

### A note on biography

Oskar Halecki was born on 26 May 1891 as the only son of Oskar Alojzy Halecki, army general of Austria-Hungary, and of Leopoldyna Dellimanić. After graduating from the catholic Imperial-Royal Scottish Secondary School in Vienna in 1909, he obeyed his father's wish and enrolled at the Jagiellonian University, where he earned a doctoral degree having submitted the dissertation entitled *Zgoda sandomierska 1570 r., jej geneza i znaczenie w dziejach reformacji polskiej za Zygmunta Augusta* [The 1570 Consensus Sandomiriensis, its genesis and importance in the history of Reformation in Poland during the reign of king Sigismund Augustus]. The dissertation was written under the guidance of Stanisław Krzyżanowski. In 1914, Halecki avoided conscription because of his poor eyesight. He spent the war doing scientific work. He was mainly occupied with sphragistics and other auxiliary sciences related to history. He also published national-spirited texts, i.a. in the publishing house of the Supreme National Committee [NKN] and in journals published in Vienna. This is when Halecki took an interest in the history of Lithuania, Rus, and the Polish–Lithuanian Union. These matters provided a basis for his post-doctoral (habilitation) dissertation: *Ostatnie lata Świdrygiełły i sprawa wołyńska Kazimierza Jagiellończyka* [Świdrygiełło's last years and Casimir Jagiellon's Wołyń issue], which he successfully submitted in 1916. Until 1918, while waiting for his own chair, he worked as private docent for the Chair of History-Related Auxiliary Sciences at the Jagiellonian University. In 1919, he was offered a position at the University of Warsaw, where he lectured on the History of Central-Eastern Europe until 1939.

In the academic year 1920–1921 he was elected dean of the Faculty of Philosophy. He was also involved in work for the League of Nations. He was a delegate (1920) at the request of Biuro Propagandy Zagranicznej Prezydium Rady Ministrów [Office of Foreign Propaganda at the Presidium Council of Ministers]. Between 1921 and 1926 he often travelled to Geneva, to the League's institutions. He was a member and secretary of the International Committee on

Intellectual Co-operation of the League of Nations (1922–1924). Halecki initiated international scientific cooperation and international conferences.

Between 1925 and 1926 he was head of the University Section at the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in Paris. In 1926, Halecki became entirely involved in academic and teaching work. In the academic year 1930–1931 he was elected dean and a year later deputy dean of the Faculty of Humanities. In 1927, jointly with Marcei Handelsman, he established the Federation of Historical Societies of Eastern Europe, in operation until 1939.

He was a member of several Polish and international scientific organizations and institutions. From 1929, he was a member of the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences [PAU]. He chaired the Polish Heraldry Society and in the period 1930–1939 he was editor of *Miesięcznik Heraldyczny* [Heraldry Monthly]. He was delegated by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences to Conseil de perfectionnement de l'Institut Français de Varsovie (1932–1936).

Oskar Halecki was an active participant in the intellectual life of the Catholic Church. He was an active member of the Society of Academic Youth *Odrodzenie* and the *Pax Romana* Federation. He was also a member of the Catholic Association for International Research in Fribourg and chair of the Polish branch (1927–1929). Halecki took an active part in the forming of the Association of Catholic Writers and was elected the association's first chair (1933–1936). He served as vice president of the board of the Polish Catholic Intellectuals League (1934–1935).

Throughout his career, he maintained extensive international contacts. He attended all international historians' meetings, organized by the League of Nations. In 1938, courtesy of the Kosciuszko Foundation, he left for the United States, where he delivered lectures at 24 universities. He returned a year later to attend the Congress of Catholic Scientists.

He later moved to Switzerland to join his wife, and it was there that the outbreak of the Second World War found them both. The Haleckis soon moved to France. There, in Paris, Oskar Halecki was one of the initiators of the Polish University Abroad. In light of the imminent German attack, in 1940 the Haleckis left France for Spain and next for Portugal. They ultimately went to the United States. Oskar Halecki was initially employed at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York (1940–1942). In 1942, he co-founded the Polish Institute of Science and served as its director, and from 1953 as its chair. He served as chair until 1962, and between 1964 and 1973 – as honorary chair.

The Haleckis never returned to Poland after the war. Oskar Halecki ceased to be a university employee in 1947, after the Council of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Warsaw accepted his resignation. In the academic year 1944–1955 he took up the chair of History of Central-Eastern Europe at Fordham University in New York. Fordham University remained his *alma mater* until his retirement in 1961. He simultaneously lectured at the Université de Montréal (1944–1951) and at Columbia University, where he was visiting professor (1955–1963). He continued his scientific activity after retirement. Oskar Halecki lectured at the Loyola University Chicago in Rome and at the University of California in Los Angeles. For several years, he attended International Congresses of Historical Sciences. In the West, Oskar Halecki enjoyed tremendous respect for his outstanding scientific achievements. He still ranks among the most frequently quoted Polish historians. His position in the world of the academia is confirmed both by the number of his works and their indisputable quality.

## About the book

The two-volume edition, *Dzieje unii jagiellońskiej* [History of the Jagiellonian Union], is an attempt to synthetically present a crucial event for Europe: the Polish–Lithuanian Union. Indeed, the author's intention was to demonstrate the entire process of shaping mutual Polish-Lithuanian relations.

The first part of the publication provides an extensive and in-depth analysis of the origin of the Polish–Lithuanian Union. According to Halecki, its beginnings go back to the times of Mindaugas and Gediminas, when part of the territory of Rus was under the influence of the Polish and Lithuanian states. The process, which was initiated then, was intended to end up in a union. The author puts forward an argument that the union was initiated by Poland.

The second part expatiates on the period from the Union of Krewo formed in 1385 until Casimir Jagiellon's coming to the throne in 1440. The Union of Krewo is presented as an arrangement of vital importance in the process of bringing into force the political concept of a state of Casimir Jagiellon being the king of Poland, Lithuania and Rus. Halecki's focus is centred on the misunderstandings and obstacles to the union and the reasons for its failure. At the same time, he stresses that both states were striving to maintain the union, as well as emphasizes the role of Casimir Jagiellon's policy, seeking compromise in the relations with Lithuania. This position of both states was to lead to international success. What also mattered very much was the strengthened relationship between both states, sealed by the Union of Horodło in 1413, which additionally stressed and consolidated the ties between two countries and two cultures. The author pays special attention to the adoption of Lithuanian boyars; as a consequence, the Lithuanian Catholic nobility was granted privileges and ownership titles, which brought them closer to the Crown nobility. This resulted in this social group becoming more uniform, and in a political and social alliance of the elites of both states. The work discusses in detail the union's crisis (1430–1440); this period was decisive for its further existence.

The third part produces an in-depth analysis of Casimir Jagiellon's reign in the difficult period of the personal union. The conflict between Poland and Lithuania i.a. over Volhynia and Podolia is discussed. The author stresses the king's merits in striving for maintaining peace, and mitigating and resolving the rifts. During his 50-year reign, Casimir Jagiellon worked out a state of relative balance, in this way strengthening the relations between Poland and Lithuania. His efforts were crowned by the Union of Kraków and Vilna, signed in 1499. The union was a

political and military alliance aimed at mutual help, closer relations, and at preventing the states from coming apart.

The fourth part expands on the Polish-Lithuanian relations during the reign of Sigismund I the Old and his son, Sigismund II Augustus. The point of departure is the Union of Mielnik signed in 1501, a significant attempt to unite the Kingdom of Poland with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although the union was, in fact, never brought into force due to the conflict inside the Lithuanian elites, it laid a foundation for the Union of Lublin signed later on in 1569, which gave rise to the Commonwealth of Two Peoples. The author focuses on the mutual relations of both states and their expectations – the Lithuanians in their battles against Moscow and the Tatars, and the Poles in the legal union with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Further on, Sigismund Augustus' double election is discussed, as well as his attempts to reconcile the political plans of Poland and Lithuania. The author presents the stance of the king and the Polish and Lithuanian nobility towards the union. He dedicates the last part of the book exclusively to the Union of Lublin. He expatiates on the terms of the union, as well as emphasizes Sigismund Augustus' merits in this area. He also points to the solemnity of the union. He scrutinizes it in cultural, religious, and national terms, noting its solemn and voluntary nature, and demonstrating its advantages for Poland and Lithuania. A fervent advocate of the Union of Lublin, Halecki perceives it as a compromise between the Polish and Lithuanian nobility, ensuring stable ties in the interest of both nations.

### **Impact on historiography**

The book by Oskar Halecki, *Dzieje unii jagiellońskiej* [History of the Jagiellonian Union], was first published in 1919. After almost a century, it still remains as up-to-date as ever. Scientists worldwide consider it to be a publication of essential importance as regards the history of the Polish–Lithuanian Union. The researchers into Polish-Lithuanian relations and the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the reign of the Jagiellonians regularly continue to refer to this publication, for a number of reasons. Firstly, no publication has been issued in Poland so far that would expand on the Polish and Lithuanian relations during the reign of the Jagiellonians in such a detailed and in-depth manner. The work was meticulously written and based on abundant archive material. The author conducted a painstaking source analysis and presented it with great clarity. For decades, Halecki's work has been a point of reference for the world of the academia. The scientific value of the book has established his position as a historian in Poland and internationally.