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## THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY OF THE ARISTOCRATIC FAMILIES IN THE NEW NATIONAL STATES AFTER 1918: AN EXAMPLE OF HABSBURG & HOCHBERG FAMILIES IN POLAND

### Abstract

The independence of newly born (or reborn) states at the end of 1918 raised the question of the future of the aristocratic families who had built their position in the pre-war empires. An interesting example of such dilemmas arose in Poland. This was connected with the fate of two originally German-speaking families. One of them was a branch of the imperial Habsburg family that settled in Żywiec (German: Saybush) in western Galicia. The other: rich and powerful family of Hofburg von Pless having their main seat in Pszczyna (German: Pless) in Prussian Upper Silesia. They were both members of the absolute elite of European aristocracy, being related to many noble and royal families and playing important roles in the political and economic life of Austro-Hungary and Germany. What they also had in common was the fact, that their estates were located in a borderland between different ethnic and national groups. After the end of World War One, almost all these properties became part of the independent Polish state. As a result, the new administration treated the families with serious distrust. However, their national choices were different: the Habsburgs of Żywiec started to consider themselves as pure Polish, while the Hofburgs radically adhered to their German self-identity. This article shows what the criteria were behind these choices.

**Key words:** identity questions, Habsburg, Hofburg, aristocracy, 1918, postimperial transition

The significant changes brought by the end of World War I can certainly be viewed in the context of a decline of aristocracy in most European countries, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe. Before the outbreak of the Great War, the aristocracy was one of the most important elements of the social structure of

the great empires and its privileged position was often guaranteed by appropriate legal regulations. Leaving aside issues relating to the position of the aristocracy before 1914, there is no doubt that in the world that began to take shape in 1918 pre-war aristocracy meant little. The new national states that emerged from the ruins of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires were instead democratic republics departing from the pre-war monarchical and aristocratic heritage. Once influential, great families were treated unenthusiastically or sometimes even with hostility. This resulted not only from the contradiction of the idea of aristocracy with the new socio-political system but often from the ethnic difference between these families and the nations that were trying to build their statehood on the basis of the principle of self-determination.

The new situation, which was primarily defined by the development of nationalist movements, required the aristocrats to adapt quickly. First of all, they had to take into consideration the issue of their own national identity. They had to (and some even wanted to) make definite and unambiguous choices. This does not mean that before 1914 Central European aristocrats did not have any national identity<sup>1</sup>. They did; however, it was much more complex, or one can even say “floating.” They often identified themselves primarily with a state, rather than with a nation understood in pure ethnic categories. In the case of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, this kind of patriotism meant allegiance to the Habsburg dynasty, who played the role of the ideological keystone of the state. We should also remember that the lifestyle of the aristocracy imposed some sort of cosmopolitan approach. Members of the families spoke many languages fluently and easily switched them even in conversations with their relatives. Despite living in distant countries, noble families were also closely related. One of the tragedies of World War I was that it could be essentially called the “war of cousins”. The year 1918 completely reshaped that world of old empires and the main element defining not only an international system but also life was the national state.

In this paper, I show that the end of the Great War brought aristocrats a need to define their basic national identification. Earlier their identities could have been more flexible, cosmopolitan, multi-layered, and combined. I would like to also analyse some factors that played an important role in the choices finally made by Central-European aristocrats. However, the aim of the paper is not a synthetic analysis of the situation of the aristocracy in general, but I would like to focus on two thought-provoking examples: the Habsburgs from Żywiec (German: *Saybusch*) and the Hochbergs from Pszczyzna (German: *Pless*)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> More about national identity in the Habsburg empire, see: Lawrence Cole, “Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy,” in *Nationhood from Below. Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Maarten Van Ginderachter, Marnix Beyen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 96–119; *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, ed. Pieter M. Judson, Marsha L. Rozenblit (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> All the people mentioned in the paper used both German and Polish versions of their names, therefore to make the narration clear, they were standardised to names used in British (or American) historiography. All the geographic terms are given in current transcription, which is mainly Polish, however the previous, German names are also mentioned.

Why concentrate on these two families? Firstly, they lived very close to each other: between their residences there was a distance of only 45 kilometres. From the geographical point of view, we are actually talking about one region. Żywiec (the seat of the Habsburgs) was located in the middle of the Beskidy mountains, and Pszczyna (the seat of Hochbergs): in close proximity to that mountain range. These lands were also a state and a cultural frontier (in a political sense: between Austria-Hungary and Germany, in a cultural sense: between Polish and German languages). Both families were originally German-speaking, but lived in a rather Polish-speaking environment. One should also point out that both families were closely related to the royal dynasties of their countries. On the other hand, some significant differences should be taken into consideration: the Habsburgs were Austrians living in Galicia, while the Hochbergs were Germans who settled in Upper Silesia. In fact, they lived in the same borderland, although in different states and regions. Their fates were similarly dramatic and full of turmoil: hence their history can be treated as a kind of *case study*, showing some universal dilemmas the Central European aristocracy faced after the end of World War I.

The first family to be analysed is the Habsburgs. How was it possible that they settled in provincial Żywiec, located in middle of the Beskidy Mountains (German: *Beskiten*)? The family that settled here was a branch of the world-famous imperial dynasty. Żywiec, a small town located in a valley in the Polish highlands, had for centuries been a centre of surrounding estates, organized in the form of a "state", so from the legal point of view this was a single, indivisible property. For hundreds of years, it belonged to various Polish noble families. After the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth the estates were located on the border of Prussian Upper Silesia and Galicia, which belonged to Austria. The location, as well as the rapid increase in demand for wood (which was a result of the industrial revolution and industrialisation) made those underestimated mountain areas attractive from the economic point of view<sup>3</sup>. Interestingly, their potential was recognised not by the Polish nobility, but by foreigners. The first to buy properties in Żywiec was Prince Albrecht of Saxony and Cieszyn (German: *Teschen*), the son of the eighteenth-century Polish king Augustus II of Saxony. He married a daughter of Empress Maria Theresa, Archduchess Maria Christina of the Habsburg family<sup>4</sup>. She gave him as a dowry the Duchy of Cieszyn, which Albrecht decided to expand by including the neighbouring Żywiec estates<sup>5</sup>. He bought the first part in the years 1808–1810 and established two management offices: in Żywiec itself and in Bestwina. The expansion was continued by his heir and adopted son, Archduke Charles Habsburg, who purchased the largest part of the "Żywiec State" in 1838. In the following years he expanded his properties, mainly to the areas of the Beskidy forests. After his death in 1847,

<sup>3</sup> Bogumiła Hyla, "Habsburgowie w Żywcu," *Zeszyty naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace historyczne* 121 (1997): 273.

<sup>4</sup> Agnieszka Dudek, "Habsbursko-hybrydowy sposób na życie: galicyjsko-śląscy Habsburgowie na pograniczu czy ponad granicami," *Pamiętnik Cieszyński* 22 (2017): 214.

<sup>5</sup> Stanisław Grodziski, *Habsburgowie. Dzieje dynastii* (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków: Ossolineum, 1998), 125.

the Duchy of Cieszyn, together with the estates in Żywiec, were inherited by one of his sons, Albrecht. During his life, the properties began to bring considerable income, mainly due to the fact that the Archduke invested in various economic undertakings – the wood industry, glassworks, steelworks, and finally the most important investment, a huge and very modern brewery built between 1852 and 1857<sup>6</sup>.

Albrecht died in 1895. Due to the fact that he only had a daughter, Maria Theresa (married to the Prince of Württemberg), his properties were divided and a considerable part of them were inherited by the sons of his brother, Charles Ferdinand<sup>7</sup>. The property in Żywiec, finally separated from the Duchy of Teschen, was given to Charles Stephen Habsburg, a key figure in our analysis. He was born in 1860<sup>8</sup>. As a member of a branch of the Habsburg dynasty, he belonged to the elite of the European aristocracy and was related to many royal families. His sister, Marie Cristine, became queen and from 1886 a regent of Spain (she married the king of that country, Alfons XII).

Charles Stephen was an extraordinary figure. He spent his youth serving in the Austrian Navy and for the rest of his life the sea remained his great passion<sup>9</sup>. He distinguished himself from the imperial family, being impulsive, open minded, and a kind of individualist. He had many interests and was also known for his sense of humour<sup>10</sup>. In 1886 he married his cousin, Archduchess Maria Theresa, daughter of Archduke Karol Salwator and granddaughter of the King of Sicily<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, she represented a line of the Habsburg family which was primarily associated with Italy (Italian was her native language)<sup>12</sup>. Maria Theresa's personality was the opposite of her husband's: peaceful and self-controlling. This does not change the fact that they were believed to have an exceptionally harmonious and successful marriage<sup>13</sup>. Six children were born to their family: Eleonora Maria, Renata Maria, Charles Albrecht (Polish version: Olbracht), Mechthildis Maria, Leon Charles, and Wilhelm.

However, the most important fact seems to be that in 1895 Charles Stephen inherited the Żywiec estate and decided to change his life completely. He ended his active service in the Habsburg Navy and moved with his family from the warm Adriatic to Żywiec, hidden in the Beskidy basin<sup>14</sup>. Thus, he became the first Habsburg to live directly there – the previous owners, though they took care for the properties, treated them as part of larger estates (the Duchy of Teschen).

<sup>6</sup> Dudek, *Habsbursko-hybrydowy*, 275.

<sup>7</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 274.

<sup>8</sup> *Księżna. Wspomnienia o polskich Habsburgach. Z Marią Krystyną Habsburg rozmawiali Adam Tracz i Krzysztof Błęcha*, ed. Krzysztof Błęcha, Adam Tracz (Żywiec: MoniMed, 2009), 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Księżna*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 276.

<sup>11</sup> *Księżna*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Krzysztof Błęcha, Adam Tracz, „Ostatni król Polski” Karol Stefan Habsburg. *Historia polskich Habsburgów* (Żywiec: BoniMed, 2012), 66–72.

<sup>13</sup> *Księżna*, 170.

<sup>14</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 276.

Charles Stephen settled in the palace already built by Albrecht. It was colloquially called the "new palace" in contrast to the old castle, erected around 1500, which was not suitable for living<sup>15</sup>. Charles Stephen thoroughly rebuilt and modernised the nineteenth-century residence of his uncle and began to manage the Żywiec estate. However, the most fascinating and unusual aspect turned out to be another, parallel process.

Charles Stephen became interested in the culture of the people living in his new properties and gradually began to identify with Polish heritage and nationality. First, he learned Polish and soon he began to speak it quite well<sup>16</sup>. He also established intensive contacts with Polish artists, intellectuals, and aristocracy. He hired the most famous architects from Kraków, Franciszek Mączyński and Tadeusz Stryjeński, to rebuild his palace<sup>17</sup>. The walls of the residence were decorated with works by Polish painters, e.g., Wojciech Kossak<sup>18</sup>. Settled in Galicia, Charles Stephen quickly became patron of local science, including the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Polska Akademia Umiejętności*)<sup>19</sup>. Last but not least, he decided that his children had to learn Polish. This process of "growing into Polishness" extended for a period of several years, but one cannot help the impression that it was very intense. His crowning achievement was to marry his daughters to the members of the best Polish aristocratic families: Archduchess Mechthildis Maria married Olgierd Czartoryski, while Archduchess Renata married Hieronim Radziwiłł<sup>20</sup>.

It is worth remembering that at the same time Charles Stephen remained a Habsburg and respected his duty to serve the state and the dynasty. As a member of the European reigning house, he also led a fully cosmopolitan life and staying in the Beskidy forests did not bother him in any way. In 1907, his sister, Spanish regent Marie Cristine, visited Żywiec<sup>21</sup>. Charles Stephen's great passion was still the sea, especially the Mediterranean, where he sailed every year for several months on board private yachts commissioned in British shipyards<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the identity of this remarkable man can be described as a combination of various interests. There is no doubt that at least until the end of World War I he certainly remained Austrian (understood as Habsburg) and the European, cosmopolitan aristocrat. At the same time, he started to describe himself as a Pole or the "Polish Habsburg"<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 276.

<sup>16</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 277.

<sup>17</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 110–111; *Księżna*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 172–175.

<sup>19</sup> Grodziski, *Habsburgowie*, 8–9.

<sup>20</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 6–16, 144–163; Grodziski, *Habsburgowie*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 118; *Księżna*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 277.

<sup>23</sup> What certainly helped Charles Stephen to find his way to identify himself with the Polish society and culture, was the loyalist, openly pro-Habsburg attitude of the Polish, Galician elites, especially intellectuals and politicians, e.g. Michał Bobrzyński. More: Larry Wolff, *Idea Galicji. Historia i fantazja w kulturze politycznej Habsburgów: The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture*, transl. by Tomasz Bieroń (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2020), 505–510.

He also eagerly emphasised his relationship with the region where he settled and tended to use the title "Count of Żywiec"<sup>24</sup>.

The process of Charles Stephen's gradual identification with Poland led to a very interesting result at the time of World War I. The eccentric Habsburg from Żywiec began to be widely associated with the Poles and the Polish cause. As a result, during various political disputes, the notion began to appear that Karol Stefan should become the Habsburg candidate for the king of Poland. This idea appeared in different places and at different times. The first time it was probably mentioned, which seems to be a kind of a paradox, was in 1915 in Russian newspapers published in Petrograd. Generally, this thread was closely related to Austro-Polish plans: the idea to establish a new Polish state connected with the Central Powers and consisting of Galicia enlarged by territories of the former "Russian Poland". These ideas, although widely promoted by some Galician political parties, can be described as quite vague. Polish activists and journalists usually mentioned not Charles Stephen, but rather emperor Franz Josef himself, as a potential head of a future Polish state. Nevertheless, the owner of the Żywiec estate was also mentioned in this context.

The year 1916 brought a definite change in the situation. It then became clear to the Central Powers that something should be done with the Polish cause. From the summer of 1915, Germany and Austro-Hungary actually occupied all ethnic Polish territories and the question of their future demanded clarification (or at least a kind of declaration). Military factors also had an impact on speeding up decisions. It was a time when the Central Powers bled seriously on all fronts: during heavy fighting at Verdun and the Somme, the endless battles upon the Socha River (Isonzo) on the Italian front, and finally that summer, the surprising offensive of Brusilov in the east. In that situation, the governments in Berlin and Vienna became interested in using the occupied Polish territories as the reservoir of a new armed force, which could have played a very important role on the European battlefields (the mobilisation possibilities of the former Russian Kingdom of Poland were estimated to be around one million people).

That situation was the starting point for the so-called "Act of November 5th, 1916": a political declaration by the Central Powers announcing the reestablishment of the Kingdom of Poland, consisting exclusively of the territories that had been under Russian rule before 1915. It became clear that the new, autonomous state would not be a part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy but a separate political being. Thus, it was impossible for Franz Josef to become the future king of Poland. Charles Stephan Habsburg, a member of the imperial dynasty and a man deeply rooted in Polish reality, became a natural candidate<sup>25</sup>.

The issue of Charles Stephen's candidacy for the Polish throne is a topic for a separate paper<sup>26</sup>. Without going into detail, it is enough to say that the Austrians themselves decided not to implement this project and, according to some historical

<sup>24</sup> Błecha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 138.

<sup>25</sup> Błecha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 213.

<sup>26</sup> Błecha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 94–237.

sources, Charles Stephen paradoxically enjoyed neither favour nor true trust on the part of the Vienna court, both in the times of Franz Josef and his successor, Charles I. After many years, the owner of Żywiec also claimed that he would not accept the crown, because, in his opinion, it would be detrimental to the Polish people<sup>27</sup>. Leaving aside the reasons for the failure of that candidacy, the fact is that it was seriously considered by both Germans and Austrians, and above all enjoyed popularity among the politicians who supported the Austro-Polish solution<sup>28</sup>.

“Charles Stephen: the last king of Poland”: this undoubtedly interesting issue appeals to the imagination and prompted some historians to make far-reaching interpretations. An excellent American historian, Timothy Snyder, in his book dedicated to the life of the son of Charles Stephen, Wilhelm, argued that the owner of Żywiec planned to seek the Polish throne from the very beginning of his Galician life<sup>29</sup>. That idea was his main motivation when in 1895 he moved from the Adriatic coast to the Polish highlands. Snyder claims that the ambitious and intelligent Charles Stephen, a representative of the Habsburg branch deprived of any chance of succession, noticed a significant fact: at that time Poles remained the largest European, historical nation that did not have its own statehood. According to Snyder’s interpretation, the owner of Żywiec was convinced that sooner or later the Polish cause would have to find a solution<sup>30</sup>. Considering the reality of the time it seemed to be quite possible that, similarly to all Central and East-European countries, the future Poland would be a monarchy. According to nineteenth-century practice, rulers of the newly emerged states were usually appointed from members of the old, though not necessarily native, dynasties. As Snyder claims, Charles Stephen simply noted that Poles are the largest nation in Europe without a king and he, as the Habsburg, was to be that king.

This theory, although it seems to be quite logical, unfortunately tends to be an ahistorical analysis. During World War I, Charles Stephen was indeed considered as a candidate for the king of Poland. This does not change the fact that in the 1890s, when the Habsburgs moved to Żywiec, the situation was completely different. The Polish cause practically did not exist in international relations and absolutely all European governments treated it as a closed matter and an element of the internal policy of the partitioning powers. It was a period when no one expected that the issue of Poland's independence would emerge again in the foreseeable future. There is no reason to say that the representative of the Habsburg branch was such a far-sighted visionary and predicted events that even Poles themselves did not expect at that time. The concept that Charles Stephen implemented a far-reaching political plan, in fact is not supported by any source material.

Snyder's interpretation is, however, an interesting attempt to answer a difficult question: why did the new owner of Żywiec start to associate himself with Poland

<sup>27</sup> *Księżna*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 213.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Czerwony książę*, transl. by Maciej Antosiewicz (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2010), 35–36.

<sup>30</sup> Snyder, *Czerwony książę*, 49–50.

with such conviction? His approach seriously deviated from the attitude of all other representatives of the Habsburg family. It seems, however, that this difference holds the answer. According to many sources, Charles Stephen was an individualist, reluctant to follow beaten paths, curious about the world and looking for non-standard ways and solutions. This is also just a hypothesis. The important point is that any analysis of the background of identity choices cannot exclude an emotional component.

Interestingly, Timothy Snyder himself emphasises the importance of such emotional motivation. In his book, he analyses the life of Charles Stephen's son, Wilhelm, who during World War I decided to adopt a radically different identity than his father. The young Habsburg decided to tie himself with the Ukrainian cause. At that time, Ukrainians were also developing ideas of establishing their own state. Wilhelm openly supported their aspirations and, similarly to his father, began to be considered as a candidate for the throne, but this time the Ukrainian throne. His decision deeply influenced his relationship with his father: in the face of a growing Polish-Ukrainian conflict, Charles Stephen did not accept the political orientation of his son. In consequence, it even resulted in Wilhelm's disinheritance. It is important that Timothy Snyder considers Wilhelm's choice to be mainly emotional. The American author underlines the rebellious nature of the young Habsburg and the desire to undermine his father's authority. On the other hand, what played an important role was a romantic fascination with Ukrainian folklore<sup>31</sup>. That "William embroidered", as he was called in reference to the patterned Ukrainian shirts, he wore under the Habsburg uniform, contrary to his father – the Habsburg of Poles – decided to become the Habsburg of Ukrainians. Leaving aside Wilhelm's biography, it is important that according to Snyder's theory, the choice of the son was strictly emotional. Thus, it is difficult to understand why this type of motivation could not be the background for the choice of the father?

Going back to the history of the older Habsburg of Żywiec, the end of 1918 brought an extremely important moment, the final choice of his national identity. Up to that point, despite pro-Polish sympathies, throughout the whole of World War I Charles Stephen consistently emphasised his Habsburg patriotism. In November 1918 Austria-Hungary fell. Poland was reborn. This was the most important moment in the history of the Habsburg from Żywiec. He ultimately decided that it was time to become a Pole. This is not about accepting the citizenship of the new state, but about a decision regarding national identity with all its consequences. Charles Stephen simply decided that he wanted to become a Polish patriot<sup>32</sup>. A similar decision was immediately made by his sons, Charles Albrecht and Leon, who joined the Polish Army<sup>33</sup>. In the following years, they fought in

<sup>31</sup> Snyder, *Czerwony książę*, 75–79.

<sup>32</sup> Błecha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 276–277; *Księżna*, 29. The case of Polish citizenship for Habsburgs continued until 1921: State Archive in Katowice, Section in Bielsko-Biała (APKOB-B), sygn. 13/908/0/1/1, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Błecha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 273.



the wars waged to save independence and establish the borders of the young republic<sup>34</sup>.

The decision of Charles Stephen was radical and consistently implemented. Surprisingly, it was not influenced by the fact that the young Polish state felt distrust towards the Habsburg family. After all, they were members of the dynasty ruling one of the partitioning powers. Moreover, as a result of an action started by one of deputies of the Polish Peasant's Party, the Ministry of the Agriculture and State Properties commissioned a compulsory state administration on the Habsburg estate, which lasted until 1924 and caused a significant reduction in the family's standard of living<sup>35</sup>. Properties returned to the Habsburgs after an international intervention (with a contribution from the King of Spain Alfons XIII, Charles Stephen's nephew)<sup>36</sup>. The whole issue had no effect on the decision of the owners of Żywiec to become Poles. It is worth emphasising that this was at exactly the same time Charles Stephan disinherited his son, Wilhelm, for supporting the Ukrainians in their conflict with the Poles<sup>37</sup>.

The oldest son, Charles Albrecht, followed the decision of the senior of the family<sup>38</sup>. In 1920, he married a Swedish aristocrat, Alice née Ankarkrona, widow of Count Ludwik Badeni, member of one of the most eminent families in Galicia<sup>39</sup>. Despite the fact that the young couple was of Austrian and Swedish origins they considered themselves Polish. Their children — Charles Stephen (born in 1921), Maria-Christina (born 1923) and Renata Maria (born 1931) — were brought up in a very patriotic atmosphere<sup>40</sup>. Although the children were taught several European languages, their mother language was Polish<sup>41</sup>. The Habsburgs were also involved in various social activities, financially supporting, e.g., the Polish Academy of Sciences and Polish scouting. They funded scholarships for talented students at the University of Science and Technology in Kraków (AGH)<sup>42</sup>. In their palace in Żywiec they hosted many distinguished Poles, including President Ignacy Mościcki, sculptor Antoni Madeyski and Archbishop Adam Stefan Sapieha<sup>43</sup>. Charles Albrecht personally made friends with many

<sup>34</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 277–281.

<sup>35</sup> The administration was established under the peace treaty of Saint-Germain which ruled that all former imperial property was taken over by the Polish state, Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 280; *Księżna*, 30–31.

<sup>36</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 280–281.

<sup>37</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 238–268; *Księżna*, 32–34.

<sup>38</sup> Bożena Husar, “Habsburg Karol Olbracht Lotaryński (1888–1951) arcyksiążę austriacki, pułkownik Wojska Polskiego,” in *Słownik biograficzny Żywiecczyzny*, pt. I, ed. Antoni Urbaniec (Żywiec: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Gazeta Żywiecka, 1995), 74.

<sup>39</sup> Judyta Syrek, *Nie bój się żyć. Biografia ojca Joachima Badeniego* (Kraków: Znak, 2014), 46–60; Husar, *Habsburg Karol Olbracht Lotaryński*, 73; *Księżna*, 39–41.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Albrecht and Alice had one more son, Olbracht Maksymilian (born in 1926), who died of diphtheria at the age of two. Also, Alice's son from her first marriage, Kazimierz (later a Dominican, Father Joachim Badeni), was brought up in their home, Syrek, *Nie bój się żyć*, 77–79.

<sup>41</sup> *Księżna*, 77.

<sup>42</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 283; Syrek, *Nie bój się żyć*, 69.

<sup>43</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 283; Syrek, *Nie bój się żyć*, 69.

Polish officers, including General Franciszek Kleeberg<sup>44</sup>. On the eve of World War II, the Habsburgs also provided substantial funds for the Polish army<sup>45</sup>.

Charles Albrecht and Alice consistently preserved their Polish identity during World War II and paid a high price for it. The Nazis had no mercy for the family who had "betrayed the German nation" and stubbornly refused to leave the occupied country or sign the *volkslist*<sup>46</sup>. Charles Albrecht was arrested, tortured, and imprisoned in poor conditions<sup>47</sup>. Due to the fact that he was a member of the former imperial family, the Nazis were afraid to implement the most drastic measures. He was finally released in 1941 as a partially paralysed man<sup>48</sup>. The Nazis also established a forced administrator over the Habsburg properties<sup>49</sup>. Alice, forced with her children to leave the palace, lived in rather poor conditions. Even at that time she participated in the resistance movement: she was a sworn member of the Union of Armed Struggle and the Home Army<sup>50</sup>. Due to her fluency in foreign languages, she was responsible for listening to western radio stations and for preparing reports for the command of the Home Army. The son of the archducal couple, Charles Stephen, as well as the son of Alice from her first marriage, Kazimierz Badeni, managed to escape to the West and they both joined the Polish army<sup>51</sup>.

Fate did not spare the family in the post-war period. Although initially they were promised their estates (due to their merits during the war), after the communists finally took over in 1947 Habsburgs properties were confiscated and parcelled out<sup>52</sup>. Despite this, the family continued efforts to shape their lives in Poland, but gradually it turned out to be extremely difficult. Charles Albrecht was the first to leave Poland and travelled to Sweden for treatment. He died there in 1951. Soon, Alice and her daughters also left to the country<sup>53</sup>. She never returned to Poland; however, to the end of her life (she died in 1985) she remained interested in the country's problems<sup>54</sup>. She was also distinguished several times for her military service. Her daughter, Maria-Christina, lived in Switzerland, but she never accepted citizenship, claiming that she could only be Polish<sup>55</sup>. As a result, she remained stateless for many years. She did not return to Żywiec until 2001<sup>56</sup>. She spent the

<sup>44</sup> Hyla, *Habsburgowie w Żywcu*, 283; *Księżna*, 32.

<sup>45</sup> Błęcha, Tracz, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 237–238.

<sup>46</sup> Syrek, *Nie bój się żyć*, 144.

<sup>47</sup> Grodziski, *Habsburgowie*, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Bogumiła Hyla, „Patriotyczna postawa ostatnich właścicieli Żywiecczyzny oraz ich dzieci w latach II wojny światowej,” *Karta Groni* 16 (1991): 18–22.

<sup>49</sup> Tracz, Błęcha, „*Ostatni król Polski*”, 365; Mirosław Sikora, „Cena lojalności wobec II Rzeczypospolitej. Wywłaszczenie Habsburgów żywieckich przez narodowosocjalistyczne Niemcy 1939–1944,” *Pamięć i sprawiedliwość* 1(17) (2001): 231–245.

<sup>50</sup> Syrek, *Nie bój się żyć*, 141–143.

<sup>51</sup> Syrek, *Nie bój się żyć*, 145.

<sup>52</sup> Grodziski, *Habsburgowie*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> *Księżna*, 175–176.

<sup>54</sup> *Księżna*, 185–186.

<sup>55</sup> *Księżna*, 202.

<sup>56</sup> Małgorzata Terteka, „Życie codzienne Marii Krystyny Habsburg (1923–2012),” *Biuletyn Historii Wychowania* 33 (2015): 138.

last years of her life in a small apartment offered to her by the authorities of Żywiec. It was located in a wing of the former Habsburg palace while the main building was turned into a local school.

As we can see, the Habsburgs' choice of Polishness was indeed extremely consistent. However, it should be clarified that it was the case of the family of Charles Albrecht, the main heir of Żywiec after death of Charles Stephen in 1933. Regardless of the Ukrainian identity of Wilhelm, Archduke Leon also made a different choice. After serving in the Polish army, he settled in Bestwina, the smaller estate of the Habsburgs of Żywiec, and in 1922 he married Marie Klothild de Thuillieres, Countess Mentjoye and de la Roche. Apparently, as the family later claimed, thanks to the influence of his wife, he assumed German identity: that language and culture dominated in his home<sup>57</sup>. On the other hand, he remained a loyal citizen of Poland until the end of his life. To sum up: of the three brothers of Austrian origins, one followed in the footsteps of his father and became a patriotic Pole, another remained German, while the third identified himself as Ukrainian.

Another example of a family whose fate was determined by the collapse of the old political and social order after World War I, were the German dukes Hochberg von Pless, owners of huge estates in Lower and Upper Silesia. They set an example as an aristocratic family who, unlike the Habsburgs from Żywiec, did not belong to the ruling dynasty, but thanks to numerous and very successful economic investments, they came to own a fabulous estate. At the end of the 19th century, the value of Hochberg properties was estimated to a sum of 64 million marks in Lower Silesia and 95 million marks in Upper Silesia<sup>58</sup>. These included landed estates, mines, factories, quarries, breweries, two huge palaces in Książ (Lower Silesia, German: *Schloss Fürstenstein*) and in Pszczyzna (Upper Silesia, German: *Schloss Pless*), the Szczawno Zdrój resort (German: *Bad Salzbrunn*), residences in Berlin, Wrocław and Munich as well as in the other European cities. The Hochbergs were considered to be the third richest family in the German Empire (after the imperial family and dukes von Hohenlohe)<sup>59</sup>. The well-known brewery in Tychy is preserved to this day and is a testimony of the former power of the family.

The spectacular financial career of the family primarily resulted from the activity of talented prince Hans Heinrich XI (1833–1907)<sup>60</sup>. Nevertheless, the period analysed in this analysis falls within the life of his son, Hans Heinrich XV (1861–1938). Despite the apparent similarities, e.g., the lifestyle typical of the aristocratic elites, he was a different personality from the previously discussed Charles Stephan Habsburg. Hans Heinrich, as a member of one of Europe's richest families, in his youth served for a short time in the army and experienced

<sup>57</sup> *Księżna*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> Bogna Wernichowska, "Zamiast zakończenia. Dama z perłami," in Daisy Hochberg von Pless, *Taniec na wulkanie 1873–1918*, transl. by Mariola Palcewicz (Kraków: Arcana, 2004), 434.

<sup>59</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 434.

<sup>60</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 434.

university studies<sup>61</sup>. He had some interest in diplomacy (in particular, he was fascinated by Anglo-Saxon countries), but lack of real involvement in the political life of the German Empire caused his career to be limited to a few spectacular, though not significant, incidents. The vast majority of the young Hochberg's time was consumed by aristocratic pastimes, such as horse riding and endless hunting, which he carried out almost all over the world. His personal friendship with the later emperor Wilhelm Hohenzollern also played important role<sup>62</sup>.

In 1891 Hans Heinrich XV married Mary Theresa Olivia Cornwallis-West, privately called Daisy, who came from one of the best aristocratic families in Great Britain (originating, e.g., from the Plantagenets and associated with Winston Churchill)<sup>63</sup>. However, the marriage did not change the life of the young Hochberg much. His spouse, though blessed with extraordinary beauty and intellect, easily entered the carefree and wasteful lifestyle of her husband. The couple had four children: a daughter who died a few days after birth and three sons: Hans Heinrich XVII (born in 1900), Alexander (born in 1905) and Konrad (born in 1910).

In 1907 the old Duke Hans Heinrich XI died and his son inherited a huge estate<sup>64</sup>. Admittedly he showed some involvement in the management of his estates and industry, which had been systematically expanded and modernised. At that time, the concern of the dukes of Pless, with their headquarters in Katowice, was finally established. Hans Heinrich also actively participated in the political and local government of the Silesian province<sup>65</sup>. At the same time, the family did not give up their exclusive lifestyle, which consumed a huge amount of money. The Hochbergs maintained two huge castles and a 200-man court, with the entire array of ceremony and etiquette. They also took part in the life of the European aristocratic elites and ruling dynasties. For many years, Daisy was cordially friends with the Czarina of Russia Alexandra (wife of Nicholas II)<sup>66</sup>. The proverbial "millstone round the neck", which permanently burdened finances of the family, became the project of a huge reconstruction of the castle in Książ, which was to become (and actually became), the largest and most spectacular aristocratic seat in Silesia<sup>67</sup>.

At that time, the Hochberg family completely identified themselves with Germany, both in the political and national contexts. The owners of Książ and Pszczyna were to a certain point cosmopolitan: in the everyday life of the family, they spoke English rather than German. Nevertheless, it should be seen as a kind

<sup>61</sup> Jerzy Polak, *Poczet panów i książąt pszczyńskich*, pt. II, *Od Fryderyka Ermanna Anhaltu do Jana Henryk XV* (Pszczyna: Towarzystwo Miłośników Ziemi Pszczyńskiej, 2007), 196–197.

<sup>62</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 197.

<sup>63</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 435; Beata Górniołek, Bronisława Jeske-Cybulska, *Księżna Daisy. Pani na Książu i Pszczynie* (Mikołów: Kamilia, 2002), 17, 31–39.

<sup>64</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 197.

<sup>65</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 202–203.

<sup>66</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 438.

<sup>67</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 200–202.

of nod to the duke's wife's British origins and a manifestation of his sympathy for Anglo-Saxon culture. The Hochbergs occasionally emphasised their relationship with Polish, or rather Silesian tradition. Their youngest son Konrad was called by the family Bolko. Hans Heinrich himself knew Polish from his youth (apart from the other foreign languages in which young aristocrats were educated). However, this should be interpreted as a gesture towards regional, Silesian culture and tradition. This was probably also an expression of certain political ambitions of Hans Heinrich: he supposedly dreamed of having the title of Archduke of Silesia (*Herzog Schlesiens*) and that is why he eagerly underlined his distant affinity with dukes from the Piast dynasty who ruled Silesia several hundred years previously. On the façade of the new wing of the palace in Książ, he placed the Piast coats of arms, which was a clear sign of these aspirations<sup>68</sup>. However, it did not change the German character of this family. Moreover, Hans Heinrich can be described as a German nationalist, though cautious and pragmatic. He consistently supported German local organizations (*Hakata*) and cultural initiatives in Upper Silesia, although he opposed rapid and violent Germanisation. This was a manifestation of concerns about the possible increase of local conflicts, which would cause a significant disturbance of his business ventures<sup>69</sup>.

The peak of the family's social and political importance was the time of World War I. The palace in Pszczyna became a headquarters for the German army and was often visited by Emperor Wilhelm II himself, as well as all major German commanders and politicians, such as Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff<sup>70</sup>. In July 1916, an important political conference was held in the family's Upper Silesian residence. One of participants was the King of Bulgaria<sup>71</sup>. In the succeeding months, Pszczyna became the place for the German-Austrian negotiations preceding the decision on establishing an autonomous Kingdom of Poland (announced in Act of November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1916). Interestingly, Hans Heinrich XV was also temporarily considered as a candidate to become king of Poland<sup>72</sup>. Obviously, there is a clear analogy with the previously discussed Charles Stephen Habsburg. The only difference was that the owner of Żywiec actually identified himself with Polishness, while Hans Heinrich Hochberg had fully accepted a German identity.

This is how we get to 1918, when the Hochberg family, the most eminent aristocracy of Silesia, faced the fall of the German Empire and the emergence of a dramatic question about the family's nationality and property. The collapse of the old order caused the duke of Pszczyna shock and disbelief. In the first weeks after the fall of the Hohenzollern monarchy, Silesia remained a part of the German state, but gradually demands also appeared from the Polish side. Howe-

<sup>68</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 201.

<sup>69</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 204.

<sup>70</sup> Damian Okręć, Justyna Okręć, "Kwatera główna," *Głos Pszczyński. Historia* 10/529, XXV (2014): 4–18.

<sup>71</sup> Daisy Hochberg von Pless, *Taniec na wulkanie 1873–1918* (Kraków: Arcana, 2004), 362–363.

<sup>72</sup> Hochberg von Pless, *Taniec na wulkanie*, 368–370.

ver, the biggest problem for Hans Heinrich was something else: the socialist and anti-aristocratic nature of the changes taking place in the emerging Weimar Republic (liquidation of nobility and its privileges, adverse tax laws, and the Act of July 1919 that parcelled the great landed property). This was probably the background to what Hans Heinrich did in late 1918: he proposed the creation of the "Free State of Silesia", shaped in such way that the new country would cover all his properties<sup>73</sup>. He probably saw himself as the leader of that potential political state. Hans Heinrich XV tried to come forward with this project during the Peace Conference in Paris, but met only temporary interest from the delegations of the Anglo-Saxon states<sup>74</sup>.

It soon turned out that the real game would take place between two countries: Germany and Poland. At that time, the project for an independent Silesian state had no chance of success for three reasons. First, the Silesian national movement, although it existed at that time, was relatively weak and among the local population there was a lack of universal Silesian national consciousness. Secondly, both countries interested in the incorporation of Silesia could not imagine abandoning the matter. Having at least some of the Silesian economic potential was a key issue for the functioning of both Germany and Poland. Thirdly, it can be assumed that the only influential group that could support this idea in international relations was the local German aristocrats and their interest was only to be temporary. Later they used the concept for purely tactical reasons: as an argument in the game they were playing with Poland. The overall political activity of Hans Heinrich XV leaves no doubt that he fully argued for Silesia's belonging to Germany. He supported the German delegation for the Peace Conference in Paris financially, and in his Pszczyna estates he facilitated the creation of German self-defence forces<sup>75</sup>.

The Versailles Treaty, signed on June 28th, 1919, contained a stipulation that the future of Upper Silesia would be decided by a plebiscite<sup>76</sup>. Hans Heinrich believed the outcome of the Paris conference to be unfair and harmful to the Germans<sup>77</sup>. Shortly afterwards, in August 1919, as a result of the complicating political and social situation, the first Silesian Uprising broke out quite spontaneously. It is worth emphasising that these events took place in the middle of the estates of the duke of Pszczyna: the first outbreaks occurred in the villages of Urbanowice and Paprocany, which today are districts of the city of Tychy, only 15 kilometres from Pszczyna<sup>78</sup>. Hans Heinrich was not present in Upper Silesia at

<sup>73</sup> Hans Heinrich XV did not create this concept, but supported ideas promoted at the time by various Silesian journalists and activists. The independence of Silesia was considered in various variants – not only full sovereignty, but also as a republic separated from Prussia, which would be connected with the German state, Dariusz Jerczyński, *Śląski ruch narodowy* (Zabrze: Narodowa Oficyna Śląska, 2006), 49–58.

<sup>74</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 208; Jerczyński, *Śląski ruch narodowy*, 65.

<sup>75</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 208.

<sup>76</sup> Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Powstania śląskie 1919–1920–1921. Nieznana wojna polsko-niemiecka* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2019), 101.

<sup>77</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 208.

<sup>78</sup> Kaczmarek, *Powstania śląskie*, 151–160.

the time, but his palace was intended for German military barracks and anti-insurgent action. Also, the captured insurgents were tortured there and in the plants belonging to the Hochberg group, e.g. in the brewery in Tychy<sup>79</sup>. Interestingly, after the suppression of the uprising, Hans Heinrich established economic relations with Poland and decided to settle permanently in Pszczyna. There is something characteristic in his method of action: on the one hand he fully supported German aspirations, on the other, he knew that his business must continue to operate and therefore accepted the existence of the Polish state and understood the need to achieve some kind of agreement. Clear nationalism, but also pragmatism.

In the next months, the Polish-German conflict became more intense and brutal. In August 1920 the Second Silesian Uprising broke out. The duke's approach to the Polish claims was beyond any doubt. In his factories, officials were fully involved in the anti-Polish terror, while Hans Heinrich himself contributed to forming a German militia. At the same time, the events frightened the duke: he decided to evacuate 11 wagons of furniture from the palace in Pszczyna and from the nearby hunting lodge in Promnice. In autumn 1920, unexpectedly, he again proposed the independence of Silesia, which, however, seems to be a desperate attempt to prevent possible incorporation of part of Silesia into the Polish state. It is worth mentioning that the duke's emotions were somehow understandable: although Germans could generally hope to defend their possessions in the largest industrial cities, the Hochberg estates were located in the southern, slightly more agricultural part of the region, where pro-Polish sympathies were definitely stronger. During the plebiscite in March 1921, Hans Heinrich tried to counteract the process that seemed to be increasingly inevitable. He brought 240 workers from his estates in Lower Silesia to join the plebiscite and they obviously voted for Germany. It did not change much: the results of the voting in his possessions clearly pointed to Poland<sup>80</sup>. When in May 1921 the Third Silesian Uprising broke out, the entire county (*powiat*) of Pszczyna was immediately taken over by Polish forces<sup>81</sup>. At the same time, Hans Heinrich again supported German self-defence and even financed the armed forces that fought on the German side during the Battle of Mount St. Anna. He also sent his son, Hans Heinrich XVII, to the battlefield<sup>82</sup>. It is worth mentioning that many local German aristocrats and industrialists acted in a similar way<sup>83</sup>.

The results of the uprisings and the previous plebiscite, however, determined the fate of the estates of the Hochberg family in Upper Silesia. Hans Heinrich, as

<sup>79</sup> Połak, *Poczet panów*, 208.

<sup>80</sup> 74.2% of the citizens of the powiat of Pszczyna voted for Poland, Górnioćzek, Jeske-Cybulska, *Księżna Daisy*, 229; *Encyklopedia powstań śląskich*, ed. Franciszek Hawranek (Opole: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Śląskiego w Opolu, 1982), 685–686.

<sup>81</sup> Mieczysław Wrzosek, "Działania bojowe trzeciego powstania śląskiego 3 maja – 5 czerwca 1921 r." *Studia Podlaskie* XIII (2003): 35.

<sup>82</sup> Połak, *Poczet panów*, 210.

<sup>83</sup> It is worth noting that some Silesian aristocrats did not share this attitude and showed pro-Polish sympathies, e.g., Hans Georg, Count Oppersdorff, who had a Polish wife, Kaczmarek, *Powstania śląskie*, 401.

well as the other local landowners and industrialists, were afraid of the upcoming Polish rule. Thus, the Polish side quickly realised that it was crucial for the economy of the country to reach an agreement and continue production. This was understood mainly by the local Polish politicians, who knew how important the role of the German owners of factories and coal mines was. Shortly after the Third Uprising, in July 1921, the leader of the Polish Silesians, Wojciech Korfanty, met with representatives of the eminent German-Silesian families (including the Hochbergs) and argued that the incorporation into Poland promised a chance to open new economic opportunities<sup>84</sup>. The duke of Pszczyna also realised the necessity of an agreement. At the turn of 1922, his representatives negotiated intensively with the Polish side, trying to regulate the situation of the Hochberg family and their possessions in Poland. As a result, the so-called Geneva Convention was signed. The Polish authorities were obliged to respect Hochberg's property, his current privileges, and rights. Hans Heinrich accepted Polish citizenship, which does not mean that he surrendered his German passport, claiming that a significant part of his property, e.g., Książ Castle, remained on the other side of the border.

The attitude of Hans Heinrich XV in interwar Poland seems to be a further consequence of his pragmatic approach. He stayed mainly in Książ, although he willingly visited his Polish estates to hunt. He accepted the new situation and tried to establish correct and even friendly relations with the Polish authorities: he hosted Polish generals, officers, officials and even President Stanisław Wojciechowski in Pszczyna. He supported local Silesian organisations and social movements, including the Polish Red Cross and scouting. Nationalist Germans even began to accuse him of Polonophilism, but the duke defended himself by constantly financing German culture, veterans, hunting, economic organisations and even some right-wing political parties<sup>85</sup>. It seems that during that period the only ambition of Hans Heinrich XV was to secure safe conditions for his economic activity.

Paradoxically, it was the economy that decided the gradual decline of the family in the interwar period. The first problem were the high taxes imposed by the Polish administration, which was a part of the general policy towards great ownership at that time. In addition to some unsuccessful investments, the huge sums consumed by the duke and the expensive reconstruction of the castle in Książ (which lasted until 1927) caused permanent financial problems<sup>86</sup>. Another blow to the family was the Great Depression and the emergence of further tax arrears in the early 1930s. The huge dispute that the Hochbergs had with the Polish administration ended with lawsuits in the Court of Arbitration in Bytom and the Council of the League of Nations in Geneva. Finally, in 1937 the Polish state took over 56 percent of the estate<sup>87</sup>. The Hochbergs also suffered from huge

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<sup>84</sup> The other families present at that meeting were the Donnersmarcks, the heirs of Gieschego and the Ballestrems, Kaczmarek, *Powstania śląskie*, 521–522.

<sup>85</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 212–214.

<sup>86</sup> Jerzy Polak, *Ziemia pszczyńska. Rozwój gospodarczy od Piastów do Hochbergów* (Pszczyna: Bractwo Gospodarcze Związku Górnośląskiego, 2000), 49.

<sup>87</sup> Polak, *Ziemia pszczyńska*, 54.



debts in Germany: as a result, all the equipment of the castle in Książ was sold<sup>88</sup>. At last, only one butler was left with the sick and aging duke. It was this tragic financial situation that finally led Hans Heinrich to reconcile with the Polish state, sign the tax agreement and settle in Pszczyna again<sup>89</sup>. He died during his medical trip to Paris in 1938<sup>90</sup>.

In the interwar period, the Hochberg family was also touched by moral problems and scandals. During the Great War the marriage of Hans Heinrich XV and Daisy began to fall apart. They separated in autumn 1918 and formally divorced in 1923<sup>91</sup>. The owner of Pszczyna, who was 64 years old at that time, married again the much younger, half-Spanish Klotylda. However, this was just the beginning of the real scandal that broke out when the new wife of the Duke of Pszczyna got into a love affair with her husband's youngest son Bolko. Two children were born from their relationship. Hans Heinrich had to divorce again and forced his son to marry his ex-stepmother<sup>92</sup>. Bolko himself died in 1936 at the age of only 26 in rather unclear circumstances. The fact that the duke's son was arrested by the Gestapo in Gliwice and spent some time in prison certainly played a role in that tragedy<sup>93</sup>.

After the death of Hans Heinrich, the Hochberg properties were still in debt and suffered from very bad financial conditions. According to the testament of the duke of Pszczyna, it was his younger son Alexander who inherited the whole, indivisible estate. This caused a dramatic conflict with his older brother, Hans Heinrich XVII, who wanted to contest his father's will<sup>94</sup>. The Hochbergs entered World War II as a completely ruined and conflicted family. All this overlapped with dilemmas related to their national identity. Contrary to his father, a convinced German, at that time Alexander felt Polish<sup>95</sup>. It is hard to say what factors influenced this declaration: maybe it was growing up in the basically Polish (Silesian) environment of Pszczyna or aversion to his father and the family, whose splendour faded so much at the time. Last but not least, it could have been fear of the Nazi regime identified so much with Germany. That motivation cannot be ignored. During the war, both conflicted brothers decided to fight against Nazi Germany. Alexander fought in the Polish army (taking the name Aleksander Pszczyński), while Hans Heinrich XVII joined the British army (as Henry

<sup>88</sup> Górniołek, Jeske-Cybulska, *Księżna Daisy*, 243.

<sup>89</sup> Górniołek, Jeske-Cybulska, *Księżna Daisy*, 246.

<sup>90</sup> Polak, *Poczet panów*, 223.

<sup>91</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 439; Górniołek, Jeske-Cybulska, *Księżna Daisy*, 230.

<sup>92</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 439.

<sup>93</sup> Bolko was arrested by Gestapo on the absurd charges of not paying for an apartment and a dinner. The actual reasons for the Nazi repression towards the member of one of the most eminent families of the Reich are still unknown. His imprisonment probably contributed to Bolek's death but was not its main cause. There are many indications that the young prince died of leukaemia, Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 440; Górniołek, Jeske-Cybulska, *Księżna Daisy*, 248–249.

<sup>94</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 442.

<sup>95</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 442.

Pless)<sup>96</sup>. Daisy lived at the time in Książ, but as an aristocrat, Englishwoman, and mother of traitors of Germany; consequently, Nazi authorities treated her with considerable distrust. The palace in Książ was confiscated, while the duchess herself lived in difficult conditions. She probably died on June 29, 1943<sup>97</sup>. According to some speculations, this actually occurred more than a year later, and the duchess became a victim of the anti-aristocratic repressions that the Nazis started after the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944<sup>98</sup>.

The above examples of aristocratic families that found themselves in a completely new political and legal reality in November 1918 are only part of a larger issue, but nonetheless they lead to some conclusions.

Firstly, in 1918 (and subsequent years), in the face of the brutal national conflicts, the question of the national identity of the aristocrats could no longer be ignored. A good example are the Habsburgs from Żywiec, who simultaneously identified themselves with Austria (not in the sense of ethnicity, but rather the state and the dynasty) and with Poland (culture, sympathy for the local tradition). Charles Stephen Habsburg, the committed Pole, could not accept the "Ukrainian-ness" of his son Wilhelm. At the same time Hans Heinrich, the committed German, openly supported the fight against Poles and allowed the Germans to torture them in his own palace<sup>99</sup>.

Secondly, some of these choices became persistent and a basis for the family's new ethos. This was the case of Charles Stephen and the marriage of Charles Albrecht (of Austrian origin) and Alice (of Swedish origin), who began to identify themselves as super-patriotic Poles. Their determination and consistency are not easy to explain. It seems that their decisions cannot be analysed without taking into consideration the family's previous, long-term interest in Polish culture and tradition, marked so much by romanticism and well correlated with the deep Catholicism of the Habsburg family.

Thirdly, identity choices were not always definitive and sometimes led to surprising about-turns. Leon Habsburg, although bravely serving in the Polish army, apparently under the influence of his wife, decided to become German. Alexander, son of Hans Heinrich XV, despite all the painful conflicts his father had with "Polishness", eventually became a Pole and fought against Germany during World War II.

Fourth and lastly, it is impossible to resist the impression that conflicts based on nationalism, at least in some cases, were still to be overcome. Still, there was a space for a pragmatic approach. A perfect example would be Hans Heinrich XV, who, although remaining German, eventually decided to reconcile with the Polish state. In 1918 the world changed, but it was not fully ideologised. In general,

<sup>96</sup> See: Michael Luke, *Hansel Pless. Prisoner of History: A Life of HSH Hans Heinrich XVII, the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Pless* (London: The Cygnet Press, 2002).

<sup>97</sup> Górniołek, Jeske-Cybulska, *Księżna Daisy*, 257.

<sup>98</sup> Wernichowska, *Zamiast zakończenia*, 442–444.

<sup>99</sup> The issue of a dramatic transformation of the aristocracy, but in the Bohemian lands, was precisely analysed in a study by Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists. The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

it can be said that the period of World War I initiated the twilight of political and economic importance of the aristocracy but did not bring a definitive end. In some aspects the position of the aristocracy was still very high in the interwar period, e.g. their residences were important centres of social life<sup>100</sup>. The final collapse, at least in Central and Eastern Europe, was only brought about by World War II and the destructive force of totalitarian regimes: Nazi and communist.

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