

Developing the Concept of “Succession Crisis”: New Questions to Social and Political Circumstances of Łokietek’s Rise to Power, 1304–1306

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In this article I would like to share some reflections about the concept of “succession crisis” which is an attempt to formulate the working characteristics of medieval politics. The concept derives from modern traditions of political analysis and strives to approach medieval politics, and especially its stormy context of a succession to a throne, from systematical and generic perspective. The concept will be tested by applying it to the situation in Poland in the turn of the fourteenth century, when Władysław Łokietek, an exiled duke of Piast dynasty, contributed to the fall of the Přemyslids rule in Poland and seized power in Cracow. The structure of my article is, therefore, the following: first, I will introduce the “succession crisis” as a concept for studying politics in the Middle Ages. Second, I will outline recent historiography about the context of Łokietek’s return to power. I will mainly underline challenges associated with the Bohemian rule in Poland. Finally, I will apply the concept of “succession crisis” to a particular aspect of Łokietek’s political activity, i.e., to his sophisticated relations with the nobility of Little Poland.

“Succession Crisis” as a Concept for Studying Politics in the Middle Ages

The concept of “succession crisis” has emerged from the need to re-examine ways of writing the political history of the Middle Ages. In the twentieth century politics lost its significance, along with the development of history as an academic discipline after other aspects of the past like social, economic or anthropological history

had won popularity. Discussion of political matters no longer seemed interesting, since the bulk of major facts and events had been established; the focus shifted towards hidden social mechanisms and interrelations which were held responsible for shaping the political life of the Middle Ages.¹ Politics, therefore, was only interesting as a sort of outcome of the complex, multifaceted machinery that stood behind it. Decoding the machinery itself became the real issue. The basic question, “What happened?” was, as a result, replaced – or rather supported – with a long list of additional research questions where sociological and anthropological interests prevailed.

As recent examinations of historiography have shown, political history is regaining its place in scholarship. However, it is more inclined to study the rituals and symbols of government,² or examine political culture, elite networks and the interplay of political power and social influence in various localities.³ Such approaches shed a great deal of light on “traditional” political history and equip a historian with far broader understanding of medieval political realities. Throughout the twentieth century, parallel to changes in the field of history, Political Science and its derivative discipline, International Relations, gradually evolved. Theoretical analyses of governments, political institutions and international bodies, along with reflection on political systems, their features, motivations, and agents, created a set of models and an entire intellectual “toolbox” that claimed to describe the workings of modern politics successfully.

The concept of “succession crisis” relies on the assumption that working on medieval politics demands wide and equal consideration of recent achievements in the fields of history, political science, international relations, and the sociology of politics. It is evident that the latter three disciplines arose, above all, from the critical examination of contemporary politics and their main focus rarely reaches back further than the nineteenth century. I am fully aware of this situation. Nevertheless, while developing the concept of “succession crisis,” I put forward two premises.

First, any intellectual advance benefits from questioning the settled models or a critical reconsideration of widely acknowledged truisms. Therefore, I decided to challenge the established opinion that Political Science as such could only have emerged from, and be applied to, the birth of the modern state, including the corollary that once these states were formed they created a more-or-less stable political order that is still visible to our days. The symbolic moment of this happening is the Peace of Westphalia, which marked the end of the Thirty Years’ War in 1648.⁴

1) Jean-Philippe GENET, *Political Society and the Late Medieval State*, in: *New Approaches to the History of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Selected Proceedings of Two International Conferences at the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen in 1997 and 1999*, ed. Troels Dahlerup and Per Ingesman, Copenhagen 2009, pp. 11–12.

2) Susan REYNOLDS, *The Historiography of the Medieval State*, in: *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley, London – New York 1997, p. 113.

3) Rees DAVIES, *The Medieval State: The Tyranny of a Concept?*, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16, 2003, p. 282.

4) Cf. Teresa ŁOŚ-NOWAK, *Stosunki międzynarodowe: teorie, systemy, uczestnicy* [International Relations: Theories, Systems, Participants], Wrocław 2006, p. 34, 234. On the “Westphalian Myth” see

I believe, however, that Political Science can still be telling and revealing when intellectually adjusted and applied to the Middle Ages. I use the concept of "succession crisis" in exactly such an attempt.

Second, scholarly accomplishments of Political Science shall not be ignored and an effort should be made to utilize them in medieval contexts. In other words, it appeared to me that a modern approach to political history cannot exclude the intellectual "toolbox" that Political Science has created so far. Findings in medieval political culture and anthropology enrich the picture of complex political reality in the Middle Ages; omitting these findings affects any political analysis of the period. Similarly, disregard for contributions coming from Political Science may lead to unnecessary simplifications and distort the final picture. My endeavor to connect modern approaches to politics with political practices of the Middle Ages and thus formulate an innovative way of depicting these matters is a relatively new initiative which is rather absent in Polish historiography. This situation offers the exciting advantage of being a pioneer, yet it has the unpleasant drawback of depriving me of the privilege of relying, on this particular issue, on previous scholarship. However, my research intuitions are hinged on observations made by recent Western scholarship. As Susan Reynolds remarked in her powerful summary of the historiography of the medieval state, "in the past 20 years the traditional view of the 'Renaissance state' as significantly new, modern and absolute has been much modified, though not universally abandoned."⁵ This statement supports my belief that one should view changes in political techniques, practices, and ideas as the outcomes of a gradual process rather than as an abrupt discontinuity. Hence, reaching towards modern methods, with caution and proper criticism, can bear fruit because the Middle Ages, especially the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, are not so far away from the modern period as we used to think.

Coming back to the idea of "succession crisis," the concept attempts to reflect on medieval politics, with a special focus on the Central European context, by critically employing the mindset characteristic to modern political analysis. Thus, the "succession crisis" is not confined to mechanisms of dynastic conflicts or to political struggles over empty thrones. Its scope is broader and encompasses other elements of medieval politics. In fact, it strives to formulate the working characteristics of medieval politics and discern features that made them so unique and different that eventually it appeared impossible for contemporary methods of political analysis to be applied.

The wide conceptual range of a "succession crisis" is, in my view, inevitable. The very name of political "crisis" immediately elicits the question of the "typical state" of medieval politics. Furthermore, asking about "normality" demands a definition of who, or what, was an agent in international (i.e., interstate; inter-lordly; trans-local)

also: Andreas OSIANDER, *Before the State: Systemic Political Change in the West from the Greeks to the French Revolution*, Oxford – New York 2007, p. 247, where he summarizes the limitations and drawbacks of such an approach to studying politics and indicates how strongly the "myth" was embedded in the secondary literature.

5) S. REYNOLDS, *The Historiography*, p. 120.

politics. Who was affected by a crisis then – a state (a kingdom, a principality, a lordship), or a political community as a whole, or maybe only a few members of the elite? Grappling with these issues shows the general problem of the character of a medieval state, i.e., how it functioned, what its fundamental aims and essential interests were. I am addressing all these issues with significant limitations both in time and space. I am bringing the questions together in order to compose a scaffold on the basis of which I will build a picture of political affairs in Central Europe at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Politics in the Middle Ages has already received generic characteristics. Decades of research have marked and outlined several features that are described in juxtaposition with national states, a natural environment for European historians of the previous two centuries. From the perspective of well-organized, bureaucratic, and powerful states, medieval societies, who were primarily organized around concepts of kinship,⁶ looked very stateless and anarchic. I agree with Rees Davies, who speaks about “cut-out and oversimplified models of medieval society often presented as a precursor of the modern world.”⁷ Such a patronizing attitude carried presumptions of the underdevelopment and backwardness of medieval society and its political organization. This, consciously or unconsciously, was a prejudiced approach that assumed there was only one way development.⁸ Founded in an evolutionary setting, it put a major emphasis on pointing out the lacks and prematurity of medieval society or measured its political life through lenses of modern criteria.⁹ The “absence description” prevailed over the more “contextually based” approach. Thus, popular notions evolved about “feudal anarchy,” the apparent weakness of effective “public” power, the prominence of “universal bodies” (the empire and the papacy), and the absence of coercive power or lack of ideas of sovereignty.¹⁰

I myself shared such presumptions for a long time. Moreover, compared to the contemporary world they are true to some extent, yet in an oversimplified manner. I need to add, however, that most such opinions were formulated in reference to Western medieval societies, where the source material is abundant and therefore allows drawing far-reaching conclusions. In case of Central Europe the situation is much different. Sources for medieval Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland are significantly scarcer than in the West. Thus, the picture is less clear and less complete. The limited amount of source material leaves more space for individual speculation based on common sense and logical thinking. Through these, the picture is regularly reshaped, yet there is a tendency to fill the inevitable data gaps according to certain general assumptions. Przemysław Urbańczyk has pointed out a few of them, which are claimed to be influential in the field of history of the early medieval

6) Rhys JONES, *Mann and Men in a Medieval State: The Geographies of Power in the Middle Ages*, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series 24, 1999, p. 65.

7) R. DAVIES, *The Medieval State*, p. 280.

8) Cf. Dipesh CHAKRABARTY, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton N. J. 2000, p. 7.

9) R. DAVIES, *The Medieval State*, p. 281.

10) Cf. *ibid.* p. 281.

Polish state: nineteenth-century survival-of-the-fittest evolutionism, determinism, and nation-centered state-building.¹¹

Such approaches are useful in individual cases. I would argue, however, that they are prone to explain the past in relation to results which are known to the historian, but were totally hidden from medieval people. They, probably, did not recognize any determination in political matters and were rather unaware of the structural and organizational development of the political entities they lived in. Consequently, discussing their political practices should consider their particular mindset, which was distinct to our sensibilities, e.g., Roman Sobotka claimed that Jan Długosz, the great Polish chronicler of the fifteenth century, understood the present as an immutable continuation of the past. Hence, he presented the Polish history in his contemporary setting and assumed that the Polish society of his times was much the same as the society of the tenth or eleventh century.¹² Hence, my concept of "succession crisis" tries to capture the politics in Central Europe in the early fourteenth century in its otherness (in comparison to modern standards). My intention is to use political analysis contemporary to medieval society, but – at the same time – to avoid projecting later political structures or ideas on information flowing from the source material.

What was the "succession crisis" about, then? This is a set of theoretical and general remarks on several aspects of medieval politics. It is based on what we know about medieval political culture, succinctly put forward by Rees Davies: "the so-called 'feudal world' – so often presented as ruthless and amoral in its codes of behaviour – was in fact governed by a values system other than that of force (*vis et voluntas*) and emotion (*ira et malevolentia*). It was underpinned by the concepts and practice of counsel and aid, honour and fidelity, consensual decision-making and ecclesiastically-proclaimed norms."¹³

The working definition of "succession crisis" is based on the supposition that "stability" is a critical factor in any political system. The system becomes vulnerable if something deprives it of its steadiness and knocks it off balance. A monarch in the medieval political system played an important role in maintaining political stability, which was supposed to harmonize the opposing interests of various groups and circles in a kingdom. A succession crisis erupted when there was no political agreement regarding who should step into the shoes of a deceased monarch, i.e., who was the most promising candidate for achieving the goal of stability, harmony, and balance of power.

The unique position of a ruler derives from another assumption, that the favorite political system in the Middle Ages was a monarchy, which constituted a vital element of the social hierarchy. A monarch is seen to have somewhat generated

11) Przemysław URBAŃCZYK, *Trudne początki Polski* [Difficult Origins of Poland], Wrocław 2008, pp. 37–41.

12) Roman SOBOTKA, *Powoływanie władcy w Rocznikach Jana Długosza* [Creation of a Ruler in Roczniki of Jan Długosz], Warsaw 2005, p. 194.

13) R. DAVIES, *The Medieval State*, p. 285.

politics. He was a real source of offices, income, lands, and privileges.¹⁴ He could also grant prestige that would elevate a lord over his peers¹⁵ – a practice of special importance within the limits of very hierarchical society. On the contrary, a vacant throne would freeze local politics – no more distribution of goods, offices, lands, and prestige. In the long run it would deprive political life of its sense because there was nothing to be gained and no authority that could officially confirm the status of an elite.

A “succession crisis” reveals further perspectives on medieval politics. First, its eruption opened the field for ambitious individuals and families to expand their domains by agreeing to support a particular candidate to a throne. Moreover, a crisis brings about a power vacuum which may be seized by a new dynasty. In the context of dynastic rivalry, a common feature of medieval society, a succession crisis evoked issues concerning “dynastic continuity” on a given throne and the notion of “dynastic security,” which are both closely related to the very idea of succession. Since every noble and royal family tended to enlarge its domains and thus promote its power, authority, and prestige over new lands and within society, the issue of preserving its possessions and legacy was of primary importance. This shows that the concept of “succession crisis” touches upon hereditary matters.

In the Polish conditions of the early fourteenth century, any inquiry about succession to the throne immediately discloses lacunae in our historical knowledge. According to Jacek Matuszewski, we know little about the real competences of a Piast ruler; in fact, we are not even sure whether these competences were ever explicitly formulated.¹⁶ Waław Uruszczak, in his insightful and very new study on the succession to the throne in Cracow and Poland, indicates that until Władysław Łokietek the succession was always dependent on a particular political situation and the power relations between competing candidates. This was because, he argues, there were no precise regulations concerning the succession procedures.¹⁷ All we can say about them is that beginning from the late twelfth century onwards, the throne of Cracow was elective, not in a legal sense, but rather as a political

14) Jan WRONISZEWSKI, *Król jako właściciel ziemski w średniowiecznej Polsce* [King as a Landowner in Medieval Poland], in: *Król w Polsce XIV i XV wieku* [King in Poland in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century], eds. Andrzej Marzec – Maciej Wilamowski, Cracow 2006, p. 133. See also: Jacek GZELLA, *Małopolska elita władzy w okresie rządów Ludwika Węgierskiego w Polsce w latach 1370–1382* [The Power Elites of Little Poland during the Reign of Louis the Great in Poland 1370–1382], Toruń 1994, p. 48.

15) Andrzej MARZEC, *Urzednicy małopolscy w otoczeniu Władysława Łokietka i Kazimierza Wielkiego* [The Officials of Little Poland in the Retinue of Władysław Łokietek and Casimir the Great], Cracow 2006, p. 295. The author indicates that royal donations, which were available for members of the royal court, significantly strengthened position of a noble family among its peers.

16) Jacek MATUSZEWSKI, *Polska monarchia patrymonialna – opis średniowiecznej rzeczywistości czy produkt dziewiętnastowiecznej historiografii?* [Polish Patrimonial Monarchy – a Description of Medieval Reality or a Product of the Nineteenth Century Historiography?], in: *Król w Polsce XIV i XV wieku* [King in Poland in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century], eds. Andrzej Marzec – Maciej Wilamowski, Cracow 2006, p. 147.

17) Waław URUSZCZAK, *Następstwo tronu w księstwie krakowsko-sandomierskim i Królestwie Polskim (1180–1370)* [Succession to a Throne in Principality of Cracow and Sandomierz, and in Kingdom of Poland 1180–1370], *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* 62, 2010, p. 33.

tradition.¹⁸ In the light of unregulated formal procedures a throne vacancy was always a destabilization of the political order.

That is why the "succession crisis" introduces the notion of "stability potential." It indicates certain features or characteristics of a candidate which encouraged various political and social "forces" (rulers of neighbor polities; the Church; the nobility; the towns) to consider him a good political investment. "Stability potential" is a term that encompasses all the political motivations that may create support for a particular candidate. A candidate with a high stability potential was an individual who held the promise of leading the country out of the succession crisis and who seemed to have good chances for victory. Hence, he appeared to be a good long-term political investment and – last but not least – the price to be paid for supporting him was comparatively low compared to projected gains.

Many factors can enhance "stability potential" and they do not have to coincide to make a candidate successful. Their importance rests on the political context and fluctuates through time due to changes in political (and economic) conditions. For that reason it is not easy to give a set of particular features which make a candidate to the throne a person worth supporting. Proven prowess in battle, possession of certain kinds of wealth, and dynastic connections to powerful political entities may play their significant role, but they are only elements of a more complex network of social and economic relations that links a candidate with his followers. Other reasons needed to be taken into consideration – whether there was a real political alternative for a candidate; personal charisma; the likes and dislikes of the nobility; concepts of stability prevailing among certain interest groups (the nobility; the Church; towns; foreign powers), and so on. So many factors cannot create a cohesive image in theory. They can, however, help in asking questions of sources and to examining given facts or events in a search for better understanding of the political conditions that supported one candidate over another.

"Succession crisis" is not a fixed term. It cannot be applied within a precise framework of juristic terminology. It rather identifies a certain status of "public" life and draws attention to consequences of certain actions. The term may be applied to self-governable (to various extents) territorial entities. In the medieval intellectual climate that favored stability, immutability, and continuity¹⁹ it could be perceived as a period of instability in a particular polity which demanded immediate treatment. Moreover, "succession crisis" becomes here an ambivalent term because it refers to dynamics of political change which must have been understood differently in the past than now, when hardly anything seems to have been stable. The time of crisis, therefore, stimulated responses from a variety of political forces, yet the question of how a vacant throne was generally comprehended still awaits revelation.

I have elaborated the concept of "succession crisis" in order to approach the political situation in Central Europe at the beginning of the fourteenth century

18) *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

19) R. СОВОТКА, *Powoływanie*, p. 15.

from a new, region-centered, perspective. A number of thrones in Central Europe became empty nearly simultaneously at that time. Since political conditions cannot tolerate a vacuum, these unexpected vacancies opened the field for new candidates to the throne(s). The situation became even more complicated when some monarchs, in whom many had invested their political hopes, died young (Ladislav IV the Cuman, Andrew III, Wenceslas III, Rudolf of Habsburg, Henry VII). The peak of the crisis occurred during the years 1306–1310, when the Hungarian, Bohemian, Roman, and Polish thrones all stood vacant. This unstable situation created a heated political environment in the region and drew special attention to it because these vacancies appeared like the Promised Land to new ambitious noble families that were engaged in quests to enlarge and secure their domains.

On the whole, the modern political concept of “succession crisis,” although concerning quarrels around vacant thrones, in fact can contextualize a broader view of medieval politics. It creates a perspective from which to examine primary sources and historiographical interpretations. This perspective is fundamentally focused on “politics at play,” although it can also help to identify generic features of late medieval politics in Central Europe, with necessary references to the European context, and, so equipped, to offer a fresh interpretation of the circumstances which allowed Władysław Łokietek to come back to power.

Łokietek’s Return to Power in Modern Polish Historiography

Władysław Łokietek is a special ruler in Polish history. He is considered the founder of a state that survived until the late eighteenth century. He is also the one who managed to successfully overcome internal divisions among Polish provinces and bring the most important of them to unity at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

In contrast to this view, Łokietek’s career has been a perplexing subject for generations of historians. He was descended from a minor branch of the Piasts, the Polish ruling family, and originally seemed to be doomed to supervise his petty principality in Cuiavia. However, after the death of Leszek the Black, his older stepbrother, in 1288, Łokietek received Sieradz, a significantly more powerful duchy than his previous one, and escaped the fate of marginalization. In addition, he engaged in conflicts to get control of Cracow, so far ruled by the deceased Leszek, and expanded his domains by acquiring Sandomierz, the second largest province of Little Poland. The 1290s witnessed Łokietek’s rise and abrupt decline in power. He temporarily ruled in Great Poland and Pomerania, yet in 1300 he lost all his domains to Wenceslas II, king of Bohemia, and was exiled.²⁰ His situation was so desperate that recently Tomasz Jurek called him “politically bankrupt.”²¹ Łokietek, nevertheless, to the surprise of historians, vigorously came back to “big” politics

20) For general introduction see: Stanisław SZCZUR, *Historia Polski: średniowiecze* [History of Poland: Middle Ages], Cracow 2002, pp. 312–324 and 335–338.

21) Tomasz JUREK, *Dziedzic Królestwa Polskiego książę głogowski Henryk* [Henryk, Duke of Głogów – the Heir of the Kingdom of Poland], Cracow 2006, p. 95.

in early 1305, and gradually reconquered his lost territories at the expense of the Bohemian rulers and other Piast dukes. Polish historiography, no matter how critical occasionally, has recognized Łokietek’s stubbornness, ambition, and evident political talents, which eventually made a king out of a petty duke. And his kingdom lasted for centuries.

There is not enough space to discuss all possible aspects of Łokietek’s success in 1306. My PhD research is dedicated to these issues, which I am situating in a broader Central European political context, using the “succession crisis” concept as a tool for disentangling sophisticated interrelations at the interstate and local level. Here I will only outline a few elements in Łokietek’s “triumphant” story which, in my opinion, need further investigation. First, however, I am summarizing the context and circumstances of Łokietek’s actions as they are presented in recent historiography. My further remarks shall serve as an example of applying the “succession crisis” concept.

Łokietek left Poland for Ruthenia sometime in the second half of 1300.²² He had friendly relations with dukes of Halich and Lodomeria, which had earlier been secured by dynastic marriages.²³ However, he lost all his domains and in this sense he became a “homeless” duke.²⁴ Wenceslas II, the king of Bohemia, seized power over most of the principalities of Poland and was crowned king of Poland in 1300.²⁵ He did this with the common consent of the Polish nobility, who accepted him as ruler. According to Tomasz Nowakowski and Tomasz Jurek, Wenceslas II maintained his strong position among the Polish nobles for the next few years, certainly until 1303.²⁶ The Bohemian king preserved nearly the whole elite of office-holders intact²⁷ and did not elevate any of the noble families to be significant supporters of his power.²⁸ He introduced the new office of *starosta* (*capitaneus*), who acted as

22) Bronisław WŁODARSKI, *Polska i Ruś 1194–1340* [Poland and Ruthenia 1194–1340], Warsaw 1966, p. 232; Bronisław WŁODARSKI, *Stanowisko Rusi halicko-wołyńskiej wobec akcji zjednoczeniowej Władysława Łokietka i jego powiązanie z utratą Pomorza Gdańskiego* [The Attitude of Ruthenia of Halich and Lodomeria towards Władysław Łokietek’s Unification Efforts, and Its Connection with the Loss of Gdańsk Pomerania], *Zapiski Historyczne* 27, 1962, pp. 342–343. See also: Maciej MACIEJOWSKI, *Orientacje polityczne biskupów metropolii gnieźnieńskiej 1283–1320* [Political Positioning of Bishops of the Metropolis of Gniezno 1283–1320], Cracow 2007, p. 258.

23) B. WŁODARSKI, *Polska i Ruś*, pp. 227–228.

24) T. JUREK, *Dziedzic*, p. 95.

25) Janusz BIENIAK, *Wielkopolska, Kujawy, ziemie łączycycka i sieradzka wobec problemu zjednoczenia państwowego w latach 1300–1306* [Attitudes of Great Poland, Cuiavia, Provinces of Łęczyca and Sieradz towards the Problem of the State Unification 1300–1306], Poznań – Toruń 1969, pp. 133–134. He argues that the traditionally accepted date of Wenceslas’ coronation shall be moved from August 1300 to November 1300.

26) Tomasz NOWAKOWSKI, *Małopolska elita władzy wobec rywalizacji o tron krakowski w latach 1288–1306* [The Power Elite of Little Poland and the Conflict over the Throne of Cracow 1288–1306], Bydgoszcz 1992, p. 61, 102. See also: Tomasz JUREK, *Polska pod władzą obcego króla. Rzeczy w latach 1291–1306* [Poland Ruled by a Foreign King. The Bohemian Reign 1291–1306], in: *Król w Polsce XIV i XV wieku* [King in Poland in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century], eds. Andrzej Marzec – Maciej Wilamowski, Cracow 2006, p. 192.

27) T. NOWAKOWSKI, *Małopolska*, pp. 72–73.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 77.

the king's representative in Polish provinces and *de facto* diminished the traditional authority of the highest office of "wojewoda" (*palatinus*, voivode).²⁹ Jurek discovered that Wenceslas II tried to alter the traditional rules of administration and left minor offices vacant for years. This practice, Jurek believes, was targeted at the actual liquidation of the lower ranks of the offices.³⁰

There are few sources that describe the Bohemian rulership in Poland. The most detailed in existence are materials from the canonical trial of Jan Muskata, bishop of Cracow.³¹ These sources are considered to be biased and exaggerate the alleged atrocities of Wenceslas' representatives.³² Previous historiographers used them extensively and created an image of growing opposition towards the Přemyslids in Poland as a direct response to the foreign occupation of the country.³³ The increasingly unhappy nobility was supposed to have called Łokietek back, and whole-heartedly supported the "true heir" to the throne of Cracow. Consequently, the fall of the Bohemian system of rulership in Poland, along with the premature death of Wenceslas II in 1305, was seen to create favorable conditions for the exiled duke to claim back his domains and regain power.

This interpretation has been somewhat mitigated, although not fully transformed, by more recent studies.³⁴ Jurek found positive aspects of the Bohemian presence in Poland,³⁵ yet he had to grapple with the same problem that had bothered previous generations of historians, namely, Łokietek's successful rise to power, which started in late 1304.³⁶ The problem was how to explain, with the scarce source material, the rapid end of the Bohemian lordship in Poland and such an enthusiastic welcome for the "political bankrupt." Therefore, Jurek, as all his predecessors, was forced to formulate a hypothesis based on re-reading the sources and justified reasoning. He lists a few causes for the Bohemian loss: the opportunism of the Polish nobility, who, in fact, was never pleased with Wenceslas II and just wanted to save its traditional position in power; a conflict of interest between the new system of administration and the old customary system; the marginalization of Poland in foreign policy; severe repressions against rebellious nobles, including

29) Janusz KURTYKA, *Odrodzone królestwo: monarchia Władysława Łokietka i Kazimierza Wielkiego w świetle nowszych badań* [The Reborn Kingdom: Monarchy of Władysław Łokietek and Casimir the Great in the Light of Recent Studies], Cracow 2001, p. 116.

30) T. JUREK, *Polska*, p. 202.

31) *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana* III, ed. Joannes PTAŚNIK, Cracow 1914, pp. 78–95.

32) Sławomir GAWŁAS, *Człowiek uwikłany w wielkie procesy - przykład Muskaty* [A Man Involved in Great Trials - the Example of Muskata], in: *Człowiek w społeczeństwie średniowiecznym* [A Man in Medieval Society], eds. Roman Michałowski et alii, Warsaw 1997, p. 392. T. NOWAKOWSKI, *Matopolska*, pp. 100–101.

33) T. JUREK, *Polska*, p. 188.

34) Cf. Bronisław NOWACKI, *Rządy Przemysłidów w Polsce w ocenie historiografii polskiej* [The Evaluation of Reign of the Přemyslids in Poland by the Polish Historiography], in: *Przemysłidzi i Piastowie: twórcy i gospodarze średniowiecznych monarchii: materiały z konferencji naukowej, Gniezno 5–7 maja 2004 roku* [The Přemyslids and the Piasts: Founders and Landlords of Medieval Monarchies: Materials of the Conference, Gniezno May 5–7 2004], ed. Józef Dobosz, Poznań 2006, pp. 231–236.

35) T. JUREK, *Polska*, p. 219.

36) *Ibid.*, p. 216.

the threat of a military expedition; and finally, the lack of an ideology that would attract the elites compared to the Piast's notion of unification of Poland,³⁷ which was already popular with the Polish nobility.³⁸ Nowakowski puts the emphasis on the marginalization issue, i.e., that Poland incorporated into the Kingdom of Bohemia was doomed to become an object of international politics rather than its subject, agent, and creator.³⁹

According to Andrzej Marzec, Łokietek seized power because he won wide support among the nobility of Little Poland.⁴⁰ He also points out that there was no real alternative to Łokietek.⁴¹ For Błażej Śliwiński, the winds of change blew as early as late 1304, when an anti-Bohemian coalition was formed with papal and imperial contributions⁴² and Łokietek seemed to re-emerge from oblivion.⁴³ Jurek also believes that fluctuations on the international level brought Łokietek back into view and subsequently rescued him from his "bankruptcy."⁴⁴ Stanisław Szczur remarks that changing political constellations made Łokietek, the "exiled" duke, a favorable candidate for Cracow in the eyes of the barons of Little Poland.⁴⁵ Janusz Kurtyka, in his influential study on the "reborn Kingdom of Poland," identified the reaction of the Polish nobility ("political nation," as he put it) to the alien (the Bohemian) political system, subsequently turning into the real support for Łokietek's efforts, as a major cause of Łokietek's success.⁴⁶ Janusz Bieniak took a little more nuanced view, underlining that support from the Polish nobility was not immediately unanimous.⁴⁷ Jurek argues that Henryk of Głogów, another Piast duke, could have been a political alternative to Łokietek because he managed to acquire and maintain power in Great Poland after the fall of the Přemyslids. Moreover, Jurek found evidence for Henryk's royal aspirations but – at the same time – the duke of Głogów never seems to have attempted to reach for Little Poland.⁴⁸ Jan Baszkiewicz followed Jurek's arguments and states that in Poland in 1306 there were two candidates for royal insignia – Łokietek and Henryk of Głogów.⁴⁹

The lion's share of facts and events concerning Łokietek's rise to power has already been displayed by former generations of prominent scholars – Jan Baszkiewicz, Jan Dąbrowski, Edmund Długopolski, Antoni Kłodziński, Bronisław Włodarski

37) Ibid., pp. 216–218.

38) A. MARZEC, *Urzednicy*, p. 18.

39) T. NOWAKOWSKI, *Małopolska*, pp. 108–109.

40) A. MARZEC, *Urzednicy*, p. 21, 44, 49.

41) Ibid., pp. 115–116.

42) T. JUREK, *Dziedzic*, p. 104.

43) Błażej ŚLIWIŃSKI, *Leszek, książę inowrocławski (1274/1275 – po 27 kwietnia 1339)* [Leszek, Duke of Inowrocław 1274/1275 – after 27 April 1339], Cracow 2010, p. 110.

44) T. JUREK, *Dziedzic*, p. 104.

45) S. SZCZUR, *Historia*, p. 336.

46) J. KURTYKA, *Odrodzone*, pp. 15–16.

47) J. BIENIAK, *Wielkopolska*, p. 109.

48) T. JUREK, *Dziedzic*, pp. 109–132.

49) Jan BASZKIEWICZ, *Odnowienie Królestwa Polskiego 1295–1320* [The Restoration of Kingdom of Poland 1295–1320], Poznań 2008, p. 132.

et alii.⁵⁰ Some new material has appeared due to archival work of Stanisław Sroka.⁵¹ However, historians nowadays confront this matter with more or less the same source data, so discussion of Łokietek's return to power rests upon "re-activities," i.e., reinterpretation, reconsideration, rereading etc.

There are several issues related to the topic which are worth discussing here. One of them is claims in recent historiography for the great popularity of Łokietek among the nobility of Little Poland. These opinions are generally buttressed by source evidence deriving from the lists of testators of Łokietek's charters.⁵² Lately, the meticulous analysis has shown, e.g., that from the very beginning Łokietek was surrounded by followers who originated from the most powerful noble families.⁵³ He had to come to terms with them and he could only secure his power over Little Poland if he found a way to please the barons of the province. According to Marzec, one of their conditions was to maintain the *status quo*, i.e., the office holders were not to be replaced.⁵⁴ Łokietek fulfilled these wishes and consequently received the desired recognition. On the basis of the analysis of charters, Marzec also made a more general remark regarding the political horizons of the nobility of Little Poland. Namely, he said that their political aspirations and ambitions did not surpass membership in a princely or royal retinue.⁵⁵ Thus, local politics was all they wanted to participate in and they were not very interested in creating any kind of foreign policy. Szczur has also argued along these lines for Łokietek, saying that only the duke's exile was an eye-opener to a broader political horizon.⁵⁶ Contrary to previous scholarship, Marzec has argued then that it was unjustified to introduce the notion of "political factions" for the power relations in Little Poland at the beginning of the fourteenth century.⁵⁷ He points out that the available source material does not allow legitimately discerning the working nobility parties. Jerzy Wyrozumski has noted a similar, i.e., individualistic and self-centered, attitude

50) Some major and relevant works: Jan BASZKIEWICZ, *Powstanie zjednoczonego państwa polskiego na przełomie XIII i XIV wieku* [Foundation of the Unified Polish State in the Turn of the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth Century], Warsaw 1954; Jan DĄBROWSKI, *Z czasów Łokietka. Studium nad stosunkami polsko-węgierskimi w XIV wieku* [From the Times of Łokietek. A Study on the Polish-Hungarian Relations in the Fourteenth Century], Roczniki Akademii Umiejętności Wydział Filozoficzno-Historyczny 59, 1916, pp. 278–326; Edmund DŁUGOPOLSKI, *Władysław Łokietek na tle swoich czasów* [Władysław Łokietek and His Age], Wrocław 1951, Cracow 2009; Antoni KŁODZIŃSKI, *Problem węgierskiej pomocy dla Łokietka* [The Problem of the Hungarian Support for Łokietek], Roczniki Akademii Umiejętności Wydział Filozoficzno-Historyczny 59, 1916, pp. 255–277; Bronisław WŁODARSKI, *Polityka Jana Luksemburczyka wobec Polski za czasów Władysława Łokietka* [Politics of John Luxemburg towards Poland during the Reign of Władysław Łokietek], Lwów 1933.

51) Stanisław SROKA, *Kontakty Władysława Łokietka z Węgrami w świetle nowych dokumentów* [Contacts between Władysław Łokietek and Hungary in the Light of New Charters], *Studia Historyczne* 38, 1995, pp. 299–307.

52) Cf. A. MARZEC, *Urzędnicy*, p. 36. He argues that between 1305–1312 almost 30 different nobles appeared in the charters of Łokietek. This calculation acts as an evidence for wide recognition of Łokietek.

53) A. MARZEC, *Urzędnicy*, p. 62.

54) *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

55) *Ibid.*, p. 113, 295.

56) S. SZCZUR, *Historia*, p. 336.

57) A. MARZEC, *Urzędnicy*, p. 56, 71.

among towns. They were preoccupied with their particular interests and their deals with Łokietek were limited to regulations on paying customs. Political borders were insignificant because the customs were not collected only there.⁵⁸

Application of the "Succession Crisis" Concept to Łokietek's Case

What does this historiographical survey reveal about relations between Łokietek and the nobility of Little Poland? What does it say about his "triumphant" march to power? Mainly, that there are still many questions to be asked.

First, there is a methodological problem concerning the political horizon of the nobility that must be addressed. Namely, all we know about the barons and the nobility in the period comes from lists of testators. Historians have assumed that being a witness to a princely charter was not only a legal tradition or requirement, but it also reveals the political meaning of an individual.⁵⁹ This assumption is generally recognized and sometimes even taken for granted as an axiom. The problem is that it is not self-evident. And hardly can be. However, historians are eager to outline whole political constellations of the nobility on such questionable material. Even those who are aware of possible limitations of the assumption dismiss criticism with the explanation that otherwise historians would be left with no sources whatsoever.⁶⁰ One element of criticism emphasizes that the legal tradition and not political influence was a major reason for acting as a witness to princely or royal charters. Another element is just common sense: the number of preserved charters is far from complete⁶¹ and we do not even know how many are missing. In the case of Łokietek, only 304 charters are available.⁶² Is this 5%, 20% or 50% of his overall production in nearly 60 years!⁶³ We do not know. Therefore, any picture we draw from it is unstable from the very beginning.

Second, this is why my intention is to approach these uncertainties from another perspective. In my opinion, Łokietek was never politically bankrupt. I believe he remained in game. What he was doing in 1301 is unknown, but his later steps are somewhat known. In 1302 he invaded the province of Sandomierz with troops from Ruthenia.⁶⁴ I consider this his first attempt, which eventually failed, to regain his lost power in Little Poland. It might seem similar in concept to the campaign

58) Jerzy WYROZUMSKI, *Gospodarcze i społeczne uwarunkowania procesu zjednoczeniowego w Polsce XIII wieku* [Economic and Social Conditions of the Unification Process in Poland in the Thirteenth Century], in: Przemysław II: odnowienie Królestwa Polskiego [Przemysław II: the Restoration of the Kingdom of Poland], ed. Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa, Poznań 1997, p. 62.

59) A. MARZEC, *Urzędnicy*, p. 149.

60) *Ibid.*, p. 150.

61) T. JUREK, *Polska*, p. 203.

62) Anna ADAMSKA, *Arengi w dokumentach Władysława Łokietka: formy i funkcje* [Arengas in Władysław Łokietek's Charters: Forms and Functions], Cracow 1999, p. 31.

63) Cf. Alojzy PREISSNER, *Dokumenty Władysława Łokietka. Chronologiczny spis, rejestry i bibliografia edycji* [Documents of Władysław Łokietek. A Chronological List, Regests, and Bibliography of Editions], *Rocznik Biblioteki PAN w Krakowie* 11, 1965, pp. 197–297.

64) ... *1302 Dux Wladislaus cum Ruthenis et Tartaris Sandomiriam vastavit...*, *Rocznik Małopolski*, in: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* 3, Lwów 1878, p. 186.

of 1304–1305, when the joint military efforts of King Albrecht I Habsburg, his son Rudolph, and Łokietek targeted lands under the Přemyslids' control.⁶⁵ Only the incursion of 1302 was a fiasco that might leave the misleading impression that it was an irrelevant raid for booty. According to Długosz, in 1303 Łokietek was travelling around the region of Sandomierz and seeking followers among the nobility.⁶⁶ Even though he had devastated the province a year before and Wenceslas II had ordered his officers⁶⁷ to search and arrest Łokietek no one turned him in or betrayed him. However, his mission failed again. What does this situation reveal about the political imagination of the local nobility? Then Łokietek is said to have moved to northern Hungary (Slovakia today), where he received help from Omodej Aba, a powerful baron of the Kingdom of Hungary. Omodej had lately joined the coalition against the Přemyslids, stood behind Charles Robert (the papal candidate to the throne in Hungary) and apparently encouraged Łokietek to take a chance again. In fall, 1304, Łokietek launched his campaign against the Přemyslids in Poland at the same time as the Habsburgs initiated their military campaigns. This time he was successful and by February, 1305, he took the castle of Wiślica.⁶⁸ I would not say that he was immediately welcomed, however.⁶⁹ He did not conquer Little Poland and Cracow until early September, 1306, i.e., a year and a half later. Why did it take so long if he had already found widespread recognition among the nobility in Wiślica, as has been supposed? Moreover, his ultimate success in Cracow very much coincided with the murder of Wenceslas III, the heir to Wenceslas II's domains who had been attempting to overpower Łokietek and was unexpectedly assassinated in August 1306.⁷⁰ Only then did a final transition of power occur. Thus, either Łokietek was not fully recognized by the nobility and only the death of the legal heir to the throne could grant him triumph or the military power of the Přemyslids' followers was so great that he was not able to suppress it, even with auxiliary troops from Hungary and the assistance of the nobility.

65) The campaign, which I refer to more extensively below, has been thoroughly discussed in the older literature, cf. E. DŁUGOPOLSKI, *Władysław Łokietek*, p. 55; Antoni KŁODZIŃSKI, *Łokietek i Habsburgowie* [Łokietek and the Habsburgs], *Rozprawy Akademii Umiejętności Wydział Historyczno-Filozoficzny Series II* 34, 1916, pp. 259–260; Bronisław WŁODARSKI, *Stanowisko Rusi halicko-wołyńskiej wobec akcji zjednoczeniowej Władysława Łokietka i jego powiązanie z utratą Pomorza Gdańskiego* [The Attitude of Ruthenia of Halich and Lodomeria towards Władysław Łokietek's Unifying Initiative, and Its Relation to the Loss of Gdańsk Pomerania], *Zapiski historyczne* 27, 1962, pp. 347–349.

66) ... *clandestine tamen aliquorum baronum Poloniae, in quorum pectoribus sincere fidei et devocionis erga se relictam credebat* [Łokietek] *constanciam, presenciam et domicilia in privato et dissimulato habitu adibat, petens et obtestans, ne se desererent...*, *Ioannis Dlugossi Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, Liber 9, ed. Zofia BUDKOWA, Warsaw 1978, p. 21.

67) *Łokietek a prefectis regis Wenceslai et signanter ab Vlrico de Boskovicz tunc Cracowiensi et Sandomiriensi capitaneo, genere Bohemo, cui sue captivitatis per regem Wenceslaum mandata erat cura, comprehendi metuens...*, *Ioannis Dlugossi Annales* 9, p. 21.

68) A. PREISSNER, *Dokumenty*, p. 241.

69) I am making this claim somewhat against recent literature, which is willing to underline the wide support for Łokietek that came from the nobility of Little Poland; cf. A. MARZEC, *Urzędnicy*, p. 22. Closer to my view: J. BIENIAK, *Wielkopolska*, p. 109.

70) *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, in: *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum IV*, ed. Josef EMLER, Praha 1884, p. 109.

This scenario triggers further questions. Why the nobility did not hate Łokietek for devastating their estates in 1302? Whereas they did hate, according to the materials for the trial of bishop Muskata, the persecutions inflicted by the bishop's armies.⁷¹ Why did Omodej Aba decide to spend his money on Łokietek's campaigns, while the political crisis in Hungary was far from over?⁷² What were the political expectations of the nobility? How were they reasoning when they rejected Łokietek twice, in 1302 and 1303, yet accepted him in 1304? If the Přemyslids had not died out with Wenceslas III and Bohemia had not collapsed in a succession crisis, would it have been so obvious for Łokietek's opponents to give up their arms? Two decades later John of Luxemburg was very close to destroying the polity that the duke had been constructing for so long.⁷³ And then, who was the founding father of the famous Piast-Angevin alliance – Łokietek – who was fully dependent on military help from abroad? Or was it Charles Robert, who himself needed enormous financial and diplomatic aid from the papacy to appease the rebelling barons and expel Otto of Bavaria, a successor of Wenceslas III to the Hungarian throne?⁷⁴ What role did Omodej Aba play, who in practice wielded princely power in the northeastern parts of the Kingdom of Hungary⁷⁵ and who might have invested in Łokietek for some unknown reason?⁷⁶ Were there economic interests based on the flourishing trade between Little Poland and Hungarian mining areas?⁷⁷ These questions are generally not addressed in modern historiography.

The "succession crisis" concept is designed to investigate issues related to the questions above. At the end of this paper, I will show the concept at work. A modern understanding of politics points to "security" and "stabilization" as important elements of any desirable political system. Moreover, the notion of personal interest, i.e., a sort of political egoism, is claimed to be omnipresent in all political interactions. I would argue that these elements are not solely representative of the

71) S. GAWLAS, *Człowiek*, pp. 391–393. See also: Sławomir GAWLAS, „*Verus heres*”. *Z badań nad świadomością polityczną obozu Władysława Łokietka w początku XIV w.* [“*Verus heres*”. Studies on the Political Consciousness of Władysław Łokietek's Retinue in the Early Fourteenth Century], *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 95, 1988, pp. 82–83.

72) For a short yet representative description of the modern Hungarian historiography available in English see: Pál ENGEL, *The Realm of St. Stephen: a History of Medieval Hungary 895–1526*, London 2001, pp. 128–130.

73) Here I am talking about a military expedition led by John of Luxemburg, king of Bohemia against Łokietek in 1327, which only Charles Robert of Hungary's diplomatic intervention prevented from complete success. See, e.g., S. SZCZUR, *Historia*, pp. 348–349.

74) *Károly Róbert emlékezete* [Remembering Charles Robert], ed. Gyula KRISTÓ, Budapest 1988, pp. 15–20.

75) Iván BERTÉNYI, *Magyarország az Anjouk korában* [Hungary in the Angevin Period], Budapest 1987, pp. 28–33. For more information about Omodej Aba, his family, and his political power and influence see also: Gyula KRISTÓ, *A rozgonyi csata* [Battle of Rozgony], Budapest 1978, pp. 27–39.

76) The contemporary sources only mention Omodej Aba, who supported Łokietek in his quest for power, but they do not give any account of Omodej's motivations. The first to provide them is Długosz who talked about sympathy and pity that Omodej felt when confronted with the tragic fate of Łokietek, cf. *Ioannis Dlugossi Annales* 9, p. 21.

77) Cf. Danuta MOLEND, *Polski ołów na rynkach Europy Środkowej w XIII–XVII wieku* [Polish Lead on Central European Markets between the Thirteenth and the Seventeenth Century], Warsaw 2001, pp. 52–53.

post-Machiavellian period, but that their generic meaning is universal and applicable to societies across centuries. If they are sometimes less important or diminished on purpose, usually such occasions are exceptional and notable for a researcher. Therefore, I expect that the nobility of Little Poland was also concerned about their security and the stability of the political system which they were part of.

What is necessary to discover, however, is what “security” and “stability” meant to them. The historiography of the period often makes interpretations based on logical inference, where given facts or source information receive meaning deduced from common knowledge about how politics functions and how political relations are generally established.⁷⁸ There is also a common presumption that expertise in political matters is generally available to everyone. This presumption ignores an epistemological structure which social anthropologists call “prior category assumptions”. These assumptions, which unwittingly penetrate our thinking about the past, may distort our understanding of past societies and their politics because the conceptual world of the past does not necessarily correspond with ours.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, such an approach has been largely inevitable, since no historian can fully disengage from the cultural and social identities that impact explanations of the past. However, it is still possible to create an intellectual image of what the nobility of Little Poland could have known and thought about politics itself. The “succession crisis” concept strives to reconstruct a larger picture of medieval political mechanisms and mentalities. The political horizon of the nobility, and their generic political sensibilities which implicitly permeate the sources, are important aspects of this endeavor.

If I follow the elementary assumptions of “security” and “stability” along with the inspirations of Wroniszewski, who claims that the distribution of goods, properties, privileges, and prestige was main means of exercising power in the Middle Ages,⁸⁰ and that the nobility of Little Poland was also quite concerned about these issues, then I can fairly easily come up with an alternative interpretation regarding the fall of the Přemyslid system in Poland, and the success of Łokietek.

Namely, the nobility did not rebel against Wenceslas II because he introduced new offices, marginalized Little Poland on the interstate stage or was exceptionally cruel. The new type of official (“starosta”, *capitaneus*)⁸¹ has never disappeared completely from the Polish landscape since then.⁸² The arcana of foreign politics were little known to the overwhelming majority of the nobility, who grew up in the context of local and short-range provincial politics. For instance, Krzysztof Ożóg has identified a mere 41 “intellectuals”, i.e., people who graduated from a university,

78) This method of approaching medieval political matters has been a prevailing style of the so-called traditional political historiography.

79) R. DAVIES, *The Medieval State*, p. 296.

80) Cf. footnote 14.

81) Tomasz Jurek had no doubt that the office of *capitaneus* was first introduced by Wenceslas II in Little Poland in the 1290s and was soon adopted by Piast dukes, e.g., Łokietek in 1299. See: T. JUREK, *Polska*, p. 200.

82) J. KURTYKA, *Odrodzone*, p. 123.

among those who served Łokietek in years 1306–1333.⁸³ The notorious cruelty of the Bohemian regime derives from the biased source material.⁸⁴ I need to point out here that Łokietek raided the province of Sandomierz in 1302 and *vastavit*⁸⁵ it, i.e., *devastated* or *ruined* it. This may indicate two things. First, that Łokietek was not much different than Wenceslas II, and second, raiding was a recognized political practice, obviously disliked, yet calculated among the risks of everyday life.

Therefore, for the nobility "security" and "stability" were not equal to freedom from external threat. None of regional rulers could provide a standing army with the ability to protect the borders constantly. In fact, the nobility was a princely army itself. Thus, I would say that the "security" and "stability" were possibly less about protection from physical violence and more about granting immutability to the political system.

I would argue that the nobility of Little Poland opposed the consequences of their previous political choice. They stood up against change. First, they were used to having an approachable ruler in Cracow.⁸⁶ Wenceslas II did not reside there, however, so they encountered difficulties in living their life as their ancestors had lived. The monarch, the source of all prestige goods, was away and his court was not their court. In such conditions politics was dramatically losing its sense. Their offices were irrelevant and their power lost its glamour because their meaning and position were always relative – in relation to the ruler. They also did not have much of an idea of how to function effectively under such conditions, since no one had taught them. They did not know how to pursue a career in Prague or maybe they did not even want to. For them, the throne in Cracow was practically vacant, so the "succession crisis" was still somewhat in gear. Second, their pride was hurt because they were accustomed to monopolize honor and prestige. Falling out of the mainstream and staying away from the royal court deprived them psychologically of their sense of "security," which rested upon keeping a hand on the pulse of political affairs. Third, power relations in Little Poland were evolving since Wenceslas II allowed the bishop of Cracow to consolidate his power by expanding his estates and building town walls.⁸⁷ From then on, instead of the two traditional parties in play, a duke and the nobility, a third one emerged, which could successfully interfere with customarily bilateral relations. Thus, fourth, the rules of political game were changed at their (the nobility) expense. A new order shattered the

83) Krzysztof Ożóg, *Intelektualiści w służbie Królestwa Polskiego w latach 1306–1382* [Intellectuals in the Service of the Kingdom of Poland 1306–1382], Cracow 1995, p. 48.

84) Cf. footnotes 32 and 33.

85) *Dux Wladislaus cum Ruthenis et Tartaris Sandomiriam vastavit...*, *Rocznik Małopolski*, p. 186.

86) T. JUREK, *Polska*, p. 199.

87) Close cooperation between a ruler and a local bishop was by no means Wenceslas' II innovation. Other examples can be noted at that time. Nevertheless, I am making the point that the case of Muskata was exceptional in scope because he had significant means for expanding his power and influence under the Přemyslids. At the same time, the nobility of Little Poland – for the reasons listed in the main text – was being deprived of access to their traditional means of building power. About the circumstances that elevated Jan Muskata, see: T. NOWAKOWSKI, *Małopolska*, pp. 83–86 and 106–107. See also: S. GAWLAS, *Człowiek*, p. 391, 393 and 398.

world they knew and enjoyed. Explicit evidence of this is the new office of *starosta*. Although the office was rather another symptom of broader changes, it eventually represented a whole set of reforms. These changes invaded the political mentality of the nobility, which was necessarily fixed on immutability because otherwise the tradition and customs which constituted the welfare of both the community and the individual would have been affected.

Łokietek restored order and brought things back into balance (although he did not give up appointing *starostas*). Unlike the Přemyslids he did not reside in a foreign kingdom. His position as a petitioner in front of the nobility gave them a thrilling injection of prestige and authority. The rules of the political game could be secured and therefore stability would be recovered. Persecutions, in the form of an ecclesiastical trial against Bishop Muskata, sent a clear signal that a third party was not welcome in the public space. This is why many supported Łokietek and this is also why he fought for a year and a half to finally defeat his opponents. Bishop Muskata knew that his unique position was due to political changes which could only be maintained under the Přemyslids, thus, he did not surrender until he was informed of the murder of Wenceslas III.⁸⁸ Muskata believed that new rules could be defended efficiently only with royal support, even against the majority of the nobility of Little Poland. The nobility could not afford such marginalization, which was turning their lives upside-down. Muskata and other beneficiaries of the new system had no alternative but to stick to the Přemyslids. Once the dynasty disappeared from the scene, they had to return to their previous arrangements.

My analysis is, of course, simplified and does not claim to be complete. It needs the application of source documentation and more detailed discussion of these assumptions and the whole political culture in the early fourteenth century in the region. Here I intended, however, to present how the “succession crisis” concept is applied. I believe this is an inspiring way to bring medieval politics in Central Europe into debate again.

88) According to S. GAWLAS, „*Verus heres*”, p. 82, the litigation against Bishop Muskata was launched in July 1306, but was adjourned around August/September 1306, possibly because Łokietek and Muskata came to terms with each other. The trial resumed and was resolved in June 1308 when it turned out that the cooperation had not been going well.