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Doctoral thesis

**Miraculous images of Our Lady in the process of integrating Christians of different denominations in the Great Duchy of Lithuania and Ruthenian Lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1596-1795**

Abstract

The doctoral dissertation investigates into the phenomenon of using miraculous images of Our Lady for integrating Orthodox, Catholics, Uniates and Protestants in the Great Duchy of Lithuania and Ruthenian Lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1596-1795. In the 16-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the population of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was quite heterogeneous from religious point of view. The lands of the Great Duchy of Lithuania and Ruthenian Lands (referred to as the eastern territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the dissertation) were inhabited by mainly Orthodox, with a number converted to Protestantism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, the dominating religion in the state was Catholicism and the eastern lands were to be Catholicized as well. It was one of reasons for the union made between several Orthodox dioceses and Vatican in 1596 which resulted in the formation of Uniate Church (also known as the Greek Catholic Church), which acknowledged the Pope primacy but followed the eastern Orthodox rite.

The miraculous images/icons of Virgin Mary were the object of veneration of Orthodox, Catholic and Uniate believers independently on the denomination they belonged and were located in the majority churches of the state. This conditioned using them as a tool to build a religiously homogeneous society. And that is the topic of this research. The dissertation is aimed to find the answers to the questions: 1) How was the cult of Marian miraculous images used for converting believers to different denomination? 2) How were the miraculous images of Our Lady used to unite Christians without converting to other denomination? and 3) How did these practices affect the cult of Marian miraculous images in three main Churches of the Commonwealth.

The dissertation consists of six sections. The first section contains general issues, such as the justification for time and territorial scopes, state of knowledge, used terminology, sources and methods. The second section describes historical aspects of Marian cult in the Orthodox, Catholic and Uniate Churches as well the relation of Protestants towards the miraculous images in the light of historical fractographic sources.

Each Christian denomination had its own approaches and particularities in using miraculous icons in missionary activities. First miraculous icons were brought to Rus from

Byzantine after the baptism of Kievan Kniaz Vladimir the Great. Devotional practices were also adopted from Byzantine. However, the spread of Protestantism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the decline of the cult of some icons, and after 1596, the majority of popular Orthodox icons were undertaken by the Uniates, which developed and spread their cult following the pattern worked out in the Roman Catholic Church.

The reforms in the Orthodox Church initiated by Kievan Metropolitan Piotr Mohyla resulted in the renaissance of Orthodox spiritual life and occurrence of cults of many wonder-working icons. However, the rise did not last long which was conditioned by both inner processes in the Commonwealth and the reforms of Orthodox Church by Russian Emperor Peter I. Since the Kievan Metropolitan was joined to Moscow Patriarchate, the churches and monasteries in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were to obey first to Moscow Patriarch and later to Holy Synod. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century we observe decline of the cult of Marian icons in the Orthodox settings of the Commonwealth and neglect of missionary activities.

The situation was different in the Catholic setting. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the latter had great experience to use miraculous images of Our Lady in polemics with protestants. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth they were expanded to include Orthodox. It were mainly monastic orders that used images in the missionary activities. Their primary aim was to convert Protestants to Catholicism, while the Greek Catholics carried out missionary activities mainly among Orthodox. Additionally, Uniates were supported by Catholic monastic orders: Uniate churches were founded by Catholics, the clergy and the laity of both denominations held worships to same images, while the Orthodox clergy kept a distance towards its practices. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the cult of Marian images in the Uniate Church was the same as it was in the Catholic Church.

Protestantism did not pose a big threat to Marian cult and images in the eastern territories of the Commonwealth. Moreover, the Protestants were in minority in the second part of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The third section is devoted to the impact of wars between the Commonwealth and the Moscow state on the cult of miraculous images. All the wars kept on the territory of the Commonwealth were reflected in the stories of wonder-working images, however, the wars with Moscow had their particularities, which were used for missionary purposes as well.

The fourth section is devoted to the relation of two large non-Christian groups residing in the Polish-Lithuanian State: Muslim Tatars and Jews, towards the miraculous icons. It also covers the missionary activities of Christians among these populations using miraculous images of Our Lady.

The fifth section deals with the literature created in relation to the cult of images. It investigates the place of images in religious polemics between Catholics, Uniates, Orthodox and Protestants in polemic texts themselves as well as in the compendial literature and miracle registers, which were especially popular in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> century.

The dissertation considers practices in both large and famous sanctuaries and rural churches of different denominations trying to cover the features typical of all social strata. Since the time and territory scopes are quite wide, it was not possible to consider all the sanctuaries existed in the eastern territories of the Commonwealth, since only there were about 400 miraculous Marian images in the lands of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. Due to few works devoted to the Belarusian territories of the Great Duchy of Lithuania, they were the main focus of research, however, the Ruthenian Lands of Polish Kingdom are represented as well, since the picture would not be complete without them.