



Remembering the Jagiellonians

Natalia Nowakowska (ed.)

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In the sixteenth century, the Jagiellonians ruled lands corresponding to sixteen current European countries, yet this is the first ever book in English dedicated to this powerful family. It is invaluable, as the contributors draw on primary sources and historiography that are otherwise inaccessible to an Anglophone audience. *Remembering the Jagiellonians* sheds light onto the complex history of a dynasty that became celebrated in some countries, vilified in others, and forgotten elsewhere.

Natalia Nowakowska's introduction sketches the history of the Jagiellonian dynasty. Following this timeline, the focus of the volume is explained in detail: it is not a chronological narrative of the dynasty. Instead, *Remembering the Jagiellonians* answers questions about the dynasty's legacies across Europe, as developed from the sixteenth century until today. By focusing on memory and memorialisation, the contributors provide an analysis rich in both depth and breadth of how different communities shaped their Jagiellonian heritage. This provides a venue for comparison much more fruitful than side-by-side accounts of the doings of the Jagiellonians themselves.

Following the introduction, the chapters are divided by modern national boundaries. Each chapter introduces the beginnings of Jagiellonian presence, the earliest memorialisation and historicization of their reigns, and later historiographical developments, and concludes with forays into present-day group memory and popular culture. This volume is as much about the present as it is about the past. Historians rarely have an opportunity for such broad-scale and long-term comparison.

Giedrė Mickūnaitė begins with a chapter on the mixed and changing attitudes of the Lithuanians towards the Jagiellonians. In Lithuania, attitudes of historians and the public towards the family, known locally as the Gediminids after Jogaila's grandfather, are complex because they need to reconcile the grandeur of the dynasty and its successes on a broad international stage with the perceived betrayal of the Lithuanian people and their pre-Christian and Orthodox heritage. Natalia Nowakowska continues with an account of Poland, calling it a "hotbed of Jagiellonian memorialisation" (49). In Poland, the dynasty was 'cleansed' of its foreign roots, and became a symbol of the Polish Golden Age. Both contributors demonstrate how these initial ideas were used contemporaneously to further the competing nationalist goals of Lithuania and Poland. Likewise, the Soviet turn in the scholarship of both countries saw the Jagiellonians-Gediminids portrayed as hostile feudal lords. The contributors demonstrate how both

Lithuania and Poland had deprived the Jagiellonians of their Lithuanian origins, but to different ends. The post-Communist years in Poland have seen their continued glorification through scholarship, heritage sites, re-enactments, and an emphasis on the literature of the Jagiellonians and their Polishness. On the other hand, in Lithuania, their memory has been favourably re-assessed, and now focuses on the vastness and multi-faceted nature of their rule and accomplishments.

The volume then shifts to examine the memorialisation of the Jagiellonians elsewhere in East Central Europe. Many countries memorialise the Jagiellonians in similar ways, and the chapter groupings reflect this.

In the chapter on Hungary and Slovakia, Stanislava Kuzmová highlights how both in Hungary and Slovakia, the simplified narratives that were created in both scholarly and popular works for the “public demands of national Romanticism” (81) are incredibly difficult to leave behind. In the chapter about Bohemia, Ilya Afanasyev poses many questions about concepts and methods involved when dealing with the Jagiellonians. These enrich the discussion; however, perhaps it would have been better to include working definitions of these concepts at the beginning, rather than signalling them throughout the chapter. Thus, in the historiographies of all three regions, the Jagiellonians figure only in the shape of two kings that ruled the Kingdom of Hungary and Bohemia and were seen as weak and detrimental to the prosperity of the kingdoms. It is clearly demonstrated how the kings’ relations with the dynasty are only important in light of pursuing Polish-Lithuanian interests instead of local ones.

The next two chapters, covering Germany, and Sweden and Finland respectively, paint a contrasting picture that shows individual female members of the dynasty remembered as having a considerable and positive impact, unlike that of the kings. Dušan Zupka outlines how the princesses Sophie and Hedwig Jagiellon were, and are, remembered for their prestigious royal status and patronage of arts and architecture. Similarly, Susanna Niiranen illustrates how Catherine Jagiellon was received and remembered in Finland and Sweden as a royal who individually brought the Renaissance (including the fork!) to the ‘peripheral’ kingdom (154). These areas commemorate the grandeur and influence of these women, but not the dynasty itself.

The final three chapters deal with areas that were all once part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Simon Lewis outlines how Belarussian historians across the years have highlighted the Belarussian heritage of the Jagiellonians-Gediminids to provide viable national myths. Tetiana Hoshko describes the same pattern followed, *mutatis mutandis*, in Ukraine. Newer historiography tries to re-assess the Jagiellonian rule in terms of a catalyst for national identities in both countries. Yet popular memory is not a factor of this process. Lastly,

Olga Kozubska-Andrusiv describes a similar pattern in Russia, with some significant differences. She portrays how in the first stages of Russian historiographical writing, the Jagiellonians were enemies of the Russian people writ large, since they prevented Lithuanians and Ruthenians from joining the Russian family centred around Moscow. This trend was continued to justify the USSR. Post-Soviet scholarship saw a re-evaluation of the Jagiellonians as modernisers of Russia. However, as Kozubska-Andrusiv succinctly puts it, in popular memory, Russia is always portrayed as a superpower on its own, thus explaining the lack of focus on the Jagiellonians, either in imperial, Soviet, or modern-day discourse.

The book ends here, leaving the reader wanting for a conclusion to tie together the arguments made throughout. As can be expected in an edited volume that covers so many areas and draws on historiography in multiple languages, there are minor inconsistencies in the spelling of names and places; however, these are of no detriment to the quality of writing and arguments. These are the only points that would have improved the readers' experience. Otherwise, this is a work of history that is not only valuable to historians of East Central Europe and royal dynasties, but also especially to transnational historians who focus on memory, primarily because of the sheer depth and breadth of the examination that never loses its focus. The methodology is to be emulated.

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