

The Authorship of *A Relation of the State of Polonia, 1598*

Having already composed a popular diatribe against the Ottomans, *Ad principes populumque Christianum de bello adversus ad Turcos gerendo* (Cracow, 1594) and the descriptive account of the Tatars' customs, *De Tataribus diarium Guilielmi Brusci Scoti* (Frankfurt a. M., 1598),¹ the Scot William Bruce has been put forward by Stanisław Kot as a contestant for the disputed authorship of the anonymous first English description of Poland, *A Relation of the State of Polonia and the United Provinces of that Crowne, 1598* (henceforth: *A Relation of the State of Polonia*).² Originally attributed by the archivists G. Warner and J. Gilson to George Carew,³ an Elizabethan diplomat who spent two weeks in Poland in 1598, the tide has turned in favour of William Bruce largely on the grounds of his longer stay in Poland, his familiarity with Chancellor Jan Zamoyski, and his deeper knowledge of the various regions of the Polish Commonwealth.⁴ However, for a number of reasons, many of which have not been discussed before, the theory of Bruce's authorship is not tenable as it stands now, and I will discuss in detail the reasons why this hypothesis is ill-founded.

The theory of Bruce's supposed authorship might not have arisen in the first place, had the actual manuscript been consulted instead of relying on microfiche and Talbot's edition. To a large extent, the theory of Bruce's authorship depends on the date of the text's composition. Professor Mierzwa claims that the manuscript, Royal MS B I (and not 'B 1' as Mierzwa copies Talbot's error),⁵ is a copy prepared after 1600 and most likely not before 1603.⁶ And here already the first problem surfaces: the first part of this claim rests on the fact that Royal MS B I is not complete, as it ends with the phrase 'as followeth' on folio 112v. We do not know whether a complete manuscript existed but there is no reason to conjecture that this copy has been produced after 1600, because the title itself provides the date 1598 and no event alluded to in the body of the text lies beyond this date. The glosses in the margin have been added in a different and less elaborate secretary hand, and, as Mierzwa has correctly noted, refer to events occurring in or shortly after

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1600. But what Mierzwa appears to have overlooked is that these glosses constitute an editorial attempt.

For instance, the glosses frequently provide an update on the events described in the text: folio 90v features a brief account of Cardinal Jerzy Radziwiłł who was still alive in 1598. The marginal gloss next to the text adds the following information: ‘The Cardinall dyed at Rome 1600’. On folio 91r the relationship between text and gloss is made even clearer: the text has ‘The Bisshopp at thys tyme is the Earle of Bodzyrzanow’ whereas the gloss states ‘Died at Rome 1600’. But nowhere is the editorial function of the marginal gloss made more explicit than on folio 99v where the text mentions that Transylvania’s political reconciliation with Poland would be to Hungary’s detriment. The gloss unmistakably provides the reader with a note on how events have developed in this area since the text had been written:

Since this there hath ben greate alteration by the princes resignation and reconciliation to Polonia and his cozens the Cardinalls death – the Princes return and overthrow by the walachians, the walachians overthrow by George Bast.

The phrase ‘since this there hath ben greate alteration’ leaves no doubt that the secretary hand in the margin postdates the main text by at least two years. This fact alone should suffice to preclude Bruce’s authorship, as Mierzwa erects his hypothesis on the fact that William Bruce entered King James I’s service in 1603 and afterwards composed the account of Poland for the King.

It is evident from the very high quality of the main scribe’s mixed anglicana/secretary hand of s. XVI ex. together with the gold-embellished headings, and the fact that it is a manuscript and not a printed book, that it had been commissioned for a very wealthy patron. Given that it has found its way into the King’s Collection, it is not improbable to surmise that it had been composed for Queen Elizabeth, but we cannot extrapolate anything beyond this point. Nothing in the contents suggests a composition date later than 1598 which is given in the elaborately crafted title. Furthermore, we do not know of Bruce’s contacts with the English court prior to 1600. Bruce remained in Poland until the Hetman, the Commander-in-chief of the Commonwealth’s forces, sent him on a diplomatic mission to England in 1600, and, if he had indeed written this account, he must have done so in Poland.

But even if one could link Bruce to the English Court before 1600, which is currently unsubstantiated, there would still remain the valid obstacle of his limited linguistic capabilities: Bruce had composed his prior works in Latin and in a letter to Robert Cecil dated 4 November 1606 he apologises for his lack of fluency in English: ‘Pardon me Lord that I wrytte to your honor in Scottis. I had not ane that I might trust qhua culde wrytte Inglesse at this time.’ *A Relation of the State of Polonia* is written in a Southeast variety of early modern English without any trace of Scots or Northern spellings or expressions.⁷

In what must be one of the more creative palaeographical approaches, Professor Mierzwa approached the Criminal Laboratory of the local Police

authority in Lublin in 1967 with samples of Carew's and Bruce's handwriting as well as with a microfiche copy of *A Relation of the State of Polonia*.⁸ He claims that the results of Police Captain Henryk Łakomy's 'graphological and linguistic analysis' yield the following baffling insights:⁹

- 1 The text of the manuscript located in the British Museum [British Library] has not been written by William Bruce.
- 2 Neither this manuscript nor the marginal glosses have been written by George Carew, contrary to what Talbot maintains.
- 3 The reports [Bruce's letters to Robert Cecil] signed *William Bruse* have not been written only by Bruce, but by other people as well. Bruce only signed them with his signature.¹⁰

The basic problem of this approach is that Captain Łakomy from the Lublin Police authority was most likely not versed in early modern English philology despite his 'advanced microscopico-photographical equipment'. But even on the simply palaeographical level this attempt should prove nothing: if the signature *William Bruse* is all we have of Bruce's handwriting and Professor Mierzwa assumes that Royal MS B I is a copy prepared by a professional scribe, then what hope of success could this approach generate for Professor Mierzwa to prove his theory?

When first challenging Kot's hypothesis of Bruce's authorship, Talbot produced a second strong argument that should render Bruce an unlikely author of *A Relation of the State of Polonia*, namely that the existing discrepancies between Bruce's *Ad principes populumque Christianum de bello adversus ad Turcos gerendo* and the treatment of the Ottomans in *A Relation of the State of Polonia* do not permit substituting Bruce for Carew as the author of the text.¹¹ Mierzwa brushes away this serious challenge rather lightly, by saying that *Ad principes populumque Christianum de bello adversus ad Turcos gerendo* represents Bruce's attempt to forge a pan-European league against the Ottomans, whereas the treatment of the Ottoman Empire in *A Relation of the State of Polonia* had to limit itself exclusively to the Polish-Ottoman dimension of this problem. This argument is hard to sustain if we remind ourselves of William Bruce's crusading zeal that made him abandon his position as Chair of Law at Würzburg only four years prior to the composition of our text, and head for the Slovak-Hungarian front with the Ottoman Empire to command an entire division. *A Relation of the State of Polonia*, is, as I will show below when analysing the religious bias of the text, not consistently neutral in its treatment of its subject and it must be at least surprising that someone as engaged in creating a pan-European league against the Ottomans would have missed the chance of a lifetime to convey his ideas to King James. Mierzwa argues, somewhat problematically, that Bruce might have changed his ideas on realising such a league.¹² This argument rests on Bruce's disappointment with the apparent lack of determination he experienced in Hungary, but a text that had the King of England's ear could offer a new political lifeline to Bruce's idea.

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In support of Bruce's authorship, Professor Mierzwa produces two reasons himself. The first is that *A Relation of the State of Polonia* delineates Chancellor Jan Zamoyski in very favourable terms and dedicates a long passage to him.¹³ Apart from the King, Zamoyski was arguably the most powerful and influential man in the Republic and, to a large extent, the kingmaker himself. Amongst other achievements, Zamoyski ensured the election of two kings, Stephan Bathory and Sigismund III Vasa, and defeated a substantial Imperial army under the command of the Emperor's brother, Archduke Maximilian. No contemporaneous account of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with the aspiration to being comprehensive – and *A Relation of the State of Polonia* displays precisely this ambition with its systematic description of the Republic's regions, its administrative network, its legal system etc. – could afford not to dedicate a significant amount of attention to Zamoyski.

In addition to the above, Mierzwa points out that the stations of Bruce's itinerary substantially overlap with the regions described in *A Relation of the State of Polonia*.¹⁴ Again, the problem here is that *A Relation of the State of Polonia* aims at supplying a full description of the Republic and, thus, all regions are covered, with some being described with greater attention to detail than others on the basis of varying political and economic significance. More fundamentally, though, the regions are not sketched with a traveller's eye but depicted with an emphasis on their economic produce and their administrative characteristics. Much of this administrative information, such as the exact size of the various provinces or the number and names of the senators and bishops for each region, is of a statistical nature and may have been most likely supplied by a central source close to the Royal administration. Besides, it would be nearly impossible to compile such a work without the authority's approval and support. If one were to accept the argument of achieving the highest degree of congruency between the text and a traveller's itinerary as a criterion for probable authorship, then the ideal author of our text would have traversed the entire Commonwealth from border to border compiling information from local priests, clerks, and castellans. As this is both highly unpractical and unlikely to have happened, this argument does not particularly speak in favour of Bruce's authorship.

Apart from the palaeographical and linguistic evidence I have examined above, the most compelling argument against Bruce's authorship is the description of religion in *A Relation of the State of Polonia*, which, to my surprise, has not been noticed before. As a professor at Zamoyski's Academy, Bruce would almost certainly have to have been a Catholic.¹⁵ Although officially adhering to the Republic's tolerance edicts, Zamoyski supported the Roman Catholic Church, strove for and received papal recognition from Clement VII for the *Hippeum*, and granted privileges to Catholicism in Zamość.¹⁶ But the text in *A Relation of the State of Polonia* is marked by an undiluted anti-Catholic bias. A few examples will serve to illustrate this: Catholicism is frequently referred to as 'Popery' (fol. 85v), 'Popish religion',

and, most clearly, as ‘Romish superstition’ (fol. 84v).¹⁷ The author explicitly aligns himself with the Protestant cause by highlighting the plight of Polish Calvinists and applauding where they have scored successes. Speaking of the formerly Calvinist Radziwiłł family, he observes that ‘in Lithuania, and Samogitia, they [the Calvinists] have made meekely progresse, and would have don more yf, the Cardinal Radzivil, and hys three brethren had not defected from their fathers’ profession.’¹⁸ At another instance, the Jesuits are said to have ‘nestled’ in Poland (fol. 86v).¹⁹ Given this evidence, the author of *A Relation of the State of Polonia* could not have been a Catholic. If, however, Bruce had been a Protestant, then one would have to explain not only why he was a professor at the *Hippeum*, but also why the papal legate Boniface Vanozzi was such a public admirer and close friend of his.²⁰

Now that William Bruce can be safely excluded from the likelihood of being the author of *A Relation of the State of Polonia*, the question remains whether George Carew could have written this account. I agree with Professor Mierzwa that the arguments for Carew’s authorship are insufficient to confidently ascribe the work to him. What speaks for Carew is that he visited Poland in 1598, was a Protestant, and that he composed a comparable account of France in 1609, where he was ambassador for a number of years. And although the language of both texts shares the same geographical provenance, Carew’s *A Relation of the State of France* betrays greater linguistic accomplishment, employs a richer vocabulary, and displays a striking tendency to hypotactic constructions as opposed to the simple, unfurnished language of *A Relation of the State of Polonia*. This argument, I must add, depends on the assumption that Thomas Birch, who first published Carew’s text in 1749, made little or no emendations to Carew’s language.²¹ *A Relation of the State of Polonia* precedes Carew’s account of France by 11 years, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he could have developed as a writer between these two works.

However, given the inadequacy of the evidence, one cannot argue for Carew’s authorship with the same certainty with which William Bruce can be excluded from being the author of *A Relation of the State of Polonia*. In this light, and until new evidence or further analysis can determine the author of this work, I suggest that this contested position should be left vacant.

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Notes

- 1 Both works are kept in the collections of the Jagiellonian University’s library in Cracow.
- 2 Born in Stanstill in Caithness around 1560 and educated in France, William Bruce completed his Doctorate of Law in Cahors in 1586 before becoming a lecturer in Toulouse and Cahors. From there he moved via Rome to Würzburg to take up the

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Chair of Law. Next, Bruce joined the military campaign against the Ottoman Empire on the Slovak-Hungarian front before he accepted the Polish Chancellor's offer of teaching Roman law at his recently inaugurated Humanist academy, the *Hippeum*, in the town of Zamość (the stations of Bruce's life are outlined by Stanisław Kot in *Polski słownik biograficzny* (Cracow, 1937), III, 3.).

The MS containing *A Relation of the State of Polonia*, Royal MS B I, is held as part of the King's Collection of the British Museum in the British Library. It has been rather hastily transcribed and edited by C. H. Talbot in *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, XIII (Rome, 1965). Large extracts of the text have been translated into German by Siegfried Mews in *Ein englischer Gesandtschaftsbericht über den polnischen Staat zu Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1936), but the text is presented in an unscholarly ideological context.

The major articles addressing *A Relation of the State of Polonia* have been listed by Professor Edward A. Mierzwa, 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamojskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*' in H. Gmiterek, ed., *W kręgu akademickiego Zamościa*, passim.

- 3 G. Warner and J. Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collection*, II (London, 1921), 279.
- 4 Stanisław Kot first proposed William Bruce as the author of *A Relation of the State of Polonia* in his contribution to the *Polski słownik biograficzny* (Cracow, 1937), III, 3. Since then, Professor Mierzwa has virulently taken up the cause of Bruce's authorship in *Angielska relacja o Polsce z roku 1598, Annales UMCS*, 18 (Lublin, 1962), 'Na marginesie wydania angielskiej relacji o Polsce z 1598 r.,' *Przegląd Historyczny*, 58:4 (1967), 664–67, and, most recently, in 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamojskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*' in H. Gmiterek, ed., *W kręgu akademickiego Zamościa* (Lublin, 1996). C. H. Talbot defends Carew's authorship against Professor Kot's theory of Bruce's authorship in *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, XIII (Rome, 1965), introduction, passim.
- 5 'Ubi Royal B 1 annumeratur', Talbot, *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, XIII (Rome, 1965), xi.
- 6 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamojskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*', p. 210: 'i jest nie sygnowaną kopią sporządzoną po roku 1600' and '[. . .] a jej zakończenie przypadło zapewne nie wcześniej niż na koniec roku 1603, czyli na okres, gdy Bruce znalazł się w otoczeniu Jakuba I', p. 211.
- 7 Talbot has noted Bruce's strong Scots vernacular and his insecurity in writing English when responding to Kot's theory of Bruce's proposed authorship: 'Bruce lingua Anglica non bene callet, ut ex epistola sua ad Robertum Cecil, anno 1606 scripta [. . .] patet', *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, XIII (Rome, 1965), xiii. Talbot, however, does not scrutinise the language of *A Relation of the State of Polonia* for any Scots or Northern variations.
- 8 'Na marginesie wydania angielskiej relacji o Polsce z 1598 r.', pp. 666–67 and 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamojskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*', pp. 212–13. Mierzwa does not say which fragments of Carew's or Bruce's handwriting he obtained.
- 9 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamojskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*', p. 212.
- 10 'Na marginesie wydania angielskiej relacji o Polsce z 1598 r.', p. 666, note 7:

1. Tekst rękopisu znajdujący się w British Museum nie został napisany ręką W. Bruce'a.
2. Rękopis ten ani glossy marginalne nie były pisane ręką G. Carewa, jak utrzymuje Talbot.
3. Raporty sygnowane podpisem *William Bruse* [...] nie były pisane tylko przez W. Bruce'a, lecz pisały je i inne osoby; Szkot je sygnował własnoręcznym podpisem.
- 11 Talbot, *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, p.xiii. Talbot's third argument, the inconsistency of the description of the Tatars in *A Relation of the State of Polonia* with Bruce's *De Tataribus diarium Guilielmi Brusci Scoti* is not very useful, as Mierzwa has outlined on p. 667 of 'Na marginesie wydania angielskiej relacji o Polsce z 1598 r.', because the Tatar passage in *A Relation of the State of Polonia* has to meet a different narrative objective. But this observation does not bring us any closer to Bruce's authorship of the account.
- 12 'Na marginesie wydania angielskiej relacji o Polsce z 1598 r.', p. 667
- 13 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamojskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*', p. 212.
- 14 'Na marginesie wydania angielskiej relacji o Polsce z 1598 r.', pp. 666–67 and 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamojskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*', p. 213.
- 15 Professor Henryk Gmiterek advised me that although no official decrees or external evidence exist that would document a requirement for the Academy's professorship to exclusively profess the Roman Catholic faith, no non-Catholics had ever been professors. He further expands on the denominational landscape of the Academy in his article 'Ze studiów nad strukturą wyznaniową młodzieży Akademii Zamojskiej (1595–1784)', *Res Historica*, 10 (2000), 221–31. In addition, Stanisław Kot writes that Bruce was a Catholic certainly until he entered James I's service in *Polski słownik biograficzny* (Cracow, 1937), III, 3.
- 16 It must be added here that religious practices in the town itself prevented the total 'Catholicisation' of the Academy as, at least officially, envisaged by the Chancellor's decree of 10 April 1580, H. Gmiterek, 'Ze studiów nad strukturą wyznaniową młodzieży Akademii Zamojskiej (1595–1784)'.
- 17 This anti-Catholic tendency is mirrored in the marginal glosses, e.g.: 'Laws against the tricks of the Courte of Rome', fol. 96v.
- 18 Fol. 84v.
- 19 What is interesting is that Zamoyski is said to dislike the Jesuits, 'Zamoysky favours not the Jesuits' (fol. 86v) and that he is a crypto-Protestant: 'by profession he is a Catholike, but very moderate, secretly having correspondency with the Protestants' (fol. 78v). Professor Gmiterek pointed out to me that Zamoyski came from a Calvinist family and that he had attended Presbyterian congregations, whilst still a child. Furthermore, Gmiterek mentions Zamoyski's strained relationship with the Jesuits ('Ze studiów nad strukturą wyznaniową młodzieży Akademii Zamojskiej (1595–1784)', passim). In the light of this information, the comments made in *A Relation of the State of Polonia* about Zamoyski's secret correspondence with Protestants are highly intriguing, and deserve greater attention. Unfortunately, that would transcend the scope of this discussion.
- 20 Lempicki, *Działalność Jana Zamoyskiego na polu szkolnictwa 1573–1900*, p. 114. Mierzwa cites Vanozzi's accolades on Bruce as part of an account of

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Bruce's popularity at the Academy in 'William Bruce, profesor Akademii Zamozjskiej i agent handlowy *The Eastland Company*', p. 208. In addition, Bruce's academic career had taken him to bastions of Catholicism: Rome, Cahors, Toulouse, and Würzburg.

It is, however, highly likely that Bruce accepted Anglicanism following his return to England in 1600 to improve his fortunes at Court, but, as I have shown above, there is no reason to suppose that the text had been composed after 1600. This leaves open the possibility that the marginal glosses had been written on the basis of information supplied by William Bruce after his return to England in 1600.

- 21 *A Relation of the State of France, With the Characters of Henry IV and the Principal Persons of That Court*, in Thomas Birch, *An Historical View of the Negotiations between the courts of England, France and Brussels, etc.* (London, 1749). The assumption made above is credible as, although Carew's spelling and grammar were by then already 140 years old, Birch preserved them for the most part intact.