

# Henadž Sahanovič

## THE TRUBECKOJ MASSACRE IN MSCISLAŨ – CENTURIES LATER\*

### ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to an episode in the 1654–1667 war between Muscovy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: the capture of Mscislaŭ by the Tsarist army, accompanied by the mass murder of its defenders and inhabitants. On the basis of published sources and literature on the subject, the author has tried to trace the functioning of the tragic events in the memory of the local population, as well as show how the Trubeckoj Massacre is represented in the historiography of Belarus and Russia. The author disagrees with the thesis of some Russian historians regarding the complete conformity of the massacre with the “laws of war” that were generally accepted in early modern Europe and believes that in Russian interpretations of the events one can see the desire to justify the Tsar’s policy and the unwillingness to admit inconvenient facts.

### KEYWORDS:

Rzeczpospolita, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Aleksej Trubeckoj, Mscislaŭ, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Tsardom of Moscow, Belarus

### HENADŽ SAHANOVIČ

visiting professor at the Centre for Eastern European Studies at the University of Warsaw. His research focuses on the social and political history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as the cultural memory of the peoples of Eastern Europe.

\* This article was written during the author's fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study (Germany, Berlin).

The events in question took place in the east of present-day Belarus at the beginning of the 1654–1667 war, which was waged by Moscow against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For the attack on the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as GDL), the government of Tsar Aleksej Michajlovič assembled an army of about 70,000 men, which was huge by the standards of that time. Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who had sworn allegiance to the Tsar under the terms of Pereiaslav Agreement, sent 20,000 Ukrainian Cossacks, headed by Ivan Zolotarevko. These forces were to be opposed by Hetman Janusz Radziwiłł with an army of less than 10,000 soldiers, the majority of which was made up by districts' military units and the Noble Host [Polish: *pospolite ruszenie*].<sup>1</sup> The overwhelming superiority of the Muscovite forces undoubtedly decided the outcome of the campaigns at the outset of the war and the fate of many towns, including Mscislaŭ. In what follows, we will first try to draw a picture of the events in the town, relying mainly on published sources and literature on the subject, without claiming to provide a comprehensive factual study of the events; we then trace their function in the memory of the population and in historiography, especially in the alternative visions of Belarusian and Russian historiographies.

\* \* \*

When the southeastern grouping of the Tsarist army of Voivode Prince Aleksej Trubeckoj, which numbered 15,000 to 17,000 soldiers, moved from Brjansk to the territory of present-day Belarus at the beginning of summer 1654, there were no forces to stop them. For the inhabitants of the eastern fringes of the GDL, who had already had the bitter experience of war, the lack of defences meant that they could only save their lives by throwing themselves on the mercy of the Tsar.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, the border town of Roslaŭ surrendered immediately. The next town to stand in the way of Trubeckoj's army was Mscislaŭ, the centre of the voivodeship, which was fortified with a palisade, a fairly strong castle on the Vichra River, and earthen ramparts with wooden towers above them.<sup>3</sup> The population of the town, which was predominantly Orthodox, could be estimated at about 10,000 people.<sup>4</sup> However, by that time many people from

- <sup>1</sup> For more details on the forces of both sides at the beginning of the war, see Konrad Bobiatyński, *Od Smoleńska do Wilna. Wojna Rzeczypospolitej z Moskwą 1654–1655* (Zabrze: Wydawnictwo INFORT EDITIONS, Witold Grzelak, 2004), pp. 35–38, 47–48; Andrzej Rachuba, 'Wysięk mobilizacyjny Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w latach 1654–1667', *Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości*, XLIII (2007), 43–44.
- <sup>2</sup> For more on the initial phase of the war and the attitudes of the population towards the army, see Bobiatyński, *Od Smoleńska do Wilna*, 42–51; id., 'Adnosiny žycharou VKL da maskoŭskaha vojska ŭ 1654–1655 h.', *Belarusian Historical Review*, 14 (2007), pp. 54–80; Piotr Kröll, 'Belaruskaja kampanija 1654 h. (da bitwy pad Šapjalevičami)', *Belarusian Historical Review*, 6 (1999), pp. 7–31.
- <sup>3</sup> Andrzej Mjaceł'ski, *Mscislaŭskae knjastva i vajawodstva ŭ XII–XVIII stst.* (Minsk: Belaruskaja navuka), pp. 295–97. Cf. Michail Tkačev, *Zamki Belarusi* (Minsk: Polymja, 1987), p. 92.
- <sup>4</sup> Mjaceł'ski, *Mscislaŭskae knjastva*, pp. 312–13.

the surrounding villages and even other districts had already rushed to the town. Having learned of the approach of Muscovian troops, they sought refuge in the shelter of the town walls. Those who fled took with them what they could of their movable property, as well as property documents and other valuables.

Faced with the threat of an imminent clash with the enemy, the nobles of Mscislaŭ Voivodeship, together with the borough and land offices, held a joint assembly, the “Rada and Namova”. The assembly adopted a “fraternal resolution” not to retreat but to defend the town together, “so that all brothers do not retreat from the fortress of the King’s grace”.<sup>5</sup>

The Muscovian army reached Mscislaŭ on 18 July, whereupon it besieged the town and began to storm it. The defence of the town was led by the Mscislaŭ town governor, Jan Stankevič, who had the nobility and burghers under his command. Apparently, the nobility gathered there in considerable numbers, but the sources do not give any precise information about this. From some reports it can be concluded that, shortly before the arrival of the enemy, five noble units left the town.<sup>6</sup> Reinforcements in the form of part of the Noble Host did not arrive as they were defeated on the outskirts of Mscislaŭ.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the main defending force of the town seems to have been the burghers themselves.

After the siege began, the unprotected settlement outside a walled-in fortress was quickly overrun and set on fire by the enemy, but the outer town and the castle stubbornly resisted. The defenders still hoped for help and refused the offers of surrender, for which they were promised “great gifts and liberties”.<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to help the besieged, Hetman Janusz Radziwill left his main force in a camp at Orša and marched to Mscislaŭ with a 3000-man cavalry force, but he was too late. One of the participants in this advance wrote: “We could do nothing, because the enemy had already knocked down and burned [the town] while we were on our way with help. Because of the poor river crossings, we could not attack the enemy as quickly as we wanted to”.<sup>9</sup>

The situation of the defenders of Mscislaŭ, who were without support, was aggravated by the fact that the wooden walls of the castle and the buildings were burning, making them unable to withstand the artillery fire for long. As a result of the third attack, the castle was taken “by storm

<sup>5</sup> *Istoriko-juridičeskie materialy izvlečennnye iz aktovy gubernij Vitebskoj i Mogilevskoj* (hereinafter: IJuM), vol. 25 (Vitebsk: Tipografija G. Malkina, 1894), pp. 469–70.

<sup>6</sup> Ambroży Grabowski, *Oczyste spominki w pismach do dziejów dawnej Polski*, vol. 1 (Kraków: J. Cypcer, 1845), p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> Lavrentij Abecedarskij, *Belorussija i Rossija: Očerki russko-belorusskich svjazej vtoroj poloviny XVI–XVII v.* (Minsk: Vyššejšaja škola, 1978), p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> *Akty, izdavaemye Vilenskoj komissieju dlja razbora drevnich aktov* (hereinafter: AVAK), vol. 34 (Viłna, 1909), pp. 157–58.

<sup>9</sup> Bobiatyński, *Od Smoleńska do Wilna*, p. 51.

with great strength and perseverance” on 22 July 1654. What followed is described in many sources as a veritable mass murder – a massacre of the conquered. One of the descriptions states that the victors “massacred various noblemen, burghers and Jews, as well as common people, and then found living corpses and brought them to Moscow as prisoners; and having collected everything of value, they burned down the castle and all the fortifications, razing it to the ground”.<sup>10</sup> Hetman Janusz Radziwill, who had not managed to reach the town in time, reported only briefly to Vilnius that Mscislaŭ had been “robbed, knocked down and burned” by the enemy.<sup>11</sup>

Much more about the events of that fateful day for the town is learned from the accounts of the surviving witnesses who had stayed in the besieged castle, and who later – after the expulsion of the Muscovian army from the eastern territories of Belarus – applied to the court, complaining that as a result of the capture of Mscislaŭ they had lost their estate documents as well as various movable assets they had brought into the castle. About a hundred such applications, filed by representatives of the petty nobility (land owners) to the Mscislaŭ borough and land courts mainly in 1663 and 1664, were published in archaeological editions in the Tsarist period.<sup>12</sup> These hundreds of published petitions allow us to clarify several circumstances that are important to understand what happened on that tragic day, when, as the local Orthodox priest Stepan Volčaski put it, “Mscislaŭ Castle was seized by a tyrannical hand that flooded it with torrents of human blood of faithful sons of the Fatherland”.<sup>13</sup>

Let us first clarify who was in the besieged city. From the testimonies of the victims, it is clear that the fortifications housed people of different social status: noblemen and “common people”, i.e., burghers and peasants (“Volost inhabitants”, “low people”), as well as Jews.<sup>14</sup> As already mentioned, these were not only inhabitants of Mscislaŭ and its surroundings, but also people who had fled the enemy invasion from neighbouring districts. There is no evidence regarding the number of civilians who took refuge behind the city walls, but they were many times more numerous than the units of the nobles who had gathered there.

What happened to the besieged? As is evident from the accounts of numerous witnesses, their mass deaths took place after the capture of the fortified town and castle, not during the siege and bombardment. This is confirmed by a number of direct references to the murder of specific individuals in captured Mscislaŭ, as reported by their surviving relatives,

<sup>10</sup> AVAK, vol. p. 34, 349.

<sup>11</sup> Grabowski, *Ojczyste spominki*, p. 112.

<sup>12</sup> Many of these statements are published in volumes 24 and 25 of *IjuM* and also in volume 34 of AVAK.

<sup>13</sup> AVAK, vol. 34, p. 339.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *IjuM*, vol. 25, pp. 449, 450, 453, 453, 456, 457, 470, 473, 484, 488, 490, 495, 501; AVAK, vol. 34, pp. 281, 284, 290, 302, 313, 317, 326, 349, etc. On the Jews see: AVAK, vol. 34, pp. 157–59; *IjuM*, vol. 25, p. 497.

who distinguish the deaths during the siege of the castle from the killings after the capture. The sources clearly speak of the “execution of people” in the already captured castle and town, i.e., after the successful attack: first “by storm”, then “by the sword”.<sup>15</sup> Contemporary witnesses repeatedly note the same cruelty of the Muscovite troops to women and children: they killed “without regard to small children and women”.<sup>16</sup>

How many people could have died in Mscislaŭ in July 1654? We will probably never know because the necessary sources are missing. One thing is clear, however: the number could be in the thousands. Although in the papers of the nobleman Denis Turgenev and the government official Yakov Portomoin, both of whom were sent to Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the relevant records stated that the Tsar’s boyars and Voivodes “seized Mscislaŭ and wiped out everyone in Mscislaŭ”;<sup>17</sup> the word “everyone” here was, of course, just a figure of speech. Nevertheless, the mass killings of people is also confirmed by other documents of Moscow origin. Thus, while the register of military orders randomly states that the town was “stormed and wiped out”,<sup>18</sup> other official documents speak of “more than ten thousand” dead, and the report on the victory of the Tsarist army in the war against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth estimates their number at 15,000: “The Voivode Prince Aleksej Nikitič Trubeckoj and his companions captured the town of Mscislaŭ, burned it out, and killed more than fifteen thousand in it”.<sup>19</sup>

The sources of the opposite side contain even less concrete information about the number of victims. One lament mentions “several tens” of thousands,<sup>20</sup> but this is more of a rhetorical figure, as is the word “everyone”, which sometimes appears in the statements of the nobility. Of course, the total extermination of those gathered in the castle is out of the question. First, some of them were simply lucky to escape from the conquered town.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, some of the people trapped in Mscislaŭ were taken prisoner by the victors and deported to the Tsardom of Moscow, as was repeatedly reported by those who later returned from captivity.<sup>22</sup> Third and finally, some of the inhabitants, mainly burghers, remained in the town after July 1654 and swore allegiance to the new power.

More than three centuries later, archaeologists discovered terrible traces of these tragic events for Mscislaŭ: during excavations at the castle

<sup>15</sup> IJuM, vol. 25, pp. 446, 450, 453, 470, 476, 477, 487–89, 497; vol. 25, p. 445; AVAK, vol. 34, pp. 158, 284, 317, 318, 349.

<sup>16</sup> IJuM, vol. 24, pp. 421–22; AVAK, vol. 34, p. 158.

<sup>17</sup> *Akty, odnosjaščiesja k istorii Južnoj i Zapadnoj Rossii*, vol. 14: *Prisoedinenie Belorussii, 1654–1655* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1889), pp. 87, 108.

<sup>18</sup> *Dvorcovye razrjady*, vol. 3: *S 1645 po 1676 g.* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1852), p. 435.

<sup>19</sup> *Akty, sobrannye v bibliotekach i archivach Rossijskoj imperii*, vol. 4: *1645–1700*, (Sankt-Peterburg, 1836), p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> IJuM, vol. 25, p. 488.

<sup>21</sup> IJuM, vol. 25, pp. 438, 502.

<sup>22</sup> See: IJuM, vol. 25, pp. 438, 446, 447, 450, 452, 456, 457, 467, 470, 473, 476, 477, 484, 488, 480, 497, 501, 502, etc.; AVAK, vol. 34, p. 277 ff.

and in the town, they came across layers of major fires from the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>23</sup> Experts believe that the population of Mscislaŭ catastrophically shrank as a result of losses from the Thirteen Years' War, during which the town changed hands several times: instead of the 10,000 who lived there in the middle of the seventeenth century, by 1667 there were only 1500–1800 inhabitants.<sup>24</sup> After the devastation in the mid-seventeenth century, life in the town seemed to stop; it seemed to cease to exist for a while and changed from an important centre into a retreat.<sup>25</sup>

Let us try to place the massacre in Mscislaŭ in the larger context of the war. Was it a rare or even exceptional case of ruthless treatment of civilians by the Muscovian army, or can it rather be seen as the widespread treatment of town inhabitants during military conflicts of that era?

At the outbreak of the war in 1654–1667, there were other cases in which towns were destroyed and their inhabitants punished by force. In the process, the conquerors repeatedly violated the terms of surrender that formed the basis for the termination of resistance. In general, the Muscovian authorities dealt harshly with the populations of all the resistant towns in Belarus. At the beginning of the war, for example, the small town of Druja in northwestern Belarus also suffered greatly after its capture. As the Voivode Vasilij Šeremet'ev reported to the Tsar, in Druja, which he had captured in a battle, “soldiers and other people sitting in the town were beaten, and the town, churches and houses were burned without a trace”. And when, in autumn of 1654, after several months of desperate defence, the defenders of Dubroŭna situated on the Dnepr nevertheless agreed to surrender the town, Aleksej Michajlovič ordered the best nobles to be sent to him, while the rest were to be taken to Tula: “townspeople and district people along with their families were to be given to the soldiers, and the town of Dubroŭna was to be burned”. The same fate befell the small town of Hory, which surrendered in September of the same year after stubborn defence: by order of the Tsar, the commoners and nobility were taken “with their wives and children” to the Moscow state. As historians who have studied the Thirteen Years' War explain, the conquerors hoped to teach other towns a lesson by this cruel punishment, so that they would not dare resist.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Leonid Alekseev, *Po Zapadnoj Dvine i Dnepr v Belorussii* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1974), pp. 116–117.

<sup>24</sup> Mjaceł'ski, *Mscislaŭskie knjastva*, pp. 312–13. See also: *Metryka Litewska. Rejestry podymnego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Województwo mściławskie 1667 r.*, ed. by Andrzej Rachuba (Warszawa: DiG, 2008), p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Alekseev, *Po Zapadnoj Dvine*, p. 119; id., ‘Detinec Mstislavlja v XIV–XVII vv.’, *Rossijskaja archeologija*, 2 (2000), 107.

<sup>26</sup> Michas' Tkačoŭ, *Zamki i ljudzi* (Minsk: Navuka i Tèchnika, 1991), p. 94. As early as in the Soviet epoch, the Russian researcher A. Mal'cev explained the removal of all burghers from Dubroŭna and the destruction of its fortifications by the desire of the Moscow authorities to punish the population for their resistance, and as a punishment for other Belarusian towns. See Aleksandr Mal'cev, *Rossija i Belorussija v seredine XVII veka* (Moskva: MGU, 1974), p. 49.

It is noteworthy that, even in the following year of the war, there were numerous examples of unjustified brutal treatment of the population by the Muscovian army in the still-unconquered territories of Belarus that were sanctioned by the Tsar himself. The same Voivode Prince Aleksej Trubeckoj was ordered “by order of the ruler” to move from Sluck to Slonim, “to burn, beat, enslave and destroy people without a trace” on both sides of the road. And, in order to increase the area of destruction, the Tsar ordered the troops to return via a new, “unconquered” road and do the same.<sup>27</sup> When Alexey Michajlovič learned that his soldiers had conquered many towns, “and these towns and villages in the districts were burned, and the people beaten and completely devastated”, the happy Tsar encouraged his Voivode and “praised Trubeckoj kindly”.<sup>28</sup> In the context of the conquerors’ attitude towards the Belarusian population in the first years of the war, it is not difficult to consider the events in Mscislaŭ as something completely unexpected on their part, even if all other cases cannot be compared with the slaughter in the town on the Vichra River.

The bloody massacre of Mscislaŭ was not without reason dubbed the “Trubeckoj Massacre” after the Voivode who led the siege and storming of the town. So few of the surviving inhabitants of Mscislaŭ remained that the population of the district began to refer to them as “nedoseki” (“those who were not finished off”),<sup>29</sup> i.e., those who barely escaped annihilation. We do not know exactly when this definition came into use, but it most probably began after the war or soon after the events described. In any case, this word lived on for centuries in the language of the locals: the dictionary of the language of Eastern Belarusians that was compiled in the middle of the nineteenth century recorded the lexeme “nedoseka” in exactly this meaning – as the nickname for a native of the town of Mscislaŭ.<sup>30</sup> The collective memory of the events of 1654 was supported by two murals on the walls of the Church of St Mary, built in Mscislaŭ in the monastery of the Carmelite Order. Researchers assume that this church already existed in the town in the first decades of the seventeenth century but was initially made of wood and then burned down during the conquest of the town by the Muscovian army. The construction of the stone church in place of the wooden one started only in 1717–21, while its towers appeared even later as a result of reconstruction carried out by Vilnius architect Johann Christoph Glaubitz in 1756–68.<sup>31</sup> This final stage of the church

<sup>27</sup> *Akty Moskovskogo gosudarstva* (hereinafter: AMG), ed. by N.A. Popova, vol. 2: *Razrjadnyj prikaz: Moskovskij stol, 1635–1659* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1894), pp. 437–39.

<sup>28</sup> AMG, vol. 2, p. 439.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Michas’ Tkačou, Aleh Trusaŭ, *Staražytny Mscislaŭ* (Minsk: Polymja, 1992), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ivan Nosovič, *Slovar’ belorusskogo narečija* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1870), p. 330.

<sup>31</sup> Tkačou, Trusaŭ, *Staražytny Mscislaŭ*, p. 51; Aljaksandr Jaraševič, ‘Mscislaŭski kljaštar karmelitaŭ’, in *Encykłapedyja historyi Belarusi*, vol. 5 (Minsk: BelEn, 1999), p. 228; Anatol’ Kulahin, *Katolickija chramy na Belarusi* (Minsk: Belaruskaja encykłapedyja, 2001), p. 104.

construction is attributed by experts to the appearance of historical frescoes<sup>32</sup> referring to the events of 1654. About 20 murals were created, of which two are the most important: “The capture of Mscislaŭ Castle by the Muscovian army” and “Murder of priests”. The first depicts the siege of the castle by Trubeckoj’s army; the second the massacre of the Catholic population of the town after the capture.

Memory of the events known as the “Trubeckoj Massacre” did not fade in the local population even under the rule of the Russian Empire, to which Mscislaŭ already belonged in 1772 as a result of the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the nineteenth century, this fact was confirmed by the authors of several historical works who were familiar with the antiquities of Mscislaŭ. In particular, the Russian history lover Michail Bez-Kornilovič, who served as a military topographer in the western provinces of the Empire in the 1830s to 1840s, wrote a work on the past of Belarus in which he recalled the tragic days of Mscislaŭ. His book states that Prince Trubeckoj took the town by storm and “the inhabitants were beaten without distinction of sex or age”. For this, the historian continued, the Tsar’s Voivode was nicknamed “cruel”, the massacre itself was referred to in folk legends as the “Trubeckoj Massacre”, “and the descendants of the citizens who survived it are called ‘nedoseki’ by the inhabitants”.<sup>33</sup> The author also recalled the historical paintings in the local church. Another historian, Iosif Turčinovič, who came from a noble family from the Mahilëŭ region, also paid attention to the events of 1654. In his first summary overview of the history of Belarus, he informed his readers that the citizens of Mscislaŭ at that time were “almost all exterminated by Trubeckoj’s troop soldiers”, which is why “the dwellers of Mscislaŭ are still called *nedoseki*”.<sup>34</sup> The mention of the Muscovite troops’ harsh treatment of the population of the subjugated territories in Tsarist Russia did not contradict the official imperial account at the time. In books on the reign of Aleksej Michajlovič, published in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, among the glorifications of the triumphant successes of the Tsarist army in the territories of historic Lithuania, one could read, for example, that the Tsar had “ordered Vicebsk to be cut down” for its resistance,<sup>35</sup> etc.

After the suppression of the January Uprising of 1863–64, however, attitudes towards the history of the Russian empire’s western provinces

<sup>32</sup> Maria Kałamajska-Saeed, *Rosyjskie pomiary klasztorów skasowanych w roku 1832*, t. 2 (Warszawa: “Polonika”, 2021), p. 655.

<sup>33</sup> Michail O. Bez-Kornilovič, *Istoričeskie svedenija o primečatel’nejšich mestach v Belorussii prisovokupleniem i drugich svedenij k nej že odnosjaščichsja* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1855), p. 190.

<sup>34</sup> Iosif Turčinovič, *Obozrenie istorii Belorussii s drevnejšich vremenii* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1857), p. 211.

<sup>35</sup> See Vasilij Berch, *Carstvovanie carja Alekseja Michajloviča* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1831), pp. 66–67; Petr Medovikov, *Istoričeskoe značenie carstvovanija Alekseja Michajloviča* (Moskva, 1854), pp. 74–75.

changed considerably. The leading positions in official historiography were taken by representatives of the so-called “Westrus’ian” school, which asserted the thesis that “Western Russia” (Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine) and “Great Russia” were parts of Russia. The ideological leader of “Westrus’ian” historiography, Michail Kojalovič, who was very active in underpinning this idea, offered simplified pro-Russian interpretations of events in his lectures on local history, which critics noted were informed by his “anti-Polish irritation”. Speaking about Russia’s war against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the actions of Trubeckoj’s army, he explained that “in Belarus, cities surrendered one by one”, because – in his interpretation – “the whole of Western Russia was in the process of overthrowing the Polish yoke and restoring its state unity with Eastern Russia”.<sup>36</sup> Pompei Batjuškov’s publication, which was intended to underpin the “original Russianness” of the western provinces of the empire, echoed this: the authors claimed that the detachments of Princes Trubeckoj and Čerkasskij took many Belarusian towns, including Mscislaŭ, with ease, as “one town after another surrendered”.<sup>37</sup> The interpretation of the war with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the “liberation of Western Russia from the Poles” became the defining discourse of Russian historiography, regardless of school. The authoritative Russian historian Sergej Solov’ev, who held balanced views, also argued in his multi-volume work that the Muscovite army occupied towns in the lands of Belarus “with the Tsar’s grace and salary”, which is why there “not only the common people, but also the nobility willingly swore an oath to the Tsar”.<sup>38</sup> When recounting the events of 1654, he mentioned the “surrender of Mscislaŭ” only in the context of congratulating the Tsar on the complete surrender of the towns of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

However, in addition to government publications that expressed the official view of the region’s past, an alternative explanation of history remained available to the public in the western provinces of the empire. When dealing with the events of local history, unofficial publications often portrayed the actions of the Russian authorities and troops in a very unflattering light. For example, despite censorship, the author of a multi-volume geographical dictionary published in Warsaw reported on the “terrible massacre” of the inhabitants of Mscislaŭ perpetrated by Trubeckoj’s army, also mentioning *nedoseki* as “the name of the descendants of the surviving

<sup>36</sup> Michail O. Kojalovič, *Čtenija po istorii Zapadnoj Rossii*, izd. 4 (Sankt-Peterburg, 1884), pp. 244, 250.

<sup>37</sup> *Belorussija i Litva: istoričeskie sud’by Severo-Zapadnogo kraja*, ed. by P.N. Batjuškovym (Sankt-Peterburg, 1890), pp. 254–55.

<sup>38</sup> Sergej M. Solov’ev, *Sočinenija: v 18 kn.*, kn. 5: *Istorija Rossii s drevnejšich vremeni*, vols 9–10 (Moskva: Mysl’ 1990), p. 603.

burghers” of the border town.<sup>39</sup> He was also well aware of the existence of a mural painting in the local church that was connected with the events of the mid-seventeenth century.

The longevity of the memory of the historical massacre of the population of eastern Belarus in the early twentieth century was convincingly illustrated by Vladimir Krasnjanskij in his historical essay on Mscislaŭ. A Russian historian who came from Novgorod province, he taught in various towns in the northwestern region. When he was the director of the men’s gymnasium in Mscislaŭ in 1906–11, he studied the local antiquities and devoted an essay to the history of the town, reporting on the tragic days of 1654. According to Krasnjanskij, Prince Trubeckoj “dealt ruthlessly with the defenders of Mscislaŭ castle, leaving them to the sword and fire; of those taken prisoner, only a few were released”.<sup>40</sup> The historian also affirmed that those who survived the mass murder were called *nedoseki* by the local population, and the slaughter in Mscislaŭ, he claimed, “is remembered to this day as the Trubeckoj Massacre”. According to Krasnjanskij, the nobility in Mscislaŭ still retained the nickname ‘nedoseki’ even in his time, and pictures of scenes from those distant events remain on the interior walls of the local church.

Finally, in 1912, in his journal “Litwa i Ruś” (formerly “Kwartalnik Litewski”), the first publication of photographs of the Mscislaŭ frescoes was issued by the Polish historian Jan Obst,<sup>41</sup> who had moved from St Petersburg to Vilnius. There he met the Belarusian historian Dzmitry Daŭhi-alla, then a member of the Vilnius Archaeographical Commission, who provided his Polish colleague with his photographs of the frescoes. In his description of the frescoes, Jan Obst suggested that they could have been painted as early as the seventeenth century, and only the rococo frame was added later during the renovation of the church under King Augustus III. The author suggested that the paintings might have been made by a foreign master, possibly from Holland, and that they might be based on living oral tradition – the accounts of witnesses to the battle in the town.<sup>42</sup> Jan Obst described the events of 1654 as “the most tragic in the entire bloody history of Mscislaŭ” and noted that they were known to both Russian and Polish historians as the “Trubeckoj Massacre”. At the same time, he subtly remarked that the “fierceness” of the Muscovian warriors against the town’s population is difficult to explain, given the constant assertions that Mscislaŭ “is and was ‘eternally Russian’”.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Krz. J., ‘Mścislaw!’, *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, ed. by F. Sulimierski, B. Chlebowski, J. Krzywicki, and W. Walewski, vol. 6 (Warszawa: Nakł. Władysława Walewskiego, 1885), p. 775.

<sup>40</sup> Vladimir Krasnjanskij, *Gorod Mstislav! (Mogilevskoj gubernii) (Vil’na, 1912)*, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> J. O. [Jan Obst], ‘Freski w kościele Mścislawskim’, *Litwa i Ruś*, 2:1 (1912), 28–33.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

After the collapse of the Russian Empire, at the beginning of the Soviet epoch, the old scheme of history, which presented the past of Belarusians and Ukrainians as branches of the “threefold people of Rus”, was discarded by the Marxist historiography of Michail Pokrovskij’s school. In the 1920s, it was time for Minsk to establish its own school of Belarusian historiography that would assert the historical and cultural autonomy of Belarusians. Naturally, at that time there was quite a lot of talk about the past wars with Russia, but we did not manage to find any examples of the “Trubeckoj Massacre” in the Belarusian publications of those years. In the 1930s, with the onset of political repression and the reorientation of Soviet historiography to justify Russia’s great power, any criticism of the policies of Muscovian rulers became politically risky.

After the end of World War II, coverage of the history of the Soviet republics was directly subordinated to a scheme designed to prove the historical justification of their incorporation into Russia and the progressive role of the Russian people in their destinies. The introduction of the concept of the “Old Rus’ nationality” as the single root of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples in 1954 demanded that Belarus’s centuries-long past be viewed only through the prism of the Belarusians’ aspirations for “reunification with Russia”. Any mention of Muscovy’s wars of aggression was excluded. In Minsk, one of the main representatives of the official position of Soviet historiography was Lavrentij Abecedarski, who became a notorious “enemy of apoliticism”. He advocated the unity of the East Slavic peoples and the Belarusians’ longing to be Russian;<sup>44</sup> he also declared any example of enmity between them in the past to be falsification and hastened to refute every statement about the inhuman attitude of the Muscovite troops towards the Belarusians.

In the conditions of the popularization of the heroes of Russian history and the active Russification of culture in the BSSR, the historical frescoes commemorating the “Trubeckoj Massacre” irritated local Soviet officials, who tried to get rid of the dilapidated church in Mscislaŭ. In 1959, they made such a proposal to Moscow and the party authorities of the Mahilëŭ region, saying not only that the preserved murals were “not of historical and artistic value to the Belarusian people” but also that their content was “anti-patriotic and insulting”. According to their explanation, the Battle of Trubeckoj was a struggle for the “liberation of Mscislaŭ from foreign invaders”, and Polish historians had attributed “distorted, false and

<sup>44</sup> Laŭrenci Abecėdarski, *Barac’ha ŭkraińskaha i belaruskaha narodaŭ za ŭz’jadnanne z Rasijaj u sjarėdzine XVII v.* (Minsk: Dzjaržaŭnae vydavectva BSSR, 1954); id., *Bor’ba belorusskogo naroda za soedinenie s Rossiej (vtoraja polovina XVI–XVII v.)* (Minsk, 1965).

hostile” meaning to it.<sup>45</sup> When the first petition to the centre had no effect, the Soviet and party apparatchiks from Mscislaŭ sent another petition to the higher authorities in 1961. It contained a request to remove the church building from the register of cultural monuments of the BSSR and to stop its restoration because, they said, the “Trubeckoj Massacre” mural depicted Russian soldiers who had come “to liberate the Belarusian people from the Polish noble yoke” in a distorted manner as murderers and robbers and was “an insult to the Russian and Belarusian brotherly peoples”.<sup>46</sup>

The church miraculously survived. It was saved by the development of cooperation between USSR and the Polish People’s Republic, which began during Nikita Khrushchev’s Thaw: the visits of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party, Władysław Gomułka’s visits to Minsk and Moscow in 1958 and 1959, and later the participation of the Polish delegation in the XXII Congress of the USSR Communist Party in 1961. The Soviet government gave this delegation the opportunity to visit Mscislaŭ with its monuments of “Polish” heritage,<sup>47</sup> thanks to which the church was saved.

Although the frescoes were preserved, people in Soviet Belarus could only talk about the “Trubeckoj Massacre” behind closed doors, because the fact of the bloody capture of the town by the Russian army radically contradicted the notion of the Belarusian people’s aspiration for “reunification” with Russia as the central thesis of the BSSR’s official historiography. With the only aim of discrediting the slaughter of 1654 as “an invention of the bourgeois nationalists”, the party authorities in Minsk allowed only the aforementioned official historian Lavrentij Abecedarski to raise this uncomfortable topic publicly. In a monograph on Belarus’s ties with Russia, he explicitly criticized what he called “the legend of the annihilation of all the inhabitants of Mscislaŭ by Trubeckoj’s army”.<sup>48</sup> Such an approach was flawed from the outset since no one in the literature on the subject insisted on the destruction of “all”. Then, this party historian resorted to an even more blatant manipulation. First, referring to one single document – the testimony of the noblewoman Raina Kurovič – he questioned the very fact of the storming of the castle, thus contradicting the testimonies of a hundred other witnesses who had described the events. According to Abecedarski, this noblewoman was also in the besieged castle and she allegedly reported that “the noblemen themselves surrendered Mscislaŭ castle to Trubeckoj’s army”.<sup>49</sup> In reality, there is nothing of the sort

<sup>45</sup> Ihar Puškin, ‘Antyrehliijnaja palityka i ‘pol’ski faktor’ u histori Mscislaŭskaha kascĕla karmelitaŭ (1950–1960-ja hh.)’, in *Mscislaŭ i Mscislaŭski kraj*, ed. by Mjaceľ’ski (Minsk: Belaruskaja navuka, 2019), pp. 355–57.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 358–59.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>48</sup> Abecedarskij, *Belorussija i Rossija*, pp. 150–53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

in Kurovič's statement. She said quite clearly that she was sent by her husband from Mscislaŭ to another "Hospodar" castle, which she did not specify. The enemy **approached this castle after** [emphasis mine – H.S.] the capture of Mscislaŭ by storm, and it was her castle, not Mscislaŭ's, that was surrendered to the enemy because of a lack of provisions, gunpowder and men to defend it.<sup>50</sup> An analysis of the available material suggests that Kurovič's report refers to the castle of neighbouring Kryčau, a town in the same Voivodeship that surrendered in the autumn of 1654.

Further, to refute the assertion of the "total extermination" of the town's inhabitants, Abecedarski referred to the Tsar's charter that had been issued to the remaining burghers of Mstislaŭ in May 1655 to protect them from insults by Muscovian warriors. His final argument was the well-known fact that captive noblemen from Mscislaŭ were brought to the Muscovian State. On the basis of these arguments, Abecedarski concluded that all talk about the "Trubeckoj Massacre" was a lie because the commoners remained in Mscislaŭ after the attack, and the nobles lived, so all remained unharmed. According to his explanation, the Tsarist power in Belarus allegedly treated the nobility "very mildly" and forbade killing the common people at all. Using his own version of the "surrender" as proven fact, Abecedarski concluded that the rumours about the "total" extermination of the inhabitants of Mscislaŭ were "invented" and spread by the nobles themselves, who thus "tried to justify the surrender of Mscislaŭ castle to the Russian army before the authorities of the Commonwealth" and "to obtain confirmation documents for their former possessions".<sup>51</sup> The party historian of the BSSR concluded his failed "debunking" by stating that only bourgeois nationalists spread this legend after the victory of Soviet power.

Apart from this case, the authorities of the BSSR did not allow any further recollections of the events of 1654 in official discourse until the end of the Soviet era. Even in popular publications about the history and culture of Mscislaŭ itself, the topic had to be carefully avoided.<sup>52</sup> The fate of a journalistic essay on Mscislaŭ written by the popular Belarusian writer Uladzimir Karatkevič in 1982 is indicative in this respect. In the original version, the author gently and without invective against the Russians recounted the tragic days of 1654, mentioning both Voivode Trubeckoj and the "Trubeckoj Massacre", as well as the word "nedoseka", and referring to the work of Nosovich for reassurance. But the censors carefully removed all of this: in the published version of the work, all that remained was

<sup>50</sup> AVAK, vol. 34, p. 290.

<sup>51</sup> Abecedarskij, *Belorussija i Rossija*, p. 153.

<sup>52</sup> As an example, see: Aleh Trusaŭ, *Rascislaŭ Baravy, Pomniki staraŭtynaha Mscislava: da 850-hoddzja horada*, (Minsk: Belarus', 1985).

a mention of the war of 1654–67, in which Mscislaŭ was “as in the furnace”.<sup>53</sup> The extracted fragments were only reinserted into Karatkevič’s popular work after the collapse of the Soviet system.

It is strange that the “Trubeckoj Massacre”, which was hushed up for decades, did not attract more attention on the part of Belarusian historians and history popularizers after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In any case, it was definitely not included in the catalogue of events used by Belarusian historiography to awaken national patriotism, and it plays no role in the “place of memory” (*lieu de mémoire*) of Belarus after 1991. A rare case of emotional treatment of this topic in the pages of a state journal was a publication dedicated to the historical fate of Mscislaŭ castle,<sup>54</sup> in which the author recounted that the conquerors killed thousands of inhabitants there and took many captives, calling the massacre at the castle its “apocalypse”. On the other hand, in a modern monograph on the history of the Mscislaŭ region, the events of 1654 are mentioned only very briefly as an ordinary episode of the war.<sup>55</sup> According to the author, the unusual number of casualties in the capture of the town is explained by the large gathering of citizens from the entire Voivodeship who sought shelter in the castle. Such reticence in the publications of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus could be related to the official politics of history under Lukašenka; however, even in popular literature, which does not look back at the position of the authorities, the events of 1654 were rarely and rather quietly discussed. In popular history books published by non-state publishers, for example, the capture of Mscislaŭ by the Muscovite army appeared only as an example of “the hardest fate” among Belarusian towns during the war of 1654–67;<sup>56</sup> however, the term “Trubeckoj Massacre” was not used because these authors clearly tried to avoid politicizing their interpretations of the events.

A completely different interpretation of the events that interest us is offered by the Russian historical narrative. It has already been mentioned that in the Tsarist era these events were included in the official legend of the “liberation of Western Russia from the Poles”. In Soviet times, the difference between Moscow’s and Minsk’s evaluations of the actions of the Muscovite rulers, together with the nationally oriented historians in Belarus, were eliminated as a result of Stalin’s policy. It is not surprising that the special works of Russian-Soviet authors, when they wrote something about the Tsarist wars in the territories of Belarus, presented them

<sup>53</sup> Uladzimir Karatkevič, *Mscislaŭ: èsè pra historyju i ljudzej adnoj zjamli* (Minsk: Belarus’, 1985).

<sup>54</sup> Raman Abramčuk, ‘Apakalipsis mjascovaha značennja: žyccé i smerc’ Mscislaŭskaha zamka (1135–1660)’, *Architektura i stroitel’stvo*, 1 (2013), 54–57.

<sup>55</sup> Mjaceł’ski, *Mscislaŭskae knjastva*, p. 241.

<sup>56</sup> Uladzimir Arloŭ, Zmicer Herasimovič, *Kraina Belarus’: iljustravanaja historyja* (London: Angloproject Corporation, 2003), p. 184.

in the context of Moscow's struggle for East Slavic unity. The prominent Russian expert on the history of the war of 1654–67, Aleksandr Mal'cev, hardly touched on the circumstances of the capture of Mscislaŭ; he only indicated that, right at the beginning of the campaign, the Russian army "took the town by storm after a fierce battle" and continued to advance.<sup>57</sup> This author interpreted the events strictly in line with Soviet politics of history, arguing that the Muscovite army "liberated" the towns and villages of Belarus from "Polish rule" and that in Belarus the overwhelming mass of the population suffered from brutal exploitation and national-religious oppression and therefore accommodated and supported the Russian "liberators".<sup>58</sup>

If the subordination of explanations of the past to official ideology was common practice in Soviet times and not surprising, then the fidelity of Russian historiography to one of the main theses of Soviet politics of history after the collapse of the USSR cannot fail to impress. Indeed, in contemporary Russian historiography, just as in the era of the CPSU Congresses, the Muscovite state's wars with its western neighbours are presented as a struggle to restore the broken "East Slavic unity" – the proverbial "reunification". In educational literature, the destructive war in the mid-seventeenth century is presented as a just and liberating war for the peoples of Belarus and Ukraine, who "suffered under a triple oppression – serfdom, nationality and religion" in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>59</sup> And with regard to events in Belarus, some Russian historians repeat like magic the thesis that "the Belarusians opened the gates of their towns before the Tsarist regiments"; they even claim that their submission to the power of Tsar Aleksej Michajlovič was "the realization of the dream of the Orthodox Russians" in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.<sup>60</sup> The authors of such publications do not seem to realize that the Orthodox citizens in Belarus at that time constituted a minority, but even they – although the rights of the Orthodox were really violated – were by no means eager to submit to the authority of the Tsar and become "Russians". This can be seen in a series of uprisings against Muscovite garrisons in the Belarusian towns that had experienced the Tsarist regime, as well as in the development of guerrilla warfare by the local population against the "liberators" during the Thirteen Years' War.

<sup>57</sup> See: *Očerki istorii SSSR: Period feodalizma, XVII v.*, ed. by A.A. Novosel'ski, V.N. Ustjugova (Moskva: AN SSSR, 1955), p. 45.

<sup>58</sup> Aleksandr N. Mal'cev, 'Vojna za Belorussiju i osvoboždenie Smolenska v 1654 g.', *Istoričeskie zapiski*, 37 (1951), pp. 133; id., *Rossija i Belorussija v seredine XVII veka*, pp. 63–65, ff.

<sup>59</sup> *Istorija Rossii: učebnik*, ed. by Aleksandr S. Orlov et al. (Moskva: MGU, 2015), p. 162.

<sup>60</sup> Andrej P. Bogdanov, 'Zapadnaja Rus' i stanovlenie velikorusskogo stichosloženiija pri Moskovskom dvore', in *Rossijskaja real'nost' konca XVI – pervoj poloviny XIX veka: ekonomika, obščestvennyj stroj, kul'tura: sb. statej* (Moskva: RAN, 2007), p. 146.

A certain adherence to the doctrine of ‘liberation’ is also readily apparent in the works of today’s Russian scholars who deal specifically with the history of the wars of Tsarist Russia. It is noteworthy that they usually do not address the issue of the Tsarist army’s treatment of the population of the occupied territories. For example, in his summary of the events of the 1654–67 war, Aleksandr Malov presents them as a “victorious march of the Russian army” in the Belarusian territories, during which it “took” one town after another, without mentioning any cases of resistance.<sup>61</sup> A similar attitude can be observed in Oleg Kurbatov, who deals with the military history of Russia in the seventeenth century. In his summary monograph on the same war, he focuses only on the military campaigns and successes of the “Russians” against the “Poles” and “Lithuanians” in the territories of Belarus and Ukraine. In his account, the army of the Tsar’s voivodes in Belarus takes one town after another as if there was no resistance anywhere. Mscislaŭ, as the book says, “was taken by storm without a long siege” by the Trubeckoj army; then, “the garrison of Dubroŭna surrendered”, and then “the burghers of Vicebsk capitulated”.<sup>62</sup> In all the aforementioned towns, the inhabitants stubbornly resisted the Tsarist army, but they are put on a par with other settlements that quickly surrendered. In the consistent omission of the circumstances of the conquest of Mscislaŭ, Dubroŭna, Vicebsk and some other towns, it is difficult not to see the intentionality. The fact that Kurbatov focuses only on the military campaigns does not explain everything, for when he describes the actions of the enemy, i.e., the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth troops, he repeatedly speaks of their cruel treatment of the local population: thus, the campaign of Col. J. K. Lisovski through Belarus at the end of 1655 was accompanied by “pogroms against the peaceful population”, and Stefan Czarnecki “exterminated all the inhabitants there” in 1665 after conquering the town of Stavišče,<sup>63</sup> etc.

But by far the most striking example of this biased approach to explaining the events of the 1654–67 war in Belarus is provided by Aleksej Lobin. In 2007, in response to my popular scientific book on the said war<sup>64</sup> and to the journalism of Belarusian history buffs, he devoted a special essay to defending the Russian troops against the “Belarusian nationalist school”<sup>65</sup> that reproached them for ruining the towns of the GDL. Let us leave aside the accuracy of the accusations against the opponents, who, according to Lobin, only “juggle facts” and have no idea about

<sup>61</sup> Aleksandr Malov, *Russko-pol'skaja vojna 1654–1667 gg.* (Moskva: Cejchgauz, 2006), pp. 16–20.

<sup>62</sup> Oleg Kurbatov, *Russko-pol'skaja vojna 1654–1667 gg.* (Moskva: Runivers, 2019), pp. 21, 27.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 297.

<sup>64</sup> Henadz' Sahanovič, *Nevjadomaja vajna: 1654–1667* (Minsk: Navuka i tšehnika, 1995).

<sup>65</sup> Aleksej Lobin, *Neizvestnaja vojna 1654–1667 gg.*, <[https://scepsis.net/library/id\\_1104.html](https://scepsis.net/library/id_1104.html)> [accessed 6 January 2023].

the “methodology of historical research”. The issue here is not the method of his polemics but the explanation of what happened in Mscilaŭ. After all, it completely contradicted Lobin’s false claims regarding the Tsar’s humane policy towards the population, which supposedly forbade the military to harm the inhabitants of towns and villages. His explanation for the Mscislaŭ case appeared to be very simple: the author justified the cruelty of Trubeckoj’s army with the “laws of war”. Because the garrison and the inhabitants put up stubborn resistance, “the Voivode could not guarantee their welfare according to the Tsar’s order”. Therefore, when the town was taken by storm, “its inhabitants were killed or taken prisoner”, according to this Russian author. In his interpretation, if a town stubbornly resisted, then “according to the **rules of military science** [emphasis mine – H.S.] of the time” the siege was followed by “brutal killing and massacre in the town”. This was how “without exception, all troops acted on enemy territory”, Lobin summed up.

Igor Babulin’s book on the events of the first year of the war can be considered the most thorough and balanced work of Russian historians on this subject to date; it contains a separate section devoted to a sensitive topic – the capture of Mscislaŭ.<sup>66</sup> Unlike others, he tried to find out what happened in this town in the summer of 1654. This author relied on the testimonies of several nobles who described the storming of the town;<sup>67</sup> then, he offered his own analysis and evaluation of the events. Unfortunately, using Abecedarski’s far-fetched argument, Babulin also tries to question the cited testimonies about the bloody capture of Mscislaŭ. Let me remind you that Abecedarski referred to the testimony of just one noblewoman, as if he were speaking of a voluntary surrender of the castle. Although, as we have shown above, this statement referred to another castle, Babulin also called it the testimony of a person who was in besieged Mscislaŭ.<sup>68</sup> Just like Abecedarski, he undertook to challenge the statement “about the total extermination of the defenders of the city”, which was just a figure of speech that was also used, by the way, in sources of Russian origin. In the scientific publications of Belarusian historians and writers, there was not even an attempt to claim something similar.

Although Babulin eventually conceded that the reports of the nobility proved “the death of a considerable part of the civilian population”, he related this to the storming of the town and rejected all accusations of excessive cruelty on the part of the Tsarist troops, disagreeing with the definition of these events as “massacres”. He attributes the very subject

<sup>66</sup> Igor’ Babulin, *Smolenskij pochod i bitva pri Šepelevičach 1654 goda* (Moskva: Russkie vitjazi, 2018), pp. 71–80.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74–76.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

of the “Trubeckoj Massacre” only to the “Polish tradition”. In describing the paintings on the walls of the Carmelite Church, he again refers to L. Abecedarski, who claims that the “Trubeckoj Massacre” is a legend created by nobles, who created the paintings on the church walls to support the legend.<sup>69</sup> The historian also insists on the need to distinguish between “unavoidable casualties during a brutal attack” on the one hand, and the “killing of defenceless people”, i.e., the “massacre” after the capture of the city. “There is no credible evidence that the Russians organized the deliberate killing of prisoners after the capture of the city”, he asserts. In his opinion, “only the Catholic priests, who were not treated squeamishly at that time” could have been the victims of the “massacre”. It turns out that if there is no concrete information in the Russian sources about the killing of civilians, the evidence of the other side does not count. This obvious tendency of Babulin’s explanation of the events of 1654 in Mscislaŭ has been rightly pointed out by a Polish historian of the same war, Konrad Bobiatynski.<sup>70</sup> It is indicative that Babulin’s conclusion shifts the entire responsibility for what happened to the inhabitants of Mscislaŭ themselves, who dared to offer armed resistance: they knew the rules of war and “were well aware of the consequences of their actions”. The notorious “rules of war” appear again, as if they justified the mass slaughter in the capture of the city. Did such generally accepted and understood “rules of war” really exist at that time?

It is well known that military science and warfare practices underwent remarkable changes during this period. The tendency to strengthen discipline and reduce the negative impact of the army on society was already evident in various parts of Europe from the 16th century onwards. To this end, the so-called “Articles of War” and other legal documents regulating the relationship between the army and the civilian population were introduced. In the Articles introduced by King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden, for example, which served as the basis for similar codes in other countries, more than half of the rules provided for the death penalty for breaches of discipline, including violence against civilians and robbery.<sup>71</sup> The same tendencies then gripped the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where German and especially Swedish models had a clear influence on the codification of military law.<sup>72</sup> The “Articles of War” introduced

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>70</sup> Konrad Bobiatynski, review of ‘Igor’ Babulin, *Smolenskiy pochod i bitva pri Šepelevičach 1654 goda*, Moskva, 2018’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 126:2 (2019), 405.

<sup>71</sup> Leslie C. Green, ‘The Law of War in Historical Perspective’, *International Law Studies*, 72 (1998), 49–50; Frank Tallett, *War and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1495–1715* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 122–124; cf. Florin N. Ardelean, ‘Military Justice, Regulations and Discipline in Early Modern Transylvanian Armies (XVI–XVII c.)’, *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica*, 8 (2011), 183–89.

<sup>72</sup> See the seminal work on military discipline in the Polish Crown and the GDL: Karol Łopatecki, “*Disciplina militaris*” w wojskach Rzeczypospolitej do połowy XVII wieku (Białystok: Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy, 2012).

by the Hetmans during the campaigns, the special constitutions adopted by the Sejm that referred to military discipline, as well as the norms of the Statute of the GDL (in the territories of today's Lithuania and Belarus) affirmed, among other things, a more humane attitude of troops towards the populations of both their own country and other countries. In this can be seen the impact of Renaissance humanism on military affairs. A good example of its manifestation is Duke Albrecht of Prussia's Treatise on the Rules of War (*Kriegsordnung*), completed in 1555, whose Polish translation became known among the elites of the GDL. What is important for us here is that this military manual contained an incantatory call to "have pity on those who do not defend themselves", on children, women and the elderly, and "not to shed the blood of an innocent".<sup>73</sup> A similar approach is found in Hugo Grotius' famous work "On the Law of War and Peace". Yes, it prescribes the soldier's harsh right to kill and take spoils of war in the enemy's lands in a just war, but it is further restricted by key clarifications. In particular, Grotius speaks of the need to avoid killing innocent people; he then separately calls for sparing children, women and the elderly, as well as church officials, peasants and merchants.<sup>74</sup> In other words, to justify the massacre of civilians indiscriminately with a general rule of war is to oversimplify things.

Naturally, the practice of war differed greatly from the preached norms, and it is true that in Europe at that time many inhabitants used to be killed when towns and castles were stormed. The victors were not obliged to distinguish the soldiers of the enemy garrison from the common people, so the latter were at high risk of violent death. Nevertheless, their mass murder could not be described as the rule. Civilians were comparatively rarely the target of deliberate attack by soldiers during military conflicts. It is known from the literature on the subject that the deliberate killing of civilians after the capture of fortifications usually took place in search of loot,<sup>75</sup> and this did not lead to mass casualties. Even if there was nothing to protect the civilian population from the invading army, women, children and clergy, as mentioned above, were included in the category to be spared under military law.<sup>76</sup> It was different with the rest. But for us it is important to note that in the history of early modern European wars one can find many examples of how the forcible

<sup>73</sup> *Die Kriegsordnung des Markgrafen zu Brandenburg Ansbach und Herzogs zu Preußen Albrecht des Älteren – Königsberg 1555*, ed. by H.-J. Bömelburg, B. Chiari, and M. Thomae (Braunschweig: Archiv Verlag, 2006), pp. 51, 172.

<sup>74</sup> Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*, ed. by Stephen C. Neff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 390–91.

<sup>75</sup> Peter H. Wilson, 'Was the Thirty Years War a 'Total War'?', in *Civilians and War in Europe, 1618–1815*, ed. by Erica Charters, Eva Rosenhaft, and Hannah Smith, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 32.

<sup>76</sup> Cf.: Green, 'The Law of War in Historical Perspective', p. 52.

capture of a castle after a siege did not result in many civilian victims.<sup>77</sup> The capture of Prague by the Franco-Bavarian army of Charles Albrecht and the Corps of Count Moritz of Saxony in 1741 did not result in any killings or looting at all.<sup>78</sup>

In the most famous cases where many lives were lost in the storming of towns in early modern Europe, experts note that factors such as the religious character of these conflicts or the desire to restore lawful order played an important role in the suppression of those who had rebelled against the ruler. The bloody capture of Mechelen in 1572, for example, was a Spanish massacre of a rebellious Belgian town.<sup>79</sup> In the German lands of the Thirty Years' War, a particularly gruesome event<sup>80</sup> was the capture of Magdeburg by Catholic League troops in 1631, in which thousands of the city's inhabitants perished. The brutality there was strongly motivated by religious opposition: Magdeburg was considered a symbol of Protestantism in Germany, which is why the Catholic warriors so mercilessly stormed this town. The same motive fuelled hostility when Oliver Cromwell's troops stormed Drogheda in Ireland in 1649 and massacred many inhabitants: the commander-in-chief himself explained the brutality of his soldiers with the rhetoric of religious opposition, calling those trapped in the town "barbarians".<sup>81</sup>

In the history of our town, however, there could have been nothing of the sort. After all, the population was predominantly Orthodox, and Tsar Aleksej Michajlovič, in his letters to the inhabitants of the GDL, described the aim of the war as the liberation of "oppressed Orthodoxy". He directed the same rhetoric to his army sent against the "Poles" as "ravagers of the Holy Eastern Church of Greek law".<sup>82</sup> Does it look like the Tsar had a poor grasp of the real state of affairs beyond the western border of his Tsardom? Or did Trubeckoj's warriors, in the frenzy of military success, not care about the creed of the town's defenders and ordinary citizens? Or could it be that the only thing that motivated them in conquered MscislaŮ was their lust for profit and the urge to kill?

<sup>77</sup> Tallett, *War and Society*, pp. 153, 163; Samuel Pufendorf, *Siedem ksiąg o czynach Karola Gustawa króla Szwecji*, ed. by Wojciech Krawczuk (Warszawa: DiG, 2013), p. 336.

<sup>78</sup> Sven Peterson, *Die belagerte Stadt. Alltag und Gewalt im Österreichischen Erbfolgekrieg (1740–1748)* (New York: Campus Verlag, 2019), pp. 69–72.

<sup>79</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *Empire, War and Faith in Early Modern Europe* (London: The Penguin Press, 2002), pp. 156–57.

<sup>80</sup> For more details, see Hans Medick, 'Historische Ereignis und zeitgenössische Erfahrung: Die Eroberung und Zerstörung Magdeburgs 1631', in *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe. Der Dreißigjährige Krieg aus der Nähe*, ed. by Benigna von Krusenstjern, Hans Medick (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), pp. 379–407; Michael Kaiser, 'Excidium Magdeburgense. Beobachtungen zur Wahrnehmung und Darstellung von Gewalt im Dreißigjährigen Krieg', in *Ein Schauplatz herber Angst. Wahrnehmung und Darstellung von Gewalt im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Markus Meumann and Dirk Niefanger (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1997), pp. 43–64.

<sup>81</sup> Parker, *Empire*, pp. 158–59.

<sup>82</sup> Solov'ev, *Sočinenija* kn. 5, vols 9–10, pp. 601–02.

These and similar questions must be confronted by historians who try to understand the “Trubeckoj Massacre”. It seems that contemporary Russian historiography lacks sufficient critical reflection and the desire to listen to the other side in order to at least distance itself from the not very valorous actions of the Russian army in the past. Some authors even deny inconvenient facts in order to justify the Tsar’s policy and the actions of his troops. We must admit that during the Russian Empire many historians explained the past of the annexed countries more objectively than some of our Russian colleagues today. The interpretation of the tragic events in Belarusian town of Mscislaŭ is a good example of this.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abecedarskyj, Lavrentij, *Belorussija i Rossija: Očerki rusko-belorusskich svjazej vtoroj poloviny XVI – XVII v.* (Minsk: Vyššjšaja škola, 1978)
- Abecedarskij, Lavrentij, *Bor’ba belorusskogo naroda za soedinenie s Rossiej (vtoraja polovina XVI – XVII v.)* (Minsk: 1965)
- Abëcëdarski, Laŭrënci, *Barac’ba ŭkrainskaha i belaruskaha narodaŭ za ŭz’jadnanne z Rasijaj u sjarëdzine XVII veka* (Minsk: Dzjaržaŭnae vydavectva BSSR, 1954)
- Abramčuk, Raman, ‘Apakalipsis mjascovaha značënnja: žyccë i smerc’ Mscislaŭskaha zamka (1135–1660)’, *Architektura i stroi tel’stvo*, 1 (2013), 54–57
- Akty, *izdavaemye Vilenskoju komissieju dlja razbora drevnich aktov*, vol. 34 (Vi’na: “Russkij počin”, 1909)
- Akty *Moskovskogo gosudarstva*, ed. by N.A. Popova, vol. 2: *Razrjadnyj prikaz: Moskovskij stol, 1635–1659* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdanie Imperatorskoj Akademiej nauk, 1894)
- Akty, *otnosjaščiesja k istorii Južnoj i Zapadnoj Rossii*, vol. 14: *Prisoedinenie Belorussii, 1654–1655*, ed. by G.F. Karpova (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdanie Archeografičeskoj Komissii, 1889)
- Akty, *sobrannye v bibliotekach i archivach Rossijskoj imperii*, vol. IV: *1645–1700* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografija II Otdelenija sobstvennoj E.I.V. Kanceljarii, 1836)
- Alekseev, Leonid, *Po Zapadnoj Dvine i Dnepru v Belorussii* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1974)
- Alekseev, Leonid, ‘Detinec Mstislavlja v XIV–XVII vv.’, *Rossijskaja archeologija*, 2 (2000), 94–113
- Ardelean, Florin N., ‘Military Justice, Regulations and Discipline in Early Modern Transylvanian Armies (XVI–XVII c.)’, *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica*, 8 (2011), 183–89
- Arloŭ, Uladzimir, and Herasimovč, Zmicer, *Kraina Belarus’: iljustravanaja historyja* (London: Angloproject Corporation, 2003)
- Babulin, Igor’, *Smolenskij pochod i bitva pri Šepelevičach 1654 goda* (Moskva: Russkie vitjazi, 2018)
- Bez-Kornilovič, Michail O., *Istoričeskie svedenija o primečatel’nejšich mestach v Belorussii prisovokupleniem i drugih svedenij k nej že odnosjaščichsja* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1855)

- Belorussija i Litva: istoričeskie sud'by Severo-Zapadnogo kraja, ed. by P.N. Batjuškovo  
(Sankt-Peterburg: "Obščestvennaja pol'za", 1890)
- Berch, Vasilij, *Carstvovanie carja Alekseja Michajloviča* (S.-Peterburg: Tip. Ch. Gince, 1831)
- Bobiatyński, Konrad, *Od Smoleńska do Wilna. Wojna Rzeczypospolitej z Moskwą 1654–1655*  
(Zabrze: Wydawnictwo INFORT EDITIONS, Witold Grzelak, 2004)
- Bobiatyński, Konrad, 'Adnosiny žycharoŭ VKL da maskoŭskaha vojska ŭ 1654–1655 h.',  
*Belaruski Histaryčny Ahljad*, 14 (2007), 54–80
- Bobiatyński, Konrad, review of 'Igor' Babulin, *Smolenskij pochod i bitva pri Šepelevičach 1654 goda*, Moskva, 2018', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 126:2 (2019), 399–405
- Bogdanov, Andrej P., 'Zapadnaja Rus' i stanovlenie velikoruskogo stichosloženija pri Moskovskom dvore', in *Rossijskaja real'nost' konca XVI – pervoj poloviny XIX veka: ekonomika, obščestvennyj stroj, kul'tura: sb. statej*, (Moskva: RAN, 2007), pp. 156–84
- Dvorcovye razrjady*, vol. 3: S 1645 po 1676 g. (Sankt-Peterburg, 1852)
- Grabowski, Ambroży, *Ojczyzste spominki w pismach do dziejów dawnej Polski*, vol. 1  
(Kraków: J. Cypcer, 1845)
- Green, Leslie, 'The Law of War in Historical Perspective', *International Law Studies*, 72 (1998), 40–78
- Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*, ed. by Stephen C. Neff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- Istorija Rossii: učebnik*, ed. by Aleksandr S. Orlov et al. (Moskva: MGU, 2015)
- Istoriko-juridičeskie materialy, izulečennye iz aktov knig gubernij Vitebskoj i Mogilevskoj*, ed. by A.M. Sazonov, vol. 25 (Vitebsk: Tipografija G. Malkina, 1894)
- Jaraševič, Aljaksandr, 'Mscislaŭski kljaštar karmelitaŭ', in *Ėncyklapedyja historyi Belarusi*, vol. 5, (Minsk: BelĖn, 1999, 228)
- Kaiser, Michael, 'Excidium Magdeburgense'. Beobachtungen zur Wahrnehmung and Darstellung von Gewalt im Dreißigjährigen Krieg', in *Ein Schauplatz herber Angst. Wahrnehmung und Darstellung von Gewalt im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Markus Meumann and Dirk Niefanger (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1997), pp. 43–64
- Die Kriegsordnung des Markgrafen zu Brandenburg Ansbach und Herzogs zu Preußen Albrecht des Älteren – Königsberg 1555*, ed. by H.-J. Bömelburg, B. Chiari, and M. Thomae (Braunschweig: Archiv Verlag, 2006)
- Kroll, Piotr, 'Belaruskaja kampanija 1654 h. (da bitvy pad Šapjalevičami)', *Belaruski Histaryčny Ahljad*, 6 (1999), 7–31
- Kałamajska-Saeed, Maria, *Rosyjskie pomiary klasztorów skasowanych w roku 1832*, vol. 2  
(Warszawa: „Polonika”, 2021)
- Karatkevič, Uladzimir, *Mscislaŭ: èsè pra historyju i ljuďzej adnoj zjamli* (Minsk: Belarus', 1985)
- Kojalovič, Michail O., *Čtenija po istorii Zapadnoj Rossii*, izd. 4 (Sankt-Peterburg: Tip. A. S. Suvorina, 1884)
- Krasnjanskij, Vladimir, *Gorod Mstislavl' (Mogilevskoj gubernii) (Viľna: Severo-Zapadnoe Otdelenie Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geografičeskogo Obščestva, 1912)*

- Krz. J., 'Mścislawł', in *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, ed. by F. Sulimierski, B. Chlebowski, J. Krzywicki, and W. Walewski, t. 6, (Warszawa: Nakł. Władysława Walewskiego, 1885)
- Kulahin, Anatol', *Katalickija chramy na Belarusi* (Minsk: Belaruskaja èncyklapedyja, 2001)
- Kurbatov, Oleg, *Russko-pol'skaja vojna 1654–1667 gg.* (Moskva: Runivers, 2019)
- Lobin, Aleksej, *Neizvestnaja vojna 1654–1667 gg.*, <[https://scepis.net/library/id\\_1104.html](https://scepis.net/library/id_1104.html)> [accessed 6 January 2023]
- Łopatecki, Karol, „Disciplina militaris” w wojskach Rzeczypospolitej do połowy XVII wieku (Białystok: Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy, 2012)
- Malov, Aleksandr V., *Russko-pol'skaja vojna 1654–1667 gg.* (Moskva: Cejchgauz, 2006)
- Mał'cev, Aleksandr N., 'Vojna za Belorussiju i osvoboždenie Smolenska v 1654 g.', *Istoričeskie zapiski*, 37 (1951), 125–41
- Mał'cev, Aleksandr N., *Rossija i Belorussija v seredine XVII veka* (Moskva: MGU, 1974)
- Medick, Hans, 'Historische Ereignis und zeitgenössische Erfahrung: Die Eroberung und Zerstörung Magdeburgs 1631', in *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe. Der Dreißigjährige Krieg aus der Nähe*, ed. by Benigna von Krusenstjern, Hans Medick (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 379–407
- Medovikov, Petr, *Istoričeskoe značenie carstvovanija Alekseja Michajloviča* (Moskva: Tipografija A. Semena, 1854)
- Metryka Litewska. *Rejestry podymnego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Województwo mścislawskie 1667 r.*, ed. by Andrzej Rachuba (Warszawa: DiG, 2008)
- Mjaceł'ski, Andrèj A., *Mscislaŭskae knjastva i vajavodstva ũ XII–XVIII stst.* (Minsk: Belaruskaja navuka, 2010)
- Nosovič, Ivan, *Slovar' belorusskogo narečija* (Sankt-Peterburg: Imperatorskaja Akademiya Nauk, 1870)
- Obst, Jan, 'Freski w kościele Mścislawskim', *Litwa i Ruś*, 2:1 (1912), 1, 28–33
- Očerki istorii SSSR: Period feodalizma, XVII v.*, ed. by A.A. Novosel'skij and V.N. Ustjugov (Moskva: AN SSSR, 1955)
- Parker, Geoffrey, *Empire, War and Faith in Early Modern Europe*, London: The Penguin Press, 2002
- Peterson, Sven, *Die belagerte Stadt. Alltag und Gewalt im Österreichischen Erbfolgekrieg (1740–1748)* (New York: Campus Verlag, 2019)
- Pufendorf, Samuel, *Siedem ksiąg o czynach Karola Gustawa króla Szwecji*, ed. by Wojciech Krawczuk (Warszawa: DiG, 2013)
- Puškin, Ihar A., 'Antyrelihijnaja palityka i "pol'ski faktar" u historyi Mscislaŭskaha kascëła karmelitaŭ (1950–1960-ja hh.)', in *Mscislaŭ i Mscislaŭski kraj: zbornik navukovych artykulaŭ*, ed. by A. Mjaceł'ski (Minsk: Belaruskaja navuka, 2019), pp. 351–60
- Rachuba, Andrzej, 'Wysiłek mobilizacyjny Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w latach 1654–1667', *Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości*, XLIII (2007), 43–44
- Sahanovič, Henadz', *Nevjadomaja vajna: 1654–1667* (Minsk: Navuka i tèchnika, 1995)
- Solov'ev, Sergej M., *Sočinenija: v 18 kn., kn. 5: Istorija Rossii s drevnejšich vremen*, vols 9–10 (Moskva: Mysl', 1990)

- Tallett, Frank, *War and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1495–1715* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997)
- Tkačev, Michail, *Zamki Belarusi* (Minsk: Polymja, 1987)
- Tkačoš, Michas', *Zamki i ljudi* (Minsk: Navuka i Tèchnika, 1991)
- Tkačoš, Michas', and Trusaŭ, Aleh, *Starazytny Mscislaŭ* (Minsk: Polymja, 1992)
- Trusaŭ, Aleh, and Baravy, Rascislaŭ, *Pomniki starazytnaha Mscislava: da 850-hoddzja horada* (Minsk: Belarus', 1985)
- Turčinovič, Iosif, *Obozrenie istorii Belorussii s drevnejšich vremen*, (Sankt-Peterburg: Tip. Èduarda Praca, 1857)
- Wilson, Peter H., 'Was the Thirty Years War a "Total War"?', in *Civilians and War in Europe, 1618–1815*, ed. by Erica Charters, Eva Rosenhaft, and Hannah Smith (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012)