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## The Representation of Protestants in the Legends of Marian Images in the Territories of the (Former) Grand Duchy of Lithuania

**Keywords:**

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**Abstract:**

The paper is devoted to the representation of Protestants in the stories (legends and miracles) about the miraculous images of Our Lady that come from the territories of the (former) Grand Duchy of Lithuania: involving those currently incorporated in Belarus, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. It considers first the representation of both the locals who converted to Protestantism from Orthodoxy or Catholicism in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century and the Lutheran Swedish invaders of the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century by their contemporaries and later investigates into how the image of Protestants changed with the course of time up to nowadays and what had an impact on this. Interestingly, that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century military invaders from Sweden were described in interchangeable manner with the French soldiers of Napoleon Bonaparte's troops. And now we are witnessing the genesis of a German Nazi soldiers presentation in the miracles attributed to Virgin Mary's images/icons.

### Introduction

The Southern Baltic Sea region has experienced trade, migration and rule by various nations, ethnicities and religions. The German gentry in the Baltic provinces of Sweden and Russia as well as Hanseatic burghers of mostly German origin fuel historical narratives as much as the wars waged over the Southern and Eastern Baltic rim by the major powers in the region. However, the borderland character of this region comprises many more voices and their multicultural

entanglements as recent research has shown,<sup>1</sup> particularly for the middle ages and early modern period.

While current case studies finally pay more attention to the meanings of local populations of different ethnicities, cultural habits and nationalities, which shape the early modern religious borderlands, their narratives have had a limited impact on the grand narratives of national dichotomies and cultural contacts that shape particular borderlands. Organised by the rule of trade and money to the inside, cities like Gdańsk but also Riga or Reval were located in an ever changing environment of religious and power political loyalties, with which they have been confronted not only at times of war, trade interruptions and imperial demands but also through trade contacts, migration and exchange.<sup>2</sup> One of these repeated influx through contacts and migration shall be described in the context of conversions from the Protestant to Catholic faith in the Eastern borderlands in the times of counterreformations, which shaped the multireligious borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian empire.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a complex state in which the division between Protestants and Catholics and Orthodox was growing in the early modern period. Protestants gained an advantage in the Baltic region, where they eliminated images from churches.<sup>3</sup> The situation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was different. Although Protestantism was popular, the majority of population followed Orthodoxy and were treated as an object of Catholic missionary work. What united Catholics and Orthodox were images and icons of Our Lady, especially those of the miraculous or wonder-working type. The religious practice in the Commonwealth was dominated by the developed Marian cult represented *inter alia* in the cult of sacred images, which intensified cultural and religious tensions, as Protestants stigmatised and rejected this cult, while Catholics and Orthodox tried to show the role of images in converting Protestants through miracles and legends. This was especially relevant taking into account that the images of Our Lady were often “forced to migrate” to Poland from neighboring Czechia because of Hussites and from Hungary because of Calvinists.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Globalising Borderlands Studies in Europe and North America*, eds. John W.I. Lee, Michael North (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); here particularly: Kord-Henning Uber, “The Duchy of Courland from 1650–1737: Transformation of a Religious Borderland in the Baltic Sea Region,” 155–178. For context: Michael North, *The Baltic: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 87 ff, 127 ff, 149 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See also Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 1: *The Origins to 1795* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2005), 131–141, esp. 138f.

<sup>3</sup> See: Andrzej Wozniński, “Następstwa protestantyzmu we wczesnonowożytnej sztuce w Gdańsku i ich europejski kontekst,” *Karto-Teka Gdańska* 1 (2017), <http://www.reformacja-pomorze.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1-Wozinski.pdf>, accessed on 6 I 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Mirosław P. Kruk, “Ikona Matki Boskiej w typie Hodegetrii z dawnego kościoła klasztorowego kapucynów we Wrocławiu,” in: *Skarby uniwersyteckich kolekcji*, vol. 1: *Wykłady towarzyszące wystawie*

The main difference between a sacred image in Catholicism and an icon in Orthodoxy is based on their role in liturgical practice. In the practice of the Orthodox Church, an icon is understood not as a simple presentation of a saint person or illustration of an event from the Holy Bible but a remembrance of what is invisible; it contains gracious presence of the saint achieved by preserving the similarity of icon with the personal prototype.<sup>5</sup> The function of a holy image in the Catholic Church was mainly to remind of a depicted saint person or event.

This difference, however, was smoothed out in folk religion, and people made pilgrimages to miraculous images/icons independent of the denomination to which they belonged: Orthodox went on pilgrimage to Catholic Marian sanctuaries and vice versa. The cult of miraculous images/icons was closely related to miracles that occurred in relation to the image/icon. The miracles were recorded and miracle registers could later be published, which made the image/icon more popular and attracted yet more pilgrims of various denominations. Moreover, Marian sanctuaries sometimes attracted even Muslims<sup>6</sup> and Protestants.

Miracles reflected various aspects of social and personal life in a day and age when humans expected the Divine to intercede in such things as disease outbreaks, wars, and religious confrontations. Individuals in search of healing as well as the state looking for victory on the battlefield called upon the Divine to intercede on their behalf. Thus, in the context of religious confrontations, Protestants were also mentioned in the miracles and legends related to miraculous images/icons of Our Lady.

In this paper I would like to investigate the way in which Protestants were represented in the miracles associated with images/icons in Orthodox, Catholic or Uniate sanctuaries in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (which currently constitutes the territories of Belarus, Lithuania, part Ukraine and part of the Poland of today) and how the presentation changed with the course of time up to present day.

First, two big groups of Protestants should be distinguished. One shall include local converts from Catholicism and Orthodoxy to Protestantism, mainly Calvinism or Lutheranism in the early modern period, and the other shall include military invaders who professed Protestantism – Swedish invaders of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – and German invaders during the Second World War. Each of these groups will be further considered separately.

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*Jubileuszowej "Uniwersytet Wrocławski 1811–2011,"* ed. Urszula Bończuk-Dawidziuk (Wrocław: Muzeum Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2013), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Dąb-Kalinowska, "Ikona," in: *Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Krystyna Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, Monika Bielska-Łach, Anna Manteufel-Szarota (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2003), 156–157.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Jurkowski, *Morze litości y łaski Bożey przepaściste z Rożanego-Stoku wylane. Kwitnącemi codzień świeżo dobroczyństw powodziami wonnemi sławy zatokami cały świat Litewski oblewające...* (Wilno 1760), 62; Maria Kałamajska-Saeed, "Obraz czy ikona. O losach pewnego wizerunku Matki Boskiej Sokalskiej," in: *Sarmatia Semper Viva: zbiór studiów ofiarowany przez przyjaciół prof. dr. hab. Tadeuszowi Chrzanowskiemu*, ed. J. Baranowski (Warszawa: SHS, 1993), 155–156.

## Representation of local Protestants

The local Protestants were mentioned mainly in the literature dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century that was devoted to Marian images from mainly Catholic and Uniate sanctuaries. Miracles and legends described conversions of Lutherans and Calvinists to Catholicism under various circumstances, which was supposed to stress a special power of an image and therefore the verity of denomination to which it belonged, i.e., Catholicism, over Protestantism.

An example is the image of Our Lady of *Rożanystok* (mod. Poland) (Fig. 17). The legend, given by the author of a book about the miraculous image, Gabriel Jurkowski, states that it was painted by a Lutheran painter from Grodno who converted to Catholicism before painting the image.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 1. The icon of Our Lady of *Rożanystok*,  
Photo by V.F. Sutiagin, author's archive

An image of Our Lady of *Budslau* (Bel.: Будслаў, Pol. Budzław, mod. Belarus) was claimed to be brought from Rome by Jan Pac, who “became a warm-hearted Catholic from devout heretic”.<sup>9</sup> Logically, the cult of an image that persuaded

<sup>7</sup> The figure presents a photo of a copy of the miraculous icon that previously was in *Rożanystok* and currently is in the orthodox monastery in *Polatsk*, Belarus.

<sup>8</sup> Jurkowski, *Morze litości*.

<sup>9</sup> Eleutery Zielejewicz, *Zwierzyniec na Ziemi niebieski, to iest Puszcza Budzka, łaskami boskimi opływająca, których ludzie przy Cudownym Obrazie Nas. Panny w kościele O. Bernardynów będącym doznawają* (Wino 1650), 9.

a person to convert to Catholicism would help other people choose the correct denomination. There is a separate section in the book devoted to the icon, which describes several conversions of Protestants to Catholicism. These Protestants are depicted as people who came to this sanctuary out of curiosity, for entertainment, or merely to accompany others, and converted to Catholicism after being impressed by the image.

In general, legends and miracles usually presented Polish or Lithuanian protestants mocking sacred images, without an attempt to physically destroy them. Sometimes in literature Protestants were even opposed to the Muslim Tatars who inhabited the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth and expressed disapproval of Protestants' attempts to jeer at Our Lady and her images.<sup>10</sup>

To some extent this reflected the realities of the Polish-Lithuanian state, where Protestantism never posed a serious threat to the Marian cult.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Protestants tended to solve confessional conflicts in a peaceful way.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, there was no need to represent them as physically attacking miraculous images in the books intended for contemporary readers who were already well aware of the situation. However, the ability of an image to change a person's religious convictions clearly demonstrated the superiority of the confession that possessed the image over the person's devotion. This, among others, could strengthen the authority of a particular sanctuary and attract new pilgrims, including those of different confessional or even religious beliefs, thus uniting a heterogeneous society.

It is worth noting, that in the modern period, Protestants converting to Catholicism were most commonly mentioned in the miracles and legends reported for images in Catholic or Uniate sanctuaries, and polemics related to Marian cult were mainly between Catholics and Protestants. In the main, attacks of Protestants were not directed at Orthodox sanctuaries. This might be conditioned by the desire of Protestants to win over Orthodox believers and join hands in containing the counterreformation.<sup>13</sup> In return, Orthodox were quite tolerant of Protestants, which was also reflected in manifestations of the cult of miraculous icons.

There are few miracles associated with icons in Orthodox churches as it was not typical of them to keep miracle registers. But there was one miracle reported in relation to an icon of *Starčytsy* (mod. Majak, Belarus), which was lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup> and whose iconography is not known, that describes the punishment of a person

<sup>10</sup> "Zbór wileński I" in Marcei Kosman, *Protestanci i kontrreformacja: z dziejów tolerancji w Rzeczypospolitej XVI-XVIII wieku* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978), 138.

<sup>11</sup> Janusz Stanisław Pasierb, *Malarz Gdański Herman Han* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1974), 148.

<sup>12</sup> Marcei Kosman, *Protestanci i kontrreformacja*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Janusz Tazbir, *Świat Panów Pańskó* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1986), 251.

<sup>14</sup> It was a common case of images and various other belongings of Catholic and Orthodox churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many images were evacuated by the government of the Russian Empire in 1915 and were not returned after the Revolution of 1917. Their current whereabouts is not known.

who did not duly venerate the icon – a provisor of Starčytsy estate died suddenly after refusing to go to the site of the icon's appearance, calling it a fabrication.<sup>15</sup>

## Representation of Swedish invaders

The more the counterreformation took hold, the less the local Protestants were the focus of miracles of images/icons. Their place was taken by Protestant military invaders, i.e., by Lutheran Swedes, wars with whom took place from the mid-1600s to the 1720s in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The memory of these wars has been preserved in the folk memory of mainly rural areas in Belarus through to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Swedes were the characters of many folk legends – general, local and even family legends – that were transmitted from one generation to another for more than four centuries, evolving over the course of time.

The depiction of the Swedes differs from that of the local Protestants. The Swedish soldiers were presented by their contemporaries as military enemies, rather than religious opponents. Although they certainly did mention Swedes 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century writers mainly wrote about salvation come of Polish-Lithuanian troops and divine intercession in battle that was ascribed to Our Lady's help in relation to one or another miraculous image or icon. These plots were typical for presenting military enemies in the stories related to the images of the Mother of God in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and had consequences typical of the period. The wars promoted the cult of miraculous images in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, especially that of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Wilno (mod. Vilnius, Lithuania).<sup>16</sup>

The Swedes regarded images and precious votives on them as spoils of war. The churches were plundered, the images and votives stolen. The votives left on the icon, as in case of icon from *Trembovla* (mod. Terebovla, Ukraine), which is now in Gdańsk, was already considered a miracle wrought by the image and stressed its special power – it could influence military enemies and religious opponents.<sup>17</sup>

To protect them from the pillage that was likely to ensue, the images, as was done in other military conflicts, were evacuated as troops were approaching. Later, in the post-war period, military events gained legendary character and stories started to emerge depending on the given political and religious situation. Thus, the Notes of Hegumen Orest state that in 1708 an Orthodox monastery near

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Many of images were destroyed by the communists in 1920s and 1930s in the territories included in the Soviet Union and later in the 1950s and 1960s in the territories that joined the USSR in 1939.

<sup>15</sup> Николай (Трусковский), архимандрит, *Историко-статистическое описание Минской епархии* (Санкт-Петербург: типография духовного журнала «Странник», 1864), 70.

<sup>16</sup> Marcei Kosman, *Drogi zaniku pogaństwa u Baltów* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1976), 162.

<sup>17</sup> *Архив Юго-Западной России, издаваемый комиссиею для разбора древних актов, состоящей при Киевском, Подольском и Волынском генерал-губернаторе, часть первая, vol. 12* (Киев 1904), 303.

*Buyničy* (mod. Belarus) was plundered by the Swedes and the soldiers made walkways of the wood from the monastic dormitory church in the local swamp. When the King and his commanders were examining the territories thereabouts, the King's horse refused to step onto the walkway. When one of the planks was turned over and examined, the King saw an image of Jesus on the underside of one plank and that of Mary on that of another. The planks with the images were replaced with other boards and the King, issuing order to bring the planks – now icons – to the monastery and to hang the guilty soldiers, was able to continue on his way.<sup>18</sup>

The most numerous references to Swedes in the legends were made during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the period after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, when the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were incorporated into the Russian Empire, with Orthodoxy being made a state religion. This period was characterised by the spread of Orthodoxy and attempts to convert Catholics to Orthodoxy. Changing one's identity required strong arguments which also included the us-them dichotomy in religious terms. These were often based on popular memory of some historical events, despite the events having been confabulated. In the memory of the rural population, the Swedish wars were (and still are today) present in the form of legends related to families and localities. At the time, the manner in which Swedes were presented in miracles and legends changed and particular *topoi* occurred which were published in the literature by Orthodox writers, who spoke of icons from rural churches, many of which previously belonged to Uniates or Catholics. The passages mentioning Swedes usually were short and limited to several sentences.

These legends mentioned attempts of physical destruction of icons by Swedish soldiers followed by a punishment for the damage and, in some cases, conversions to Orthodoxy. One such legend is about the *icon of Our Lady of Barkalabava* (mod. Belarus) (Fig. 2). A military narrative is threaded through the whole legendary story of this icon. It reflects war in general, and in particular those from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> to and including the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The legend states that a Swedish military commander stayed in the monastery with his baggage train and demanded fodder for his horses. The nuns gave away everything they had and beseeched the Mother of God to rid them of the unbidden guest; meanwhile, the commander found his horses dead. Being so much impressed by it, the commander converted to Orthodoxy.<sup>19</sup>

Other legends are limited to punishment without conversion and are presented by two very close *topoi*. The first is: the Swedes bring horses into a Catholic,

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<sup>18</sup> “Записки игумена Ореста,” in: *Археографический сборник документов, относящихся к истории северо-западной Руси*, vol. 2, eds. П.А. Гильдебрандт, Ф.Г. Елеонский, А.Л. Миротворцев (Вильно: Печатня Губернского правления, 1864), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Федор Жудро, *Борколабовский Свято-Вознесенский женский монастырь Могилевской епархии* (Могилев на Днепре: Скоропечатня и литография Ш. Фридланда, 1906), 11.



Fig. 2. The icon of Our Lady of Rożanystok, Photo by V.F. Sutiagin, author's archive

or Uniate, or Orthodox church and are punished by God with blindness therefor. Undoubtedly, physical blindness in the topos refers to the spiritual blindness of the invaders who could not see the right Christian confession with their “spiritual eyes.” The plot is based on a Christian metaphor of blindness that has been used in the legends of various images since the Middle Ages. The second *topos* reflects a trial to desecrate the holy images and Divine punishment for it – another very popular plot in Christian narratives. Sometimes these two *topoi* are admixed.

By way of example is the icon from the Orthodox church in *Venzavets* (mod. Belarus) (Fig. 3). According to the legend told to me by the locals in 2014, the Swedes rode their horses into the church and when using their sabers to slash





Fig. 3. The icon of Our Lady of Venzavets Photo by V.F. Sutiagin, author's archive

images cut off a piece of the frame of a miraculous icon. This is brought about divine retribution: the soldiers were blinded and, taking hold of their horses' tails, had to be led out of the church by the horses.

A very similar theme is related to the icon of Our Lady of the Protection (Pokrov) church in *Kletsk* (mod. Belarus). According to the 19<sup>th</sup> century legend, the Swedes, having occupied *Kletsk* during a war, brought their horses into the church where a miraculous icon was stored. God punished the Swedes by making it impossible to force the horses out of the church and, absent their mounts unable to defend themselves, the soldiers died in battle with the Russian troops.<sup>20</sup>

The icon was lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to the description of the icon of 1879, the icon was 1½ arshin<sup>21</sup> long and 1 arshin wide, painted on wood in "Greek style" against a dark background and bore no inscription.<sup>22</sup> The icon is known

<sup>20</sup> *Описание церквей и приходов Минской епархии, составленное по официально затребованным от причтов сведениям*, vol. 3: *Слуцкий уезд* (Минск: Типо-литография Б.И. Соломонова, 1879), 131.

<sup>21</sup> 1 arshin = 0,7112 m.

<sup>22</sup> *Описание церквей и приходов*, vol. 3: *Слуцкий уезд*, 130.

to have remained in the Protection (Pokrov) Church until 1857 when it was brought to the Church of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ rebuilt from the Dominican temple<sup>23</sup> where it remained until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In other cases, the punishment for an attempt to destroy a sacred image was death. As in case of the icon in Orthodox Church in *Volma* (mod. Belarus), which, according to information from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the icon was lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> century), was “all shut-through”<sup>24</sup> The image originated from the local Catholic church and it depicted Virgin Mary standing on the moon with a crown above as if held there by the Holy Trinity. The image of Mary and the faces of the Holy Trinity were covered with silver plating.<sup>25</sup> According to the legend written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was shot by a Swedish soldier, who then suddenly became blind and died suffering heavily with his face turned backwards.<sup>26</sup>

Another icon said to be damaged by Swedish soldiers is the miraculous copy of the *Image of Our Lady of Częstochowa in Parševičy* (mod. Biarozavičy, Belarus) (Fig. 4). According to the legend, the icon was carried by Polish-Lithuanian troops during the war with the Swedes and was swept with fire – an effect of this is believed to be a hole in the lower part of the icon closed with a decorative insert. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the icon was reported to be painted in 1248, according to the inscription on it.<sup>27</sup> However, there is no inscription visible on the icon nowadays, and according to stylistic features the icon dates back to not earlier than 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even supposing that it could have been repainted, obscuring the initial image, the main proof the icon cannot date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century is the fact that the icon is painted on canvas, a fabric not created until much later. Secondly, as persuasive a proof, the image is a replica of the *Image of Mary from Częstochowa*, the cult of which was especially popular in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

At the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an Orthodox writer, Ivan Sprogis, wrote that during a war, the enemies of the Russian nation and Orthodoxy (supposedly the Swedes) rushed into the church of *Zalessie* (mod. Belarus), where a miraculous icon was kept, but suddenly turned blind.<sup>28</sup> The icon was called *Sokol'skaya* (*Сокольская*, from the Russian *сокол* – a tercel). The name was related with the legend that the icon itself appeared in a dense pine woods, a local inhabitant saw a tercel flying back and forth, in and out of the pine woods multiple times and alighting on the pine tree where the icon was finally found.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> *Описание церквей и приходов Минской епархии, составленное по официально затребованным от причтов сведениям*, vol. 1: *Минский уезд* (Минск: Типо-литография Б.И. Соломонова, 1878), 53.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 147.

<sup>28</sup> Иван Яковлевич Спрогис, *Залеская Георгиевская, старая, деревянная церковь (Ошмянского уезда, Виленской губернии)* (Витебск: Губернская типография, 1895), 8.



Fig. 4. The icon of Our Lady of Biarozavičy, Photo by V.F. Sutiagin, author's archive

This case of this icon is of special interest because the author stresses that the enemies were not ordinary military enemies but the enemies of the Russian nation and Orthodoxy. However, the event he described could possibly have occurred in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when the church in Zalessie was Uniate and the land was in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, not Russia. However, nowhere in his paper does he say that the church was Uniate.

Thus, it is not possible to attribute the described events to hatred of the Russian nation and Orthodoxy. Here it is the author's strong desire to stress the superiority of Orthodoxy – since the church was protected and the enemies were severely punished – which could be relevant for the period in which the author wrote about it. It was a time of confrontation between Catholics and Orthodox and a miracle of that kind should have again demonstrated the verity of Orthodoxy and persuaded those torn between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

At that very time, local Orthodox periodicals published articles about the wonder-working *Icon of Our Lady of the Sign of Novgorod*, stating that the icon

in the same way protected the town and the church from the Swedes” invasion,<sup>29</sup> and such stories were well within the context of the Russian Orthodox tradition that was spread on the lands of former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that were included in the Russian Empire, where Orthodoxy was considered to be one of the main tools to ensure that the Tsar’s subjects remained loyal to the Russian Emperor.

## Substituting Lutheran Swedes with Catholic French invaders

Interestingly, by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the place of the Swedes was taken, or occupied interchangeably, by Napoleon Bonaparte’s troops. Accounts of miraculous icons started mentioning French troops very soon after the war. Most accounts were reported in relation to icons in Orthodox settings. Like the Swedes, French soldiers stabled horses in churches and destroyed religious images.

This can be illustrated with the example of the aforementioned *icon of Our Lady from Zalessie*. The legend claims that the French brought their horses to the church in 1812 and then lost their vision.<sup>30</sup> French soldiers threw stones at icons or tried to steal them. As with the legend related to the *Icon of Our Lady of Nasilava* (mod. Belarus) (Fig. 5), the French soldiers plundered the church and threw stones at the icon of Our Lady. For this, they were punished by being deprived of their eyesight.<sup>31</sup>

This comparison between the Swedes and the French in the legends and further cross-referencing them does not seem to be based on religious similarity. Contrary to the Protestant Swedes, the French were Catholics and venerated Our Lady and Her images. It might be based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s attitude to both Swedes and Frenchmen as military enemies of different denominations, which could not have been reflected in religious accounts of that time.

## The representation of Protestant Germans

And finally, in our days we can witness how the Second World War is entering into the history of wonder-working icons in the canonical territories of the Russian Orthodox Church, which include the lands of former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. For example, there is a miracle related to the *Icon of Our Lady of Novy Sveržań*

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g.: Павел Тихомиров, *Сказание о Новгородской чудотворной св. иконе Знамения Божией Матери...* (Новгород: Типография Петра Мининского, 1860), 33–34.

<sup>30</sup> Иван Яковлевич Спрогис, *Залеская Георгиевская, старая, деревянная церковь*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Материалы по истории и географии Дисненского и Вилейского уезда Виленской губернии*, изд. А. Сапунова и кн. В. Друцкого-Любецкого (Витебск: Губернская типолитография, 1896), 246; Федор Васильевич Покровский, *Археологическая карта Виленской губернии* (Вильна: Типография А.Г. Сыркина, 1893), 40.



Fig. 5. The icon of Our Lady of Nasilava, Photo by V.F. Sutiagin, author's archive

(mod. Belarus) which has it that a Jewish woman hid in the church while the Nazis rounded up the settlement's Jews, and prayed to the icon to protect her from the Nazis, promising to undergo baptism and covert if she survives. The Nazis entered the church but did not see the woman. She survived and was baptised.<sup>32</sup> It is believed that Our Lady appeared in the sky to a German general, thus saving the people of the village of *Ražkouka* (mod. Belarus) from being shot to death.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Священник Федор Кривонос, "Свято-Успенский храм в Новом Свержене," *Минские епархиальные ведомости* 4 (2004): 57.

<sup>33</sup> Юлия Логашева, "Икона Божией Матери 'Рожковская'," *Брестские епархиальные ведомости* 3 (2008): 46.



Fig. 6. The icon of Our Lady of Nasilava, Photo by V.F. Sutiagin, author's archive

In the village of *Karma* (mod. Belarus), the Germans established a Lutheran church in the building of a former Orthodox church that the communists had repurposed as a stable. The church was resurrected and several icons were brought to decorate it. At the first divine service, the *Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir* (Fig. 6) (which was previously located in the chapel near a well and was damaged when the chapel was being destroyed by the communists and icons were being burned) fell off the wall and hit the Lutheran priest. An Orthodox priest was then brought there, and the church was never closed despite the efforts of local communist authorities.

Thus, it is possible the Germans are represented as people whose authority and decisions were overruled by force of Divine Will and the intercession of the Divine in human affairs. Additionally, I was unable to find any mention of Protestant Germans trying to desecrate icons during the Second World War. This may in some part have to do with the fact that the Germans opened beloved churches that had been closed by the Communists. Furthermore, the Second World

War has not been perceived as a religious struggle between competing Christian denominations.

## Conclusion

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the manner in which local Protestants were represented differs significantly from that of Protestant who soldiered in the military of enemies. While the former were represented as doing damage to images in words only and converting to Catholicism with the participation of Our Lady in the miraculous image, the latter assaulted them physically and were punished physically as well. The change in the representation of Protestants in the legends and miracles was conditioned by – among others – the given political situation when the legends claimed the miracles to have occurred. Common to all of them was the desire to illustrate the superiority and verity of the denomination to which the icon/image belonged over against other denominations, and to attract new coreligionists.