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The Two Swords: Using the Symbol of the Battle of Grunwald (1410) in the 19th and 20th Century Poland

In June 2006, when the FIFA World Cup was performed in Germany, the Polish football team played a match versus the German team in Dortmund. Football fans of both teams were dressed in the national flags' colours of their countries, but some of the Polish fans put on T-shirts special message with two swords, it said on the T-shirts: 'Grunwald 1410', 'Dortmund 2006' (Fig. 1). The connotations between the medieval battle and the contemporary football match



1. T-shirt logo with two swords of Grunwald, worn by Polish fans at the FIFA World Cup, Germany 2006.

were clear. The fans seemed to say: we shall win the match in the same way as our ancestors defeated the Teutonic Order knights; the only difference was that in Dortmund the Germans won. But the symptomatic fact is that the most expressive and distinctive example of the confrontation between Poles and Germans was just the Grunwald battle; probably it is the only historical event which is so well-known by the majority Polish society. It is well-known, however, not by its medieval connotations but by its 19th and 20th century context.

Historical motivation of current social and political events can be found at every step. It is common practice in the context of both chronological and geographical horizon. This does not mean, however, that the operations of this type have a uniform intensity in all communities and in all historical epochs. Polish historian Marcin Kula said that there are communities and there are periods which are especially sensitive to history¹

Indeed it would be difficult to find an event in the Polish history which imprinted more influence on common social imagination or the actions of modern Polish social and political leaders that would be comparable to the battle of Grunwald. Building a Grunwald legend had already begun the very next day after the skirmish of the Teutonic Order's army by Polish and Lithuanian knights. According to the research, this fragment of medieval history in Polish and German tradition has been filled up with different content, dependent on current social and political events. An intensification of this process could be observed especially in the period of the last 200 years. This was connected first of all with the building of modern national identity in the 19th century; later after World War II the process was continued and shaped by the Polish relations first with the West-German state and later with united Germany. The process of construction and transformation of the so called Grunwald tradition has been presented in numerous essays, studies and monographs both in Polish and German historiography therefore there is no need to repeat these facts²

¹ See M. Kula, *Krótki raport o użytkowaniu historii* [A Short Report on the Use of History], Warszawa 2004.

² The publications where the Grunwald tradition is discussed were assembled most fully in the bibliographies connected with the Grunwald battle; see for example H. Baranowski, and I. Czarciński, *Bibliografia bitwy pod Grunwaldem i jej tradycji* [Bibliography of the Grunwald battle and its tradition], ed. M. Biskup, Toruń 1990, p. 15. This bibliography collected more than 1100 publications, from which entries from 585 to 1165 are connected with the Grunwald tradition. See also J. Maternicki, *Tradycja grunwaldzka jako przedmiot badań historycznych* [The Grun-

It seems appropriate, however, to underline the existence of Grunwald events of 1410 in the memory of Polish society as a *sui generis* national symbol. Even if it is not the symbol which would be able to accumulate the members of Polish community, it is surely a symbol recognizable for a greater part of Polish society.

The Grunwald battle was the event in the history of mediaeval Poland which had essential influence on an imagination and actions of successive generations of Poles and their relations to the consecutive forms of the Prussian-German states. In the same way the most well-known and recognizable episode of this battle was the arrival of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Ulrik von Jungingen legation to the King Władysław Jagiełło of Poland. The emissaries brought the two swords and handed them over to the king. These two swords with the passage of time and especially in the last 200 years became the symbols of battle itself, the victory over the Teutonic Order's army particularly and the symbol of 'the restraint of the Teutonic pride'

This text is a contribution to the research on the episode of handing over the two swords before the battle of Grunwald. I will try to follow the transformation of the research and try to seize the symbolic content of the event which went far beyond the original meaning of the episode which opened the battle. I will take into consideration Polish situation only, however, I am fully aware of the existence of the German variant of the *Schlacht bei Tannenberg* tradition³

At the beginning I will try to answer the question how the course of the great master's legation to the Polish king was represented in the 15th century accounts, what significance it had for the contemporaries and finally why it shocked so intensively Polish witnesses. There are several reports about the course of the Grunwald battle which took place on the 15th of July 1410. Directly after the battle, on the

wald tradition in historical research], in: *Metodologiczne problemy badań nad dziejami myśli historycznej. Materiały z konferencji naukowej w Krynicy w 1989 r.*, ed. J. Maternicki, Warszawa 1990, pp. 147-162; *Tradycja grunwaldzka* [The Grunwald tradition], vol. 1-5, ed. J. Maternicki, Warszawa 1989-1990; M. Biskup, *Grunwaldzka bitwa. Geneza – przebieg – znaczenie – tradycje* [The Grunwald battle. Genesis – course – meaning – traditions], Warszawa 1990, pp. 133-205.

³ The very well documented discussion about the German version of the Grunwald tradition see S. Ekdahl, *Tannenberg/Grunwald – ein politisches Symbol in Deutschland und Polen*, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 22:4, (1991), pp. 271-234.

16th of July, the Polish king sent a number of letters addressed to dignitaries and to institutions in the country and abroad. In these letters he informed about the battle and its result. Surprisingly the description of the legation in these reports occupies much space; they included the exact quotation of the words of both legates and the king's answer. For example in the letter to Queen Anne king Władysław wrote as follows:

'Et, dum jam se mutuo aspiciamus, magister cruciferorum et marescalcus nobis et preclaro principi domino Witoldo, fratri nostro carissimo, per suos herroldos duos gladios direxerunt sic dicentes: "Noveritis, rex et Witolde, quod in hac hora vobiscum conflictum faciemus et hos gladios vobis pro subsidio dono damus. Nobis ergo locum date eligere certaminis aut ipsum aut vos eligatis!" Quibus taliter cum mansuetudine respondimus: "Gladios, quos nobis direxistis, receptimus et in Christo nomine, qui cervices conterit superborum, conflictum vobiscum faciemus; sed locum prelii et conflictus nescimus vobis dare nec volumus; quem autem omnipotens dues largire nobis dignabitur, vobiscum conflictum deducemus!"'⁴

It should be added that the report about the Teutonic Order's legation occupied about 1/3 volume of the whole letter. Similar reports can be found in letters to bishop Adalbert of Poznań, to Jan Hus, to the city council of Krakow, to the Cracovian University.

Later in 1410 an extensive account about the war of the Polish Kingdom with the Teutonic Order was written at the royal chancellery. Its shortened version is well-known at present; it was prepared in the 16th century. This version in the form of a speech delivered by heralds to King Władysław, looks in this account somewhat differently. One can read the sentences expressed by one of the emissaries to the king: 'Rex! magister hunc tibi dirigit gladium at fratri tuo Vitoldo ex parte marsalci alium dare debemus, si ipsius praesentiam habere potuerimus' Therefore Władysław Jagiello summoned Vitoldus and the later speech of emissaries looked so:

'Rex et Vitolde! Magister et marsalcus hos gladios vobis mittunt in subsidium et ad pugnam vos invitant; pro loco vero certaminis vos requirunt, ut ipsum soli eligatis et electum ipsi per vos nuntietis. Nec

⁴ *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, ed. T. Hirsch, M. Töppen, E. Strehlke, vol. 3, Leipzig 1866, p. 426. See also pp. 426-427 – the letter to bishop Adalbertus.

velitis vos in condenso hujus silvae abscondere, quinimmo ad bellum protius exire non differatis, quia pugnam nullomodo evadere poteritis⁵

Fifty years later Jan Długosz wrote an account of the battle of Grunwald and extended the heralds' speech:

Illustrissime rex, magister Prussie generalis Ulricus mittit tibi et fratri tuo Withavdo (suppresso et Alexandri et ducis nomine) per nos arolδος presentes duos gladios in pugne suffragium future, quatenus cum eo et gente sua minus cunctanter et magis audaci quam pre te fers animo congregiaris neque de cetero latites et inter silvas nemoraque consistens pugnam trahas. Si autem strictum et arctum campum te ad explicandum tuorum acies habere existimas, offert tibi magister Prussie Ulricus, quatenus te ad certamen eliciat de planicie campi, quam suo exercitu occupavit, ad quantum voles excedere aut saltem, ne pugnam ulterius dilatum a te iri contingat, martis campum quemlibet delige⁶

Next follows the King's speech, he appealed to God and the Holy Mother's help as well as to saints, asking them for support in overcoming the enemy.

In the interpretation of historians the gesture of sending the swords before a battle was practiced in the chivalric culture. The Teutonic Order Knights as ambassadors of the Western culture on the Eastern border of Christianity wanted to introduce various elements of this culture (practiced in France, Burgundy and Brabant) into the customs of Eastern knights. But king Jagiello and his closest circle took the gesture itself and the words of the emissaries as an outrageous action which was full of pride⁷ It seems, however, that the gesture of delivering the swords was essential for King's propaganda, since information about it can be found in letters sent on the day after the battle. The emissaries' words and the gesture of giving the two swords had to shock the recipients of the letters, since Jan Hus in his answer to the royal letter asked rhetorically:

‘Ubi ergo sunt inimicorum gladii? Re vera illis sunt prostrate, quibus terrere conabantur humilem! Ecce, duos dixerunt, benivolencie et

⁵ *Cronica conflictus Wladisłai regis Poloniae, cum cruciferis anno Christi 1410*, ed. Z. Celichowski, Poznań 1911, pp. 22-23.

⁶ Joannis Długossii, *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, lib. 11, Varsaviae 1997, p. 102.

⁷ See especially the study by K. Militzer, *Aspekte aus den Beziehungen des Deutschen Ordens zum Polnischen Adel*, in: *Etos rycerski w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej od X do XV wieku*, ed. W. Peltz, J. Dudek, Zielona Góra, 1997 pp. 77-84; and also M. Biskup, *Grunwaldzka bitwa*, pp. 92-93.

superbie, et multa milia perdiderunt depressi inportune! Ubi sunt gladii (. in quibus confidebant?⁸

It seems right to show, that the description of the whole episode with Teutonic Order's emissaries was preceded in all three reports with a passage about celebrating the Holy Mass in a royal tent in which the King participated. The fragments about the gentle and full of humility answer given by the king to the herald's words were important elements of the reports. King shed tears over peace, which could not have been kept and he gave himself in the custody of God and saints. The only changing element are the words of emissaries which from one report to another become more and more haughty and offensive towards the King. This fact is worth remembering, aside from the reliability of the quoted words of the Teutonic Order's heralds.

After the battle the swords were passed on to the royal treasure, where they were listed in the inventories (together with Szczerbiec, the coronation sword of the Polish kings) *ad finem* of the Polish state in 1795⁹

* * *

Discussing how the episode of the delivery of the two swords functioned in the last two hundred years of Polish history, one should notice the fact that it has been changing in the same way as the whole Grunwald tradition. The changes were influenced by well-known political events (the loss of independence of the Polish state, subsequent state and quasi-state beings inside the borders of the partition monarchies and the national rises) as well as social and identity events (first of all the process of joining new social groups with the national community and shaping the feeling of national identity). Also European cultural ideas were not without influence. Particularly romanticism deeply affected the process of legitimizing the contemporary actions and opinions in the context of the past events. In the framework of these extensive transformations the discussion – which even if

⁸ *Codex epistolaris saeculi decimi quinti*, vol. 3, ed. A. Lewicki, Kraków 1894 (=Monumenta medii aevii historica res gestas Poloniae illustrantia, vol. XIV), appendix 1, no. 3, pp. 500-501.

⁹ Joannis Dlugossii, *Annales seu cronicae...*, lib. 11, p. 104; Z. Spieralski, *O mieczach krzyżackich spod Grunwaldu* [On the Teutonic order's swords from Grunwald], *Zapiski Historyczne*, 39:2, 1974, pp. 23-29; Z. Żygulski, *Dzieje zbiorów puławskich. Świątynia Sybilli i Dom Gotycki* [The history of the Puławy collection. The Sibilla's Temple and the Gothic House], Kraków 1954.

cursory is not possible here – about the Grunwald battle and the episode with the two swords played a huge role. First of all the victory of the Polish king was in the medieval Polish history one of few episodes of universal significance. Moreover the battle was an undeniable military success, which in contrast to later defeats, proved the effectiveness of the Polish state. Finally, the victory was achieved over the Teutonic Order, but the Teutonic methods as well as. Especially peculiarly interpreted missionary ideology were identified in the course of the nineteenth-century with actions undertaken by the Prussian state and then the German Empire. Linking all these elements together transformed the Grunwald battle into a national symbol, the event all Poles could be proud of and the linking element of identification for all members of the Polish nation. In this process the most important role was played not by professional historians but by writers and painters as well as journalists. They had the largest chance to reach mass recipients interested in the national history.

For the first time in the 19th century the episode of the delivery of the two swords before the Grunwald battle was probably mentioned by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz. His *Śpiewy historyczne* (*Historical poems*)¹⁰ written between 1808 and 1810 and published in 1816 contained a piece 'Władysław Jagiełło' with subtitle 'The Grunwald battle with the Teutonic Order' The fourth stanza of this poem sounds:

'Already to Grunwald armies had approached,
When before the king the knight of the Teutonic Order stood,
He kept two swords, with impertinent figure
"My master, said, gives you these weapons
For better today's battle,
This sword for you, the other for Vitoldus"

"I have enough swords, but these will be useful also
for necks of proud people", Jagiełło answers¹¹

This literary account of J.U. Niemcewicz does not bring any new content to the episode but it is essential for a different reason. Until

¹⁰ For the textual, literary, and historical analysis see M. Witkowski, *W kręgu Śpiewów historycznych Niemcewicza* [In the circle of *Śpiewy historyczne* by Niemcewicz], Poznań 1979.

¹¹ J.U. Niemcewicz, *Śpiewy historyczne*, Warszawa 1818², p. 95.

the 19th century the Grunwald tradition was an elitist tradition, the court tradition. In this century, however, it gained mass and universal character. It did not happen – as it is often said – because of the Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Krzyżacy*, published in fact at the end of the century. It was the verse *Śpiewy historyczne* which had enormous influence on the historical perception of Polish society throughout the 19th century. It contained the verse about prominent figures of the Polish history; it included also the so called prose additions, being in fact the shortened textbook of Polish history. In the 19th century *Śpiewy historyczne* was published several dozens of times in Poland and abroad. Its influence on the formation of the vision of the past could hardly be overestimated. The most important fact in the context of the Grunwald battle was that *Śpiewy historyczne* introduced this event into the collective memory of Polish society.

Other historian-writers who wrote about the Grunwald battle also contained a reference to the episode of the delivery of the two swords before the battle in their works. Karol Szajnocha, in his extensive historical epos *Jadwiga and Jagiełło*, published in 1855-1856, introduced a wild context of the conflict between the Polish Kingdom and the Teutonic Order, he also introduced new content to the Grunwald tradition. The description of the battle and the events directly preceding it can be found in the fourth volume of the work. In its main part Karol Szajnocha's novel follows the description of the battle by Jan Długosz yet it contains some novelty which will be repeated by the later authors. Namely, the author introduced the motive of king Jagiełło, who desired with all strength to preserve the peace. The moment in which he realised that it was impossible, was the moment of the arrival of the Teutonic Order heralds', who with words full of pride overthrew the king's hopes. Therefore he did not have another possibility – he had to undertake the battle.

'King Jagiełło fell plaintively in his hopes of achieving agreement and reconciliation. Tears shone in his eyes when he had heard heralds' proud words "spurring to a bloodshed"'¹²

The novel by Karol Szajnocha enjoyed large popularity. It certainly did not achieve the fame of *Śpiewy historyczne*, yet with regard to its historical reliability as well as literary style was read widely. In my opin-

¹² K. Szajnocha, *Jadwiga i Jagiełło*, vol. 3-4, Warszawa 1969, pp. 454-455; this edition is based on the original publication from 1861.

ion the identification of historical Teutonic Knights with the contemporary, that is the nineteenth-century, Prussians or Germans took place for the first time in this novel. This parallel was unrolled and the motive of preserving the peace was repeated by another historian-writer Józef Ignacy Kraszewski in his novel *Teutonic Knights 1410. The Pictures from the Past* (*Krzyżacy 1410. Obrazy z przeszłości*), published in 1874. His scene with two swords begins with the the entry of emissaries:

‘Heralds had the **German** [emphasis M.M.] arrogance in their faces and they were angry, proud and self-confident. They did not make a proper obeisance to the king and this one who had the imperial coat of arm, started to speak German’¹³

The king’s answer to the emissaries’ speech, following the account of Jan Długosz, possesses an almost liturgical character. It contains a clear profile of king Jagiello’s intention, the profile of the Teutonic knights-Germans as well as an indication that God stands on the side of these who are his true confessors and who desire peace. The context of the identification of the Teutonic Knights with Prussians linked the historical battle with the events contemporary to the author.

Forty years after Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, the same subject was described by Henryk Sienkiewicz in his novel *Teutonic Order Knights* (*Krzyżacy*). Despite the fact that his version of the Teutonic Order legation did not stray from the presented above and it was devoided of the king’s extensive speech, the novel itself made a huge influence on the process of building the stereotype of the Teutonic Knights-Germans. Published in 1897 in the period of sharp conflicts between the German government and Polish society the novel was a reply to the current needs of the audience and formed its image of the past. Together with the monumental painting by Jan Matejko (*Battle of Grunwald*) it became one of the pillars in building the stereotype of Germans in the Polish social consciousness.

The period of time from the 90^s of the 19th century till 1910 was of key importance in the process of the introduction of new plots in the Grunwald tradition. They were connected with the action of Prussian germanisation and the stronger and stronger general aspirations of Polish society for independence. It was also an important period in the con-

¹³ J.I. Kraszewski, *Krzyżacy 1410. Obrazy z przeszłości*, Katowice 1983, p. 139.



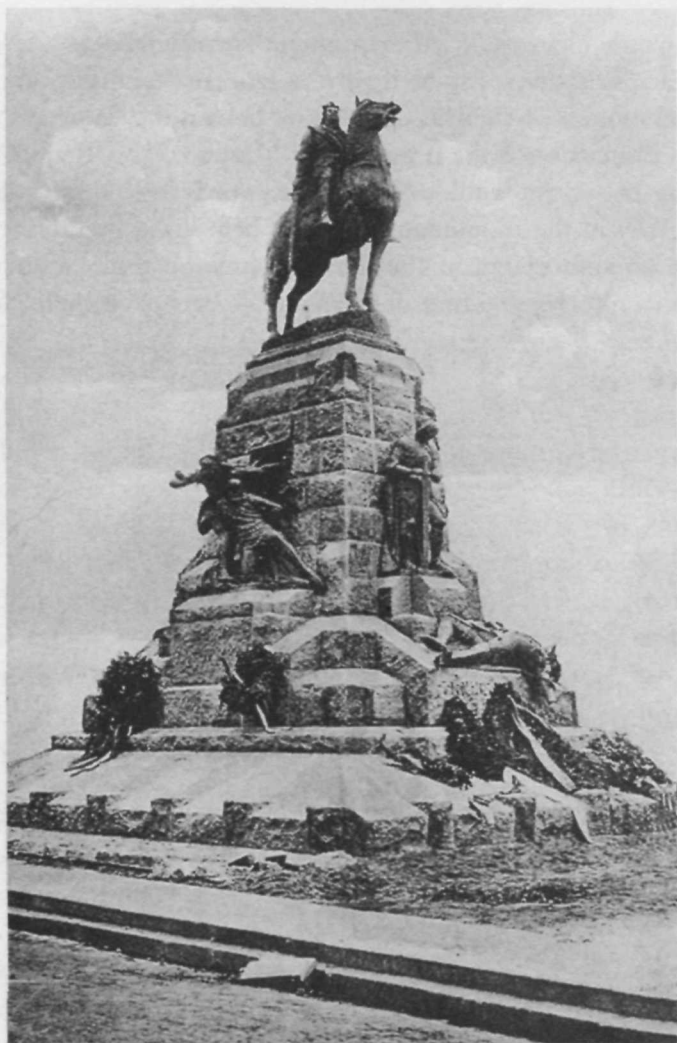
2. Dwa miecze, by Wojciech Kossak. Postcard, 1910.

text of the emissaries and the two swords episode. Shortly before the 500th anniversary of the battle Wojciech Kossak painted *Two swords* (*Dwa miecze*) (Fig. 2) he depicted the Teutonic Order's ambassadors standing before king Jagiello¹⁴. This painting was then distributed in the form of reproduction as a souvenir from the celebrations of the anniversary. Meanwhile, the Grunwald swords – or one should say, the swords regarded as such – were exhibited at the exhibition dedicated to king Jagiello and queen Hedvig of Anjou. The information about the exhibition of these souvenirs spread quickly thanks to numerous press articles¹⁵.

During the celebration of the anniversary, the Grunwald swords were presented for the first time as visual symbols. They can be found,

¹⁴ This was not the first visual representation of the Grunwald battle; see K. Skoczyńska, *Że studiów nad ikonografią bitwy pod Grunwaldem* [From the research on iconography of the Grunwald battle], *Rocznik Olsztyński*, 4, 1961/1962 [edited 1964], pp. 64-65.

¹⁵ For the celebrations of the anniversary of the battle in 1910 see among others things *Księga pamiątkowa obchodu pięćsetnej rocznicy zwycięstwa pod Grunwaldem w dniu 15, 16 i 17 lipca 1910 r. w Krakowie* [The commemorative book the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Grunwald victory on the 15th, 16th, and 17th July 1910 in Krakow], ed. K. Bartoszewicz, Kraków 1911; A. Treiderowa, *Obchody grunwaldzkie w Krakowie (1410-1910)* [The celebration of the Grunwald battle in Krakow (1410-1910)], Kraków 1961, D. Radziwiłłowicz, *Tradycja grunwaldzka w świadomości politycznej społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1910-1945* [The Grunwald tradition in the political consciousness of the Polish society, 1910-1945], Olsztyn 2003, pp. 40-67.



3. *The Grunwald monument in Krakow, unveiled on the 15th of July 1910, built by the foundation of I. J. Paderewski; designer: Antoni Wivuski. The monument was destroyed during World War II and reconstructed in 1976; designer: Antoni Konieczny. Postcard.*

carved in stone, on a pedestal of the Grunwald monument in Krakow, founded by the future Prime Minister of the first independent Polish government, Jan Ignacy Paderewski (Fig. 3)¹⁶ The Monument in general was the allegory of reassurance and hope in victory; every figure and group of figures had its own allegorical meaning. The swords

¹⁶ See A. Urbańczyk, *Na chwałę narodu. Pomnik grunwaldzki w Krakowie. 1910-1976* [For the glory of the nation. The Grunwald monument in Krakow. 1910-1976], Kraków 1976.

were the only element of the monument carved in stone and not cast in bronze. They were situated on the front side of the monument, below the hooves of Jagiello's horse and behind the figure of Vitoldus (Fig. 4). The figure of the dead Grand Master of the Teutonic Order was lying below the Vitoldus' feet. The swords indeed did not play a leading part in the monument. Just like before the battle, they made only the announcement of the future victory, on the monument they made up only the shadows of three main heroes: Jagiello, Vitoldus



4. A fragment of the Grunwald monument with the swords carved in stone. Postcard, 1911.

and Ulrik von Jungingen. Maybe it will be an exaggeration to state, that the hardly foreshadowed contours of the swords made up the announcement of the second Grunwald. This idea fully unrolled itself during World War II, but they surely made up the announcement of the victory over the Teutonic Knights-Prussians in the not precisely defined future.

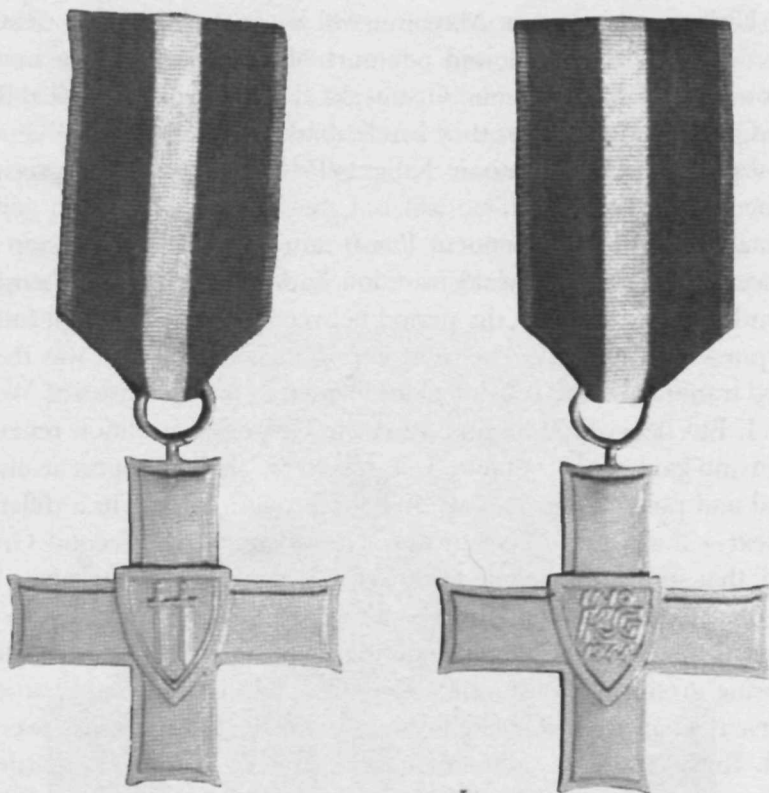
Establishing the independent Polish state in 1918 did not stop the influence that the Grunwald tradition had on the relations between Poland and Germany. In the period between two world wars it lost its sharpness and intensity. The most important in this period was the so called tradition of the Polish legions formed in the first years of World War I. But between 1939 and 1945 the Grunwald tradition renewed again and gained new content. It is possible to show that practically all social and political movements of Poles brought back – in a different context – the battle of Grunwald. The slogan of the second Grunwald, that stimulated people to renew the victory over Germans – it is sure that for different reasons – was adopted by such distant movements as the National Party or communists from Moscow. Particularly left-wing groups of Polish political scene used the Grunwald battle as the event which should create inspiration for the future victory over *III Reich*. Ruthenian and Lithuanian armies taking part in the battle of 1410 might make the historical justification for the Polish and Soviet alliance¹⁷ The oath of the soldiers of the I Polish infantry division took place on the day of the anniversary of the battle, and the order of the chief commander of Polish army given in 1945 also on the 15th July said:

‘[Grunwald] it is the first great victory of SLAVES, which Poland then organized and united. Apart from Polish and Lithuanian one, Ruthenian, Belorussian and Bohemian regiments fought too. The Grunwald battle became victory thanks to Slavic unity. Grunwald – the largest victory in the history of the Nation – was a base for Polish democracy, an element organizing the fight with Germans, leading our nation to victory’¹⁸

The most general symptom of the Grunwald-Berlin parallel was an order called the Grunwald Cross (Krzyż Grunwaldu) set in 1943 by The National Committee (Krajowa Rada Narodowa) (Fig. 5)¹⁹ This

¹⁷ See D. Radziwiłłowicz, *Tradycja grunwaldzka*, pp. 173-228.

¹⁸ See *Na chwałę narodu*, f. 63 [without paginaton].



5. The Grunwald Cross (Krzyż Grunwaldzki).

order was qualified as counterweight for the order of *Virtuti Militari* awarded by the National Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and the Polish government in London. The circumstances of the creation of the Grunwald Cross in the light of remembrances of participants of these events appear almost mythical²⁰

¹⁹ See A. Mazur, *Order Krzyża Grunwaldu. 1943-1985* [The order of the Grunwald Cross. 1943-1985], Warszawa 1988.

²⁰ A. Mazur gave detailed information on the localization of the apartment in which in November 1943 the command of Polish Army discussed about the introducing a new order. There was a special group which should protect the building against the German soldiers; the command had 3 liaison officers, who contacted with special group. In the relation of I. Loga-Sowiński the discussion about the name of the new order had the following course: 'Next, looking for an inspiration, we turned our thoughts to the past monuments our national culture, to historical works, among others to Jan Długosz, to literature by Adam Mickiewicz, Henryk Sienkiewicz and many others, we turned to history of art. And when we stopped at works of Jan Matejko, we imagined and saw in our eyes his magnificent work, the

This order was awarded for fighting against German army in years 1939-1945, and was supplemented then by the Grunwald badge granted to almost all soldiers in the Polish army. The Grunwald Cross represents the shield with two Grunwald swords on the obverse, meanwhile on the reverse there is an analogous shield with dates 1410 and 1944 and abbreviation KG ('Krzyż Grunwaldu'). The Cross was first awarded to soldiers only, later also to places, flags etc.

What is most important, the artistic form of the Grunwald Cross, and the swords too, became a universal symbol of the Grunwald battle and its tradition. There is no doubt, that the artistic form of the swords followed the form presented on the Grunwald monument in Krakow, because as far as I am informed, such way of presenting the two swords of Grunwald had not existed in any other place. Moreover, the shield with the Grunwald swords from the Grunwald Cross was placed on monuments, commemorative boards, graves, and at last they were used as a sign of the places of national memory, that is the places connected with the victims of World War II (Fig. 6, 7). In 1999, when the law of the places of national memory was discussed at the Polish Parliament, the members of Parliament during a debate opposed a legal liquidation of this sign. It was argued that the Grunwald swords belonged to the same group of symbols as the national emblem or the national flag²¹

It seems also, that till 1960, that is to the 550th anniversary of the battle, Grunwald²² and the two swords with carried symbolic meaning and were of military character in general. Soldiers were the main actors and spectators of subsequent anniversaries of the battle celebrated in numerous places decorated with the boards with the two swords. This situation changed in the period of the strong anti-German policy in the decade of Władysław Gomułka and the time of stressing the Polish-Soviet alliance by Edward Gierek's circle. The

picture of a victory of a historical value – the Grunwald battle. We all stopped breathing and Grzegorz Korczyński shouted (...) I have a proposition – the Grunwald Cross. Yes, it was a great idea, it was what we all wanted (...) It was the beginning of the order of the Grunwald Cross (...)’ – cited by A. Mazur, *Order Krzyża Grunwaldu*, pp. 21-22.

²¹ See the stenography from the 117 session of the Komisja Samorządu Terytorialnego i Administracji Państwowej on 5th February 2004 in: <http://www.senat.gov.pl/k5/kom/kstap/2004/117stap.htm>.

²² Thanks to the publication edited in 1960 on the occasion of the 550th anniversary of the Grunwald battle the new authorities inscribed themselves in the 19th century patriotic Grunwald tradition. See *Grunwald. 550 lat chwały* [Grunwald. 550 years of glory], ed. J.S. Kopczewski, M. Siuchniński, Warszawa 1960, 1961².



6. A sign indicating a place of national memory.



7. Grave stones at the military graveyard in Siekierki established after the Grunwald Cross.



8. A photo from the movie *Krzyżacy*, directed by Aleksander Ford, 1960.

decisive moment came in 1960 when a nationwide anniversary of the Grunwald battle was organized. Certainly it still was a celebration of military character, however, this anniversary increased the general awareness of Polish society of the anniversary due to the participation of school pupils and first of all because of the premiere of the first Polish color and panoramic screen, post-war film, namely *The Teutonic Knights* (*Krzyżacy*) by Aleksander Ford²³, an adaptation of the novel of the same title by Henryk Sienkiewicz (Fig. 8). However, as Robert

²³ See the deep analysis of social and political context of the movie by L. Jockheck, *Ein Nationalmythos in 'Eastman Color': Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg 1410 im polnischen Monumentalfilm 'Krzyżacy' von Aleksander Ford*, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 55:2, 2002, pp. 216-251. The movie was discussed in many studies and monograph both by Polish and German authors. See H. Baranowski, I. Czarciński, *Bibliografia bitwy pod Grunwaldem*.

Traba says, the aggressive and primitive propaganda of the anniversary of the battle evoked the opposite result²⁴ Taking over the national symbol of Grunwald battle by the state authority and its extreme use for the purposes of contemporary policy caused the deconstruction of national symbol and loss of its power of uniting the society.

It is appropriate to underline, that the Grunwald swords played a significant role in Ford's movie. In the prologue of the movie spectators can see the episode with heralds' legation, finished with digging the swords in the ground. This scene reappears at the end of the movie preceding the final battle. It is obvious that the king's answer to the emissaries' speech was devoid of references to God, but in the next scene the picture which did not exist in any earlier description of that episode can be found. King Jagiełło sitting on his horse and in his armour, receives the swords, raises them over his head, crosses them and hits one against the other several times; it was the sign to start the battle. Thus the king with the Teutonic Order's swords, brought by Teutonic Order's heralds, gives the sign to start the battle in which the same Teutonic Knights will be defeated. The swords in this scene have a symbolic meaning, they replace these fragments of Sienkiewicz's narration, which were connected with the Polish desire for peace. Jagiełło was summoned to the battle with the swords and with the same swords he gave the sign to open the battle.

The gesture of the elevation of the swords overhead needs some commentary. Lars Jockheck noticed that this gesture follows the artistic form of the monument of king Jagiełło in Central Park, New York²⁵ (Fig. 9). It had originally stood in Lvov, yet as a result of World War II the sculptor realized his idea in USA for the local Polish community. The symbolic content, similarly as in the story of the swords from The Grunwald Cross, finds here its full expression. The symbolic content taken from the monument, or the symbolic medium, was transferred to the movie which altered that meaning and evoked a new symbolic meaning.

²⁴ R. Traba, *Konstrukcja i proces dekonstrukcji narodowego mitu. Rozważania na podstawie analizy polskich obchodów rocznic grunwaldzkich w XX wieku* [Proces of constructing and deconstructing of the national symbol. About the Polish celebrations of the anniversaries of the Grunwald battle in the 20th century], *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 1999, no. 4, pp. 520-523.

²⁵ L. Jockheck, *Ein Nationalmythos*, p. 250; for the Grunwald monuments see further S. Ekdahl, *Tannenberg-Grunwald-İlgiris: Eine mittelalterliche Schlacht im Spiegel deutscher, polnischer und litauischer Denkmäler*, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 50:2, 2002, pp. 103-118.



9. *The monument of the king Władysław Jagiełło of Poland, founded in 1946 in New York; designer: Stanisław Kazimierz Ostrowski.*

After 1960 the celebrations of the anniversary of the battle never reached such great scale again. Also they gradually lost their political and ideological significance. After 1989 the Grunwald battle and the two swords episode were taken over by historical folklore in the form of a tournament. Each year the day of the battle anniversary attracts more and more large groups of knight's fraternities on one side, and tourists on the other side. The episode of the two swords serves only as the opening of the adaptation of the battle²⁶

Considering the function of the episode with the two swords during the last two hundred years, one can notice, that throughout the 19th

²⁶ However, in 2006 the anniversary was visited by the Polish Minister of Defense and the Polish vice-Prime Minister. So it may be interpreted as a signal of the new chapter of the Grunwald tradition.

century it was transformed in the same way as the whole Grunwald tradition. It gained some independence at the moment of placing it in the symbolic form at the Grunwald monument in Krakow in 1910. According to semiotics, a visual symbol has an influence on three planes: code, signature and context²⁷. In the case of the two swords the code and the signature initially coincided. The visual medium in the form of the two swords referred directly to the battle episode which in turn functioned in the defined historical context. The code and the signature got the independence only in the order of the Grunwald Cross and the Grunwald badge. Placing the two swords on the shield and also the dates 1410 and 1944 as well as signatures Grunwald-Berlin gave the swords a definite sense and referred to a particular yet different form the previous one historical context.

Taking over and grabbing the symbol of the two swords by the authorities of the People Republic of Poland led to vulgarization of the symbolic meaning, which in turn was one of the several reasons why the whole tradition in the form of antagonizing the Poles and Germans disappeared.

There is no doubt, that the Grunwald tradition and the symbolic meaning of the two swords belong to the sphere different from history, they belong to the sphere of memory, especially collective memory. In this dimension, historians' reflections are not so important; the most influential ones are historical novels, paintings or the whole production of popular culture which formed the collective consciousness. *Memoria* is situated beyond the border of professional historical reflection, so its influence is wider than historians can even imagine.

²⁷ See A.H. Gombich, *Obraz wizualny* [Visual representation], tr. A. Morawińska, in: *Symbol i symbolika*, ed. M. Głowiński, Warszawa 1990, pp. 312-338.