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¹ Hensel W., *Tabgwa I.*, Gruzja wczoraj i dziś, Warszawa, 1976, 127-128, as early as the mid-13th century, for example, the Flemish Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck, sent east by King Louis IX of France, travelled through Georgian territory.

² Rogalski L., *Dzieje księstw nad-dunajskich to jest: Multan i Wołoszczyzny podług dzieł Cogalniceana, Vaillantana, Ubciniego i Palauzowa*, vol. I, Warszawa, 1861, 696.

Polish throne and Alexander Jagiellon became Grand Duke of Lithuania³. It was not until the year 1499 that formal relations were once again established⁴. Regardless, the main task of the Kartli newcomers was to form a coalition against Turkey, which remained a threat to both the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland⁵.

In 1484, commanded by Sultan Bayezid II, the Ottoman Turks conquered Kilia and Białogród, which were important for Polish and Hungarian trade interests⁶. The first fortress allowed them to control the mouth of the Danube on the Black Sea, while the second fortress allowed them to control the mouth of the Dniester River. The importance of these acquisitions is demonstrated by the fact that the Turkish Sultan himself described Kilia as the key to Moldavia and Hungary, while Białogród as the gateway to Polish, Ruthenian and Tatar lands. Most likely, King Constantine sent his representative, the monk Cornelius, to the Sultan of Egypt to form an anti-Turkish alliance. Returning from his mission, the cleric met in Jerusalem the envoys of Isabella I of Castile, Queen of Spain, whom he had invited to Georgia. They had probably agreed to make the long journey to establish a coalition against Turkey. After their visit, Constantine, interested in cooperation, decided to send Cornelius to Spain. Georgian legation on its way to Queen Isabella decided to travel along the Dnieper River through the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish lands. As it would appear, this choice was a very deliberate one, and was not dictated solely by the distance involved. The Georgian envoys were probably seeking political cooperation with Lithuania that would focus on the threat posed by a common enemy – Turkey. Such an action would have been in line with the policy already adopted by the King of Kartli. The Georgian envoys who came to Lithuania were received by Grand Duke Alexander Jagiellon. At that time, the hospodar had to learn the contents of a letter from Constantine II, King of Kartli, to the Spanish monarch Queen Isabella⁷. This document, after being translated into the official language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Ruthenian), was submitted to the Lithuanian Metricha⁸. There is no record of the existence of a letter to Alexander Jagiellon. However, the Georgian envoys may have had their king's will proclaimed on their own⁹. According to Bohdan and Krzysztof Baranowski, their mission to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was doomed from the start, and their attempt to forge closer ties ended in failure. It is not clear whether the envoys of Constantine II continued their journey via Kraków or whether they passed over the capital of the Kingdom of Poland at that time¹⁰. A visit to the court of John I Albert seems justified in view of the military expedition

³ *Golebiowski L.*, *Dzieje Polski za panowania Kaźmirza, Jana Olbrachta i Alexandra*, Warszawa, 1848, 358.

⁴ *Kutrzeba S.*, *Semkowicz W.*, *Akta unji Polski z Litwą 1385-1791*, Kraków, 1932, 126-130.

⁵ *Furier A.*, *Działania dyplomatyczne II Rzeczypospolitej na Kaukazie. Z historii kontaktów dyplomatycznych Polski z Kaukazem*, *Przegląd Wschodni*, vol. V, No. 3 (19), 1998, 463; *Włodarczyk M.*, *Stosunki polsko-gruzińskie w latach 1918-1921*, *Świat Idei i Polityki*, vol. 15, 2016, 444-445.

⁶ *Baczkowski K.*, *Państwa Europy środkowo-wschodniej wobec antytyreckich projektów Innocentego VIII (1484-1492)*, *Nasza Przyszłość*, vol. 74, 1990, 208.

⁷ *Cincadze I.*, *Stosunki polsko-gruzińskie w XV-XVII w.*, *Przegląd Orientalistyczny*, 1960, 5-6, 10-12.

⁸ *Джавахишвили Н.*, *Очерки истории грузино-балтийских взаимоотношений*, Riga, 2015, 463-465 (in Russian).

⁹ *Ibid*, 19-20.

¹⁰ *Baranowski B.*, *Baranowski K.*, *Historia Gruzji*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź, 1987, 93, the first possibility seemed more likely to the authors of the study.

southwards contemplated in Poland since the capture of the Black Sea ports by the Turks¹¹. Suffice it to say that, at the end of the 15th century, the Kingdom of Poland, together with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, remained major players on the European continent, second only to the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Ottoman Empire in terms of territory¹². In 1497, the Polish ruler was already convinced of the need for war. When he asked the Gdańsk city council for financial support, he justified the military action by the need to defend Christianity, which was threatened by the Turks and Tatars¹³. The Bishop of Kuyavia (Polish: Kujawy) and the Grand Chancellor of the Crown, Krzesław Kurozwęcki, tried in vain to dissuade the king from war. In fact, John I Albert is said to have severely reprimanded him for these efforts, saying “that priest at mass, it is not proper to look at war”. Neither the exhortations of the landowner Srobski, who predicted failure for the Poles, nor a series of unexpected and disturbing events dissuaded the monarch from carrying out his plans – his favourite horse fell and drowned under the monarch while he was fording a stream, a thunderstorm killed a nobleman and 12 horses, and a priest celebrating mass accidentally knocked the consecrated bread off the altar¹⁴. Military success may have brought the interests of Poland and Georgia closer together, but the expedition ended in 1497 with a defeat at the Battle of Cosmin Forest (Polish: bitwa pod Koźminem) that forever overshadowed the Polish king’s achievements. In the end, however, even the defeat of John I Albert, which had become part of the Polish collective consciousness, did not prevent the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland from establishing trade relations with Georgia. In fact, they were revived at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries¹⁵.

The turn of the 15th and 16th centuries marked an important caesura in history, dividing two great epochs – the Middle Ages and the early modern period. This period was also crucial for the Kingdom of Poland. Unlike other European states, however, it did not succeed in establishing absolute rule. This process was prevented in the first place by the many privileges granted to the nobility, which meant that state interests began to dominate public affairs¹⁶. This was the reality in which John I Albert, born in the castle of Kraków on 27 December 1459, had to rule. He was given his first name in honour of John the Apostle – the patron saint of the birthday – and his second name in honour of his ancestor – the Queen’s father and also the King of Bohemia and Hungary – Albrecht II Habsburg. Although the young prince was the third born son of the Polish King and Grand Duke of Lithuania Casimir IV Jagiellon and Elisabeth *de domo* Habsburg, he was considered his mother’s favourite child.

¹¹ Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 18.

¹² Dziubiński A., Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-tureckie w latach 1500-1572 w kontekście międzynarodowym, Wrocław, 2005, 11; Furier A., Polacy w Gruzji, Warszawa, 2009, 7.

¹³ Szybkowski S., Katalog dokumentów i listów królów polskich z Archiwum Państwowego w Gdańsku (Jan Olbracht i Aleksander Jagiellończyk), Gdańsk, 2016, 97.

¹⁴ Rogalski L., Dzieje księstw nad-dunajskich to jest: Multan i Wołoszczyzny podług dzieł Cogalniceana, Vaillant, Ubiciniego i Palauzowa, vol. I, Warszawa, 1861, 696, 699; Besala J., Tajemnice historii Polski, Poznań, 2003, 184.

¹⁵ Woźniak A., Polacy w Gruzji w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku, Niepodległość i Pamięć, No. 11, 1998, 29; Cincadze I., Stosunki polsko-gruzińskie w XV-XVII w., Przegląd Orientalistyczny, 1960, 12-13; a different view is taken: Furier A., Polacy w Gruzji, Warszawa, 2009, 7, according to the author, 16th and 17th century Polish-Georgian contacts “were rare and limited to diplomacy”.

¹⁶ Czerny F., Panowanie Jana Olbrachta i Aleksandra Jagiellończyków (1492-1506), Kraków, 1871, 9, 11-12.

At the age of eight, John I Albert began to study at the school of Jan Długosz (1415-1480), a clergyman, chronicler of Polish history and one of the most important intellectuals of his time. It was then that he acquired a knowledge of Latin. He also spoke German. The chronicler Maciej Strykowski wrote of the now adult Jagiellon that “he was a great verbalist in Latin and German”¹⁷. It is not known whether he spoke Hungarian like the Queen. In parallel with the knowledge he acquired, thanks to the chatelain Stanisław Szydłowiecki the prince became skilled in the use of weapons¹⁸. For a time (between 1472 and 1473), John I Albert may also have been influenced by the Italian humanist Filippo Buonaccorsi, known as Callimachus (1437-1496). His role at this stage in the education of the sovereign’s offspring should not be overestimated, however, as Callimachus did not appear at the royal court until the prince had already completed his education¹⁹. To a greater extent, the influence of the Italian newcomer on his attitude would become apparent in later years. Marcin Bielski goes so far as to note in his chronicle that John I Albert “in all his matters” took the advice of Callimachus, who was both learned and cunning²⁰. Although this was the influence of a courtier, not a teacher, it could prove significant and, as it was soon to be seen, fatal to the king’s fate at key moments. In fact, there is much evidence that Callimachus urged Albert to fight for the Hungarian crown, in which the prince suffered a complete defeat, losing the Battle of Eperjes (now Prešov, Slovakia; Polish: bitwa pod Preszowem) in 1492. The Italian was then an ardent supporter of the ruler’s unsuccessful expedition to Bukovina in 1497. After being educated at the school of Jan Długosz, the young John I Albert began to prepare for power at his father’s side²¹. However, he became a natural candidate for the Polish and Hungarian crown after the death of his elder brother Casimir (1458-1484). In 1487, the prince won a glorious victory over the Tatars and made a name for himself as an effective military commander²². In 1490, Casimir IV Jagiellon sought to have John I Albert succeed the late Matthias Corvinus (Hun. Hunyadi Mátyás), King of Hungary. On the field of Rakos on 7 June 1490, part of the Hungarian nobility even proclaimed John I Albert king, but in the end, thanks to the magnate Stefan Zápolya, the balance of power tipped in favour of John I Albert’s brother, Vladislaus II (Polish: Władysław II Jagiellończyk), King of Bohemia, (1456-1516)²³. It was probably hoped that this would lead to an alliance and settle the long dispute with Bohemia over Silesia, Moravia, and Lusatia. The Hungarian magnates also saw an advantage in Vladislaus’s pliant nature, which earned him the not-so-glorious nickname “King of Good, Good” (*rex bene bene*). Thus, the plans of Casimir Jagiellon and his wife Elisabeth to have one of their sons sit on each of the thrones of Central Europe – John I Albert in Hungary, Sigismund (Polish: Zygmunt) in Poland, Alexander in Lithuania, Vladislaus in Bohemia, while in Prussia, the clergy consecrated Frederick (Polish: Fryderyk) as Grand Master of the Teutonic

¹⁷ Strykowski M., *Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i w całej Rusi*, vol. II, Warszawa, 1846, 313.

¹⁸ Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 8, 11-13.

¹⁹ John I Albert studied with Jan Długosz from October 1467 to December 1474.

²⁰ Bielski M., *Kronika polska Marcina Bielskiego nowo przez Joach. Bielskiego syna jego wydana*, Kraków, 1597, 483.

²¹ Garbacz J., *Kallimach jako dyplomata i polityk*, Kraków, 1948, 33-34, 39, 138, 145; Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 15, 200-201, 210.

²² Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 18-19.

²³ Czerny F., *Panowanie Jana Olbrachta i Aleksandra Jagiellończyków (1492-1506)*, Kraków, 17-18; Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 23.

Knights – did not come true²⁴. The brothers clashed, and their quarrel exposed the weakness of the policies pursued by the Jagiellonian Dynasty²⁵. Despite his unsuccessful bid for the Hungarian crown, John I Albert still used the title of King Elect of Hungary in December 1490²⁶, and in June 1491 – the rightfully elected King of Hungary²⁷, in violation of the terms of the Koszyce Agreement, concluded on 20 February 1491. It was intended to end the rivalry between John I Albert and Vladislaus for the Crown of Saint Stephen. On this basis, the prince renounced the title he had received on 7 June 1490 on the field of Rakos and recognised Vladislaus as the monarch of Hungary. In return, he was to succeed to the throne in the event of his brother's heirless death. However, the weighting of this provision with additional caveats made the resulting gains uncertain, to say the least. Finally, it did not matter much because John I Albert was not going to wait for developments. Perhaps the impatience of the prince, to whom Callimachus was close at the time, made itself felt. It is difficult to say whether the decision to resume fighting would not have been taken without the influence of this important adviser. It is certain that Callimachus held a significant position in the Prince's Council and was at the same time one of the strongest supporters of John I Albert's accession to the Hungarian throne. Regardless of the circumstances, however, the fratricidal war for power flared up again. Time was against the prince, his troops were dwindling, while Stefan Zápolya, sent against him by King Vladislaus, was growing in strength. On the eve of the Battle of Eperjes, he already had several times as many troops as John I Albert. Attempts to surprise the enemy with an evening attack proved futile. John I Albert suffered the ultimate defeat in his fight for the Hungarian crown. Not even his bravery helped. As the chronicler Marcin Bielski wrote, "Olbracht defended himself so well that two horses under him were killed and the third wounded"²⁸. Before the battle, King Vladislaus generously asked his chieftains to ensure his brother's safety, while after the battle he allowed John I Albert to maintain his honour by agreeing to uphold the terms of the Koszyce Agreement. Still, it must have been humiliating for the ambitious prince to be escorted to the Polish border by his conqueror, Stefan Zápolya²⁹.

At the time of the death of the Polish king Casimir IV Jagiellon in Grodno on 7 June 1492, his son John I Albert was in Radom, some 300 kilometres away. However, the road to power in Poland was not entirely straightforward, as the prince was only to stand as a candidate for the throne at the

²⁴ Baczkowski K., *Polska i jej sąsiedzi za Jagiellonów*, Kraków, 2012, 162-163; Felczak W., *Historia Węgier*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź, 1983, 107; Borzemski A., *Siły zbrojne w wołoskiej wojnie Jana Olbrachta*, Oświęcim, 2019, 12; Romsics I., *Historia Węgier*, Poznań, 2018, 140.

²⁵ Dróżdż P., *Orsza 1514*, Warszawa, 2000, 23, although the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Bohemia with Silesia and Lusatia, and Hungary with Croatia remained under the rule of the family. However, these territories were very diverse economically and culturally and lacked an internal community of interests.

²⁶ Szybkowski S., *Katalog dokumentów i listów królów polskich z Archiwum Państwowego w Gdańsku* (Jan Olbracht i Aleksander Jagiellończyk), Gdańsk, 2016, 32.

²⁷ Ibid, 33.

²⁸ Bielski M., *Kronika polska Marcina Bielskiego nowo przez Joach. Bielskiego syna jego wydana*, Kraków, 1597, 477.

²⁹ Baczkowski K., *Habsburgowie i Jagiellonowie w walce o Węgry w latach 1490-1492*, Oświęcim, 2014, 126-127, 146-147, 164-166; Garbacik J., *Kallimach jako dyplomata i polityk*, Kraków, 1948, 120.

election scheduled for 15 August 1492, not as the successor to the deceased monarch³⁰. While still in Radom, John I Albert sent a letter asking for support to the city council of Gdańsk. In it, he promised to respect the privileges and to rule fairly³¹. King Casimir, in his last will and testament, also recommended to his subjects that John I Albert be elected King of Poland. His intentions were realised unanimously at a roll-call vote of the electors in Piotrków on 27 August 1492. The Crown of the Kingdom of Poland had a new ruler³². A little earlier, on 30 July 1492, the Lords of Lithuania elected Alexander Jagiellon as Grand Duke of Lithuania³³.

Soon, John I Albert had to face the greatest challenge of his reign – an approaching threat from the south, which strongly affected the consciousness of at least some of his subjects. Old people even repeated the prediction of the monk John of Capistrano that the Turks would place their camels in Kraków's Market Square. In the year of his coronation, Venetian envoys urged the monarch to launch a joint expedition of Christian rulers against Turkey³⁴. Shortly after his accession to the Polish throne, on 5 December 1492, John I Albert, through his envoys, concluded an alliance with his brother, King Vladislaus of Bohemia and Hungary, which provided for an alliance against common enemies, in particular the Turks³⁵. In February 1494, the King of Poland received a letter from Vladislaus expressing the need for an urgent meeting on matters influencing both kingdoms and Christianity as a whole. The meeting was held in Levoča. Together with John I Albert, his younger brothers Sigismund and Frederick went to see him. It is said that when Vladislaus saw his retinue approaching, he set off to meet his relatives and then, despite earlier quarrels, embraced them warmly³⁶. The reaction of Stefan Zápolya, the conqueror of Olbracht from Prešov, must have been quite different. Even before the congress, he asked for and received a letter assuring him of a peaceful passage through the Spiš starosty, which was dependent on Poland. On the other hand, according to another, albeit less likely, account, Zápolya left the town when he heard that the Polish king was approaching Levoča. Fearing retaliation, he asked for a letter guaranteeing his safety. John I Albert refused, explaining his decision by saying that there was no such custom. According to the monarch, his ancestors had vouched for inviolability with their words. In the end, however, at Vladislaus request, the King of Poland agreed to respect the guarantees of safety he had given Zápolya³⁷. Whatever the course of the first phase of the

³⁰ Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 29.

³¹ Szybkowski S., Katalog dokumentów i listów królów polskich z Archiwum Państwowego w Gdańsku (Jan Olbracht i Aleksander Jagiellończyk), Gdańsk, 2016, 35.

³² Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 30, 38.

³³ Błaszczak G., Litwa na przełomie średniowiecza i nowożytności 1492-1569, Poznań, 2002, 13.

³⁴ Bielski M., Kronika polska Marcina Bielskiego nowo przez Joach. Bielskiego syna jego wydana, Kraków, 1597, 481-482.

³⁵ Finkel L., Zjazd Jagiellonów w Lewoczy r. 1494, Lwów, 1914, 19.

³⁶ Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 63-64; Felczak W., Historia Węgier, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź, 1983, 108, this reaction may come as a surprise not only because of Vladislaus' rivalry with John I Albert for the Hungarian succession, but also because the Bohemian monarch had concluded a humiliating peace with Maximilian I Habsburg, King of Germany, based on which Vladislaus was obliged to pay him 100,000 forints in compensation and also to renounce the Austrian territorial gains made by his predecessor on the Hungarian throne, Matthias Corvinus.

³⁷ Finkel L., Zjazd Jagiellonów w Lewoczy r. 1494, Lwów, 1914, 8-9; Baczkowski K., Habsburgowie i Jagiellonowie w walce o Węgry w latach 1490-1492, Oświęcim, 2014, 167.

congress, the question of war with Turkey remained its central theme. Although the need for defence was undisputed, the debaters differed in their plans for the details of the operation. The Hungarians were trying to avoid allying with Poland, and Stefan Zápolya was even personally interested in not doing this. The reason for this was his fear of John I Albert's rise to prominence and his desire to have a member of his own family on the Hungarian throne. John I Albert, on the other hand, attempted to reclaim Moldavia, bordering on Turkey, from Stephen III, commonly known as Stephen the Great (1433–1504), against Hungarian interests, to entrust it to his brother Sigismund (1467–1548). Although these aspirations were never realised, they alienated the Polish ruler from the Moldavian hospodar and later became one of the reasons for the failure of his expedition against Turkey³⁸. Interestingly, the prediction of John of Capistrano came true later that year, although not in the way that had been feared. This is because a Turkish envoy, who arrived in Kraków in 1494, was to be hosted in one of Kraków's townhouses and therefore left sixteen of his camels at the local town hall³⁹.

According to Marcin Bielski, the king used a ploy to encourage the nobility to support the southern expedition. He was to instruct his trusted subjects to spread the news that the Turks were advancing towards Podolia (Polish: Podole), which belonged to Poland⁴⁰. According to one chronicler, however, it was widely believed that the expedition against Turkey was merely a pretext for John I Albert to invade Moldavia at the head of an army and replace its ruler Stephen III with his brother Sigismund⁴¹. This would be evidence of the Polish king's unsuccessful attempt to conceal his dynastic ambitions by a military expedition⁴². Formally, the hospodar of Moldavia remained the *atendant-in-chief* of the crown of the Polish kingdom, but he refused to join John I Albert's campaign immediately. It was only after the arrival of the Polish ruler in Kilia that he declared his willingness to help. The encounter between the royal forces and Stephen III's troops came much earlier, however, as the faithless ally joined the Turkish-Tatar forces already present in Moldavia. In response, John I Albert laid siege to Suceava. After an ineffective siege, a ceasefire was agreed. John I Albert's troops, retreating to Poland, were attacked in one of the ravines and suffered heavy casualties, despite the calm of the ruler, who was ill with fever at the time⁴³. This defeat left in the memory of posterity the saying that "under the Albert king, the nobility became extinct" (Polish: "za króla Olbrachta wyginęła szlachta"). In fact, this assessment seems unfair and the extent of the failure has been exaggerated over the years. As a result of the Bukovina expedition, however, the king was to suffer a mental breakdown. He also started getting sick a lot and for a long time⁴⁴.

The difficult situation in which Poland and Lithuania found themselves as a result of John I Albert's failure brought their positions closer together, leading to the Vilnius Agreement in 1499⁴⁵. The document provided for concerted cooperation, mutual military assistance and joint participation in

³⁸ Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 65-67.

³⁹ Bielski M., Kronika polska Marcina Bielskiego nowo przez Joach. Bielskiego syna jego wydana, Kraków, 1597, 482.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 484.

⁴¹ Strykowski M., Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi, vol. II, Warszawa, 1846, 299.

⁴² Borzemski A., Siły zbrojne w wołoskiej wojnie Jana Olbrachta, Oświęcim, 2019, 15.

⁴³ Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 126, 129, 131.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 209.

⁴⁵ Błaszczak G., Litwa na przełomie średniowiecza i nowożytności 1492-1569, Poznań, 2002, 36.

the election of rulers. However, it is difficult to describe this act as a union, as the two states retained separate rulers. John I Albert's use of the title Grand Duke of Lithuania (*supremus dux Lithuaniae*) had a more symbolic significance⁴⁶. This state of affairs did not change until after the death of the ruler in 1501, when his brother and actual ruler of Lithuania, Alexander Jagiellon (1461–1506), ascended the Polish throne⁴⁷. Even before 1499, however, the relationship between the two brothers was at least a correct one⁴⁸.

In 1501, the ambitious John I Albert was still planning a final showdown with the Teutonic Order, whose new Grand Master Frederick of Saxony was refusing to pay tribute and make peace. Perhaps the king's victory in Prussia was an attempt to make up for his failure in the war with Turkey. But this time, too, the ruler was unable to see things through to the end. Although on 8 May 1501 he arrived with his army and cannons in Toruń, from where he sent letters ordering war preparations⁴⁹, the cruel fate of John I Albert once again became known. Despite the good chances of success of his well-prepared campaign in Prussia, the king died unexpectedly on 17 June 1501. He was only 41 years old⁵⁰.

John I Albert has been the subject of some very harsh judgement by history. The Kraków chronicler Maciej Miechowita (1457-1523), who observed the course of events in which he was involved, even wrote of the fate that weighed on the king at times when he was pursuing his most ambitious goals. A similar assessment was made in the 16th century by Maciej Strykowski, who saw John I Albert as a ruler who, despite his boldness and generosity, was not well treated by fate⁵¹. Even Friedrich Papée, who is reluctant to formulate clear-cut judgements, has noted that the figure of the Polish king is "very difficult to judge". On the one hand, he showed "a sense of preparation and eagerness to act", and the author described him as a "refined warrior", while on the other, he found the ruler "swaying with premature ambition"⁵². The much more critical Franciszek Czerny had already written of John I Albert and his brother Alexander that, as people of "weak character and little energy, [...] they failed to improve the lot of a nation threatened by enemies"⁵³. Olgierd Górka also offered a less than charitable assessment of the Polish king⁵⁴. In contrast, Henryk Łowmiański emphasised the absence of a realistic perception of the ruler⁵⁵.

⁴⁶ Kolankowski L., Jagiellonowie i unja, Lwów, 1936, 20.

⁴⁷ Kutrzeba S., Semkowicz W., Akta unji Polski z Litwą 1385-1791, Kraków, 1932, 126-130; Kutrzeba S., Historia ustroju Polski w zarysie, vol. II: Litwa, Lwów, 1914, 31-32; a different view is taken: Błaszczyk G., Litwa na przełomie średniowiecza i nowożytności 1492-1569, Poznań, 2002, 36, according to the author, it's possible to speak of the Vilnius Union having been concluded in 1499.

⁴⁸ Błaszczyk G., Litwa na przełomie średniowiecza i nowożytności 1492-1569, Poznań, 2002, 35.

⁴⁹ Szybkowski S., Katalog dokumentów i listów królów polskich z Archiwum Państwowego w Gdańsku (Jan Olbracht i Aleksander Jagiellończyk), Gdańsk, 2016, 133.

⁵⁰ Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 179-180, 207-208.

⁵¹ Strykowski M., Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi, vol. II, Warszawa, 1846, 313.

⁵² Papée F., Zagadnienia Olbrachtowej wyprawy z r. 1497, Kwartalnik Historyczny, year XLVII, vol. 1, 1933, 21; Papée F., Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 199-200.

⁵³ Czerny F., Panowanie Jana Olbrachta i Aleksandra Jagiellończyków (1492-1506), Kraków, 1871, 15.

⁵⁴ Górka O., Z powodu p. dyr. Fr. Papégo: „Zagadnienie Olbrachtowej wyprawy r. 1497”, Kwartalnik Historyczny, year XLVII, vol. 1, 1933, 317.

⁵⁵ Łowmiański H., Polityka Jagiellonów, Poznań, 1999, 332.

Following the demise of John I Albert, the adage pertaining to his decimation of the nobility was perpetuated for centuries within the collective consciousness of the Polish people. Nevertheless, it was during the tenure of this monarch that its significance was reinforced due to the partitioning of the chamber of parliament, which permitted the local nobility to exert influence over central politics⁵⁶. The king's impetuosity, his willingness to undertake daring challenges and his lack of moderation in everyday life were frequently recalled. However, it was seldom acknowledged that the highly educated John I Albert was a skilled diplomat⁵⁷, a capable leader and an energetic and ambitious ruler with an imperialist vision. Furthermore, the monarch enjoyed a cordial relationship with Jagiellonian University and was particularly interested in books, paintings, and music⁵⁸. The efforts to obtain the Crown of Saint Stephen, which ended in defeat at the Battle of Eperjes, or the defeat at the Battle of Cosmin Forest during the Bukovina expedition, are remembered, but the considerable disparity of forces and the prince's courage in the first case and his illness in the second have been forgotten. In the final analysis, the King's premature demise thwarted the realisation of his ambitious designs and precluded his rehabilitation. Had it not been for his death, the fate of the monarch and the state under his rule might have been very different indeed. His dreams of avenging Władysław III of Poland, also known as Ladislaus of Varna, (Polish: Władysław III Warneńczyk), who had been killed by the Turks, had to wait for more favourable times. Miechowita might have been correct in his assertion regarding the misfortune that befell the monarch.

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⁵⁷ A different view is taken: *Borzemski A.*, Siły zbrojne w wołoskiej wojnie Jana Olbrachta, Oświęcim, 2019, 15, 18.

⁵⁸ *Papée F.*, Jan Olbracht, Kraków, 2006, 8, 211-212; *Borzemski A.*, Siły zbrojne w wołoskiej wojnie Jana Olbrachta, Oświęcim, 2019, 9.

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