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# PODLASIE – THE LANDSCAPE OF CULTURAL BORDERLAND, AND NOT OF THE BOUNDARY

## *PODLASIE – KRAJOBRAZ POGRANICZA KULTUROWEGO, A NIE KRAJOBRAZY GRANICY*

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**Key words:** cywilizacja zachodnia, cywilizacja prawosławna, pogranicze kulturowe, Podlasie

### Summary

A scholars distinguish European (Western) and the Byzantine (Orthodox) civilisations, endowing this division with the highest taxonomic rank. The boundary between these civilisations runs across the region of Podlasie in Poland, magnified there by the parallel ethnic and language divisions. Yet, we deal within this area with numerous borrowings, and the borderland type of landscape has developed. This results from the regional history, but may also be a premise for stating that there are no really deep differences between the Western and the Eastern Orthodox civilisations. These differences are not bigger than those, for instance, between the Shiite and Sunni societies. Emphasising of the differences between the Western versus the Eastern Orthodox civilisations it is more correct to classify both into one, Christian civilisation, having the highest taxonomic rank, and to look for the commonalities of the cultural landscape within the framework of this civilisation.

### Streszczenie

Religia stanowi ważny wyróżnik cywilizacji. Badacze wyróżniają cywilizację europejską (zachodnią) i bizantyjską (prawosławną), nadając podziałowi najwyższą rangę taksonomiczną. Granica między tymi cywilizacjami przebiega w Polsce przez Podlasie, wzmacniona tam podziałami etnicznymi i językowymi. Zróżnicowanie krajobrazów kulturowych odzwierciedla zróżnicowania kultur, zatem na Podlasiu należałoby oczekwać ostrej granicy między typami krajobrazów. Jednak mamy tam do czynienia z licznymi zapożyczeniami, ukształtował się krajobraz pogranicza. Wynika to ze specyfiki historii regionu, ale też wskazuje, że między tymi dwiema cywilizacjami nie ma tak istotnych różnic. Nie są one większe niż np. między społecznościami szyitów i sunnitów w cywilizacji islamu. Eksponowanie różnic cywilizacji zachodnia versus prawosławna ma uwarunkowanie historyczne, poprawniej jest obie zaliczać do jednej, najwyższej rangi taksonomicznej cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej i w jej ramach szukać wspólnoty krajobrazu kulturowego.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cultural landscape constitutes the marking of the human activity on the Earth's surface, an imprint left in various spheres, both material and the hardly comprehended sphere of signs, symbols, and associations. The diversity of the imprint, that is – the diversification of the cultural landscapes, depends upon numerous elements, like the material, in which the imprint is left (the conditions of the natural environment). This is the perception of the physical geographers and ecologists. But the imprint, the marking, is the creation of the active factor, constituting the reflection of culture and of its differentiation. This, in turn, is the viewpoint of geographers of culture, ethnologists, cultural anthropologists, sociologists... U. Myga-Piątek (2012: 17) states that "cultural landscape is an historically shaped fragment of geographical space, having developed due to the joint action of the environmental and cultural influences, forming a specific structure, appearing through regional identity, perceived as a kind of physiognomy". Close to one century ago C. Sauer (1925) considered that understanding of the region's past is the key for understanding of the cultural landscape. Religion is usually treated as an important, if not the most important, component of culture, and constitutes the basis, on which the popular classifications are performed into cultural circles (civilisations). The respective divisions find their counterpart – either explicitly or implicitly – in the distinction of the large areas, featuring separate cultural landscapes: explicitly, when we speak, for instance, of the cultural landscape of Islamic cities, implicitly – when we speak of the cultural landscape of India, or, in fact of Hinduism. The boundaries of the areas, inhabited by the faithful of different religions constitute not only the boundaries of civilisations, but also of the basic – global – units of cultural landscapes. This simplified image, though, requires in many places a rectification.

## **THE BOUNDARY VS. THE BORDERLAND**

The reaches of civilisations, and hence – of the landscape types, can most easily be tracked on the maps, especially the generalised ones. The image in the field is, however, usually much more complex. First, delimitation of the areas inhabited by people belonging to separate civilisations is difficult. In many places these people live side by side – but not together – in the neighbouring villages and quarters of cities (frequently forming a mosaic-like pattern), or even in the very same buildings. Yet, there is a distinct separation of the cultures and cultural landscapes, and only the very course of the dividing lines is very cumbersome and entwined. One can look for analogies with this respect concerning the complicated course of the administrative and political boundaries, like, e.g. in the vicinity of Maastricht (The Netherlands / Belgium / Germany) or in Llivia (Spain / France). These are the landscapes of the boundary.

Second, the very concept of separate civilisations is based on the assumption of their closeness, self-sufficiency with regard to the patterns of culture, apprehension

as to the admission of the ideas from the outside, sometimes also an apprehension or contempt with respect to the others, the aliens. This assumption is always true only in part, because along with the isolationism there exist acceptance and interpenetration of the cultural patterns. The interpenetration leads to the appearance of the specific borderland cultures, not only joining the elements of the two bordering societies, but also creatively developing over them. An expression of this phenomenon is constituted by the appearance of the cultural borderland landscape (the singular used here means that there is one cultural landscape on a given area, while in the case of the landscape of the boundary we deal with two or more types of landscape). Whether we deal with the landscape of the boundary or with the landscape of borderland depends upon people – upon the degree of separation of their cultures and the way they treat their neighbours. Since neighbourhood relations do change, it is feasible that over centuries there have been on a given area intermittently the landscapes of the borderland and of the boundary.



**Fig. 1.** Location of Podlasie.

*Source:* own elaboration.

#### Legend

1. Lands having belonged to the province of Podlasie or to the province of Białystok in different historical periods.
2. The reach of the province of Podlasie in the years 1566-1795 (the longest period of stabilisation of the administrative boundaries in the history of this territory).
3. The present (2014) reach of the province of Podlasie.

Although the numbers of civilisations, distinguished by the particular authors (Spengler, 1918-22; Toynbee, 1934; Huntington, 1996, and many other) differ, the divisions are, in their general outline, in agreement, especially in Europe. The western and central parts of the continent belong to the European (Christian, Western) civilisation, while the eastern part to the Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox) civilisation.

The boundary between the two is the cultural boundary of the highest rank, similarly as the boundary with the Islamic (Arab) civilisation, stretching to the South. Thus, one would expect at the interface of the Western and Byzantine civilisations an impermeable barrier and a distinct difference between the cultural landscapes. One of the areas, through which this interfaces passes, is the region of Podlasie in eastern Poland, where a typical landscape of a borderland developed – the landscape of the cultural, religious and ethnic borderland. Owing to a specific sequence of historical events the quite specific societal relations developed there and the area has a unique character on the European scale.

## PODLASIE – A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Podlasie is a historical land in the north-eastern Poland. Its range differs from that of the current administrative province of Podlasie. It reaches further South onto the territories of the provinces of Lublin and Masovia, while the western part of the province of Podlasie belongs to the historical region of Masovia, and the northern part of the province (the vicinity of Augustów and Suwałki), even though inhabited for centuries now by the Polish population, had been more closely associated with historical Lithuania<sup>1</sup>. The weakly populated land of the historical Podlasie was settled since the 11<sup>th</sup> century mainly from the East and South-East by the Ruthenian population (the ancestors of the present-day Ukrainians and Belarusians), but also by the Polish population coming from Masovia, situated to the West. Along with the settlers from the East the Eastern Orthodox religion would come, while Roman Catholicism would come from the West. The very name of "Podlasie" meant the "land situated next to Lachy" that is – next to Poles, which would imply the domination of the eastern element. At around the year 1325 the area became a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, to then become, since the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a land of the initially loose, but over time more and more tight, federation of the Kingdom of Poland and the Duchy of Lithuania ("the Commonwealth of Both Nations"). The province of Podlasie, established in 1513, was incorporated in 1569 into Poland (into the so-called "Crown").

Poland and Lithuania, bound since 1569 with a real, and not only personal union, formed an exceptional entity in the Europe of that time. Not only because it was territorially the biggest country. It was a multinational country, in each of the two parts of it the official documents were drawn in a different language. It was a multi-religion country, inhabited by Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants of various denominations, Jews, Muslims (Tartars). All these communities, and that in quite a mixture, lived also in Podlasie. Although Roman Catholicism was privileged (Catholic bishops sitting on the Senate), all the other religions enjoyed the freedom of worship

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<sup>1</sup> A Reader can find broader sketches of the historical background in numerous English-language books, devoted to the history of Poland, e.g. M.B. Biskupski (2000) and later editions, N. Davies (1981) and numerous later editions, J. Topolski (1987), A. Zamoyski (2009), and other publications.

and liturgy. In 1573 the nobles, convened at the parliamentary seating, voted the so-called Warsaw confederation, guaranteeing eternal peace between the people differing as to their confession, secured the protection from the state, the access to the state offices for the faithful of all the Christian denominations, etc. Although this did not prevent numerous local conflicts in the country, and in 1658 the Polish Brothers (an Arian group) were expatriated (in reaction to their support for the Swedes during the Swedish invasion of Poland and Lithuania in 1655-56), but, altogether, the degree of tolerance was absolutely exceptional for the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, ravaged by the wars of religion.

An important event in the history of Podlasie occurred in 1596, when the Eastern Orthodox bishops signed in Brest the act of union with the Roman Catholic church (this giving rise to such notions as the Union of Brest and the Uniates), and, while preserving the Orthodox liturgy, they recognised the papal primacy. This act is judged in various ways – on the one hand as an attempt of subjugating the Orthodoxy to the Catholicism, on the other hand – as an attempt of uniting the churches, corresponding to the desires of numerous inhabitants of the areas, where the faithful of different religions lived side by side, the knowledge of the theological disputes was marginal, the network of the churches was thin, but mixed marriages were frequent, and the wish of living in unity and peace was strong. Both these judgments are justified. The union was introduced in haste, it was frequently implemented under pressure, at the cost of the faithful of the Eastern Orthodoxy, who remained outside of the Union. In addition, many promises given the Uniates were not kept to. Yet, in spite of this, the Union had been gradually gaining popularity in Podlasie until in 1795 Poland lost its sovereignty. It did not succeed in becoming, though, a permanent source for reconciliation.

After the turmoil of the Napoleon's wars Podlasie became a part of Russia. The entire 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by forced Russification, limitations to the activity of the Catholic church, support for the Orthodox church, and freewill or forced, ruthless (blood shedding) liquidation of the Union. Situation changed when Poland regained independence in 1918, or, more precisely, when the Bolshevik aggression was pushed back in 1920. Now, it was the Catholic church that was privileged, and the scandalous cases occurred in southern Podlasie of destruction of the Orthodox churches. An attempt was made of reactivating the Union (the so-called Neo-Union), but it was not very popular. Simultaneously, though, teaching of the Belarusian language, never done before, was introduced to schools, even though to an insufficient degree. Since, however, the fact was ignored that in southern Podlasie also Ukrainians lived, this step became the source of new tensions – the teaching of the Belarusian was even treated as an attempt of denationalisation of the Ukrainians.

World War II brought the extermination of Jews and the persecutions of all the other ethnic and religious groups (although with differing intensity in the particular

periods). The occupants changed on this territory several times over<sup>2</sup>, trying to instigate some groups in the society against the other ones. This brought about bloody incidents, but on a much smaller scale than this was hoped by the occupants, and these incidents were condemned by a vast majority of inhabitants of Podlasie. Alas, such incidents would occur yet in the first years after the end of World War II, in conditions of the civil war, taking then place in Poland.

The very last guerrilla groups were destroyed in Podlasie roughly 60 years ago. The communist regime brought a stabilisation, although on specific conditions. The re-establishment of the Uniate parishes was not allowed, the majority of Protestants left for Germany, while against the Catholics and the Orthodox faithful an atheisation campaign was conducted, in principle similarly intensive, but also similarly little effective. Efforts were made with various means to limit the pastoral activity. Teaching in Belarusian language developed in Podlasie (grammar and secondary schools), but not in Ukrainian, and the Belarusian cultural movement was subject to sharp limitations, in order to keep this culture just as a folklore. A new situation arose after the collapse of communism in 1989. All of the denominations, as well as social, cultural and political associations, could start a free activity.

## NORTHERN PODLASIE – THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURES

Within the southern part of Podlasie (to the South of Bug river) Polish population, of Roman Catholic religion, dominates nowadays. An important part of this population have the Uniate roots, since in 1905 the so-called Tolerance Edict of the tsar Nicholas II allowed the former Uniates to convert to Roman Catholicism, and this opportunity was quickly seized by some quarter million persons (Kostomłoty..., 2013). The faithful of the Orthodox church are in clear minority, but they maintain a network of parishes and churches, and there is an Orthodox monastery in Jabłeczna. These Orthodox faithful usually consider themselves Ukrainians, while declaring their attachment to Poland. The sole Neo-Uniate parish exists in Kostomłoty and has only some 120 faithful (Kostomłoty..., 2013). Few Protestants live in dispersion (like Jehovah Witnesses), and the few descendants of Tartars treat their origins more like an element of folklore and are not keen to revert to Islam.

The situation looks differently in Podlasie to the North of Bug river, within the province of Podlasie. On a relatively small area the religious and ethnic structure is so complex and the past was at times so stormy that some authors compare it to the “Balkan boiling pot” (Plit, 2008). The sole common features of this area with southern Podlasie are the very low number of Protestants and lack of Jews. But, say, Tartars in their villages of Kruszniany and Bohoniki still form Islamic communities, with mosques, and when they migrated to nearby towns, they formed Tartar communities

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<sup>2</sup> Thus, for instance, Germans marched into Białystok in September 1939, in October 1939 – the Soviets, in June 1941 – Germans again, and in July 1944 – Soviets, with the status of this area as a Polish territory being questioned yet in 1944.

in Sokółka and Białystok. There are no Uniates in northern Podlasie (the Union was liquidated earlier there than in the South), while the Eastern Orthodox faithful are quite numerous. They inhabit a compact area in the south-east of the province, where they are in majority. There are no precise statistical data. The questions of denomination, asked in the National Census of 2011, were contained only in the so-called extended version of the census, while the data originating from the religious organisations, given the strong temporary emigration to large Polish cities (to study and to work), and abroad (to work), have only an approximate character. Most probably, though, in the county of Hajnówka the Eastern Orthodox population accounts for roughly 70% of the total (nowadays perhaps a bit less), in the county of Bielsk Podlaski – 40% (although they clearly dominate in the East of this county), in Siemiatycze – 30%, in the city of Białystok – 20%, in the rural county of Białystok – 15%, and in Sokółka – 10%. There are municipalities, where approximately 90% of inhabitants are Eastern Orthodox.

In a dominating cliché Poles are Catholics and the Orthodox are the Belarusians. The reality, though, is much more intricate. Although, in fact, the majority of the Orthodox population identify themselves with the Belarusian element, for about a quarter of century in the South of the province not only the Belarusian, but also the Ukrainian cultural associations have been active. The latter try to persuade the inhabitants of the areas to the South of Narew river that they are Ukrainians, while promotion of Belarusian language and culture was actually meant to serve the de-nationalisation, and was conducted hand in hand with Poles, at that (see, e.g., Hawryluk, 2005). Definitely, the atlases of the dialects of this territory classify their language as belonging to Ukrainian, or at least as being under a strong influence of the Ukrainian. In such a situation the question of nationality is perceived as highly sensitive, and for many people religion becomes the most important determinant, similarly as this was the case with Muslims in the former Yugoslavia. Yet, the censuses do not envisage the possibility of such a declaration. In direct communication one can still (although rarely) encounter the notion of being "local", and among persons with university education – there is a rebirth of the old notion of "Ruthenians", which is supposed to allow rising above the division into Ukrainians and Belarusians. The situation is made even more complex by the fact that there are groups of Orthodox Poles and Catholic Belarusians. There is also shortage of detailed reliable data on the ethnic structure of the region. The results of the censuses of 2002 and 2011 have shown a surprisingly low number of Belarusians in Poland (in 2011: 51 000 Ukrainians and 47 000 Belarusians). These results provoked the protests from the side of the Belarusian organisations. It is quite probable that the census results are underestimations. The present author knows the cases, when the inhabitants of northern Podlasie declared being of two nationalities: a Pole and a Belarusian, or a Ukrainian and a Pole. These people know perfectly well Polish language, use this language in external contacts, and frequently also in their family life, feel being loyal citizens of the Republic of Poland, but treat the simultaneous belongingness to two nationalities as an evidence of cultural richness. And even though the census forms

allowed for the statement of belonging to two nationalities, it sometimes happened that the census officers would write down in such a case only "Polish nationality". On the other hand, the estimates provided by some Belarusian and Ukrainian socio-cultural organisations give numbers that are several times higher, the truth most probably lying somewhere in between.

## THE CULTURAL BORDERLAND LANDSCAPE OF PODLASIE

The interrelations between the particular groups in this ethnic-religious melting pot are surprisingly good. This fact is confirmed both by the results from the numerous questionnaire-based surveys (as quoted, for instance, by Barwiński, 2004), where the respondents most often declare that they do not experience any conflicts with persons from other ethnic or religious groups, and by the observations of everyday life. The Catholic and Orthodox holidays usually take place on different dates, and on such dates those, who formally do not feast the holiday, still refrain from heavy field and farm work, in order "not to upset the neighbours". It is common that duty schedules in the libraries, offices, hospitals, etc., are set up in such a manner as to facilitate the preparation for the holidays. It is frequent that Catholics invite the Orthodox neighbours to their holiday receptions, and vice versa. The Orthodox visit the graves of their relatives after the Easter, but one can encounter at that time on the Orthodox cemeteries also the Catholics. The situation is analogous on the Catholic graveyards on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Moreover, it becomes more and more popular that the Orthodox visit the graves of their dead at the beginning of November, and the Catholics – at around Easter. The famous Eastern Orthodox sanctuary of the Holy Mountain Grabarka by Siemiatycze is visited by numerous Catholics, and one can easily tell that for a part of them this is just a tourist excursion, but other Catholics treat this visit as a pilgrimage. Then, numerous Orthodox faithful participated in the papal Holy Mass, when John Paul II was in Białystok during one of his pilgrimages to Poland. It is obvious that in such conditions mixed marriages are many. They are increasingly often contracted in the Orthodox churches, with the primary argument for such a choice being the more solemn ceremony of the marriage. Spouses in such marriages often go together to church, intermittently to the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Their children are often baptised according to the principle "girls after the mother, boys after the father, and when they grow up, they will decide themselves". In the tsarist times there was no possibility of such a choice (mixed marriages were by definition treated as Orthodox).

The good neighbourhood relations are also easily noticed in the landscape. While it is highly characteristic for the Masovian small towns and bigger villages that a Catholic church tower dominates over the buildings, in the East of Poland two towers often dominate – of the Catholic and Orthodox (the dome) churches. This is, for instance, the case in Zabłudów, where both these representative structures are situated at the market square. In some bigger towns, like in Bielsk Podlaski, there are more of such landscape dominants. The biggest concentration of the Catholic

and Orthodox temples exists in Białystok, but even there one sees easily two primary landscape dominants: the modernist Catholic church of Saint Roch and the bell tower of the Orthodox church of Holy Spirit. Both temples were built on hilltops. The external architecture of Catholic and Orthodox structures bears numerous elements typical for the other denomination. A part of them are explicit borrowings, but a part resulted from the fact that they were built by the same groups of craftsmen, and, in addition, some of these temples would have changed their "denominational belongingness" and that not only just once.

Yet, the most telling sign of existence of the borderland landscape is constituted by the burials on the graveyards of the other denomination. The body of the dead ought to lie in a special ground, sacred, in a place that is particularly emotionally close. Hence, burials within the cemeteries of the other faith witness to the fact that the closeness encompasses in this case both the Orthodox and Catholic graveyards, without much difference. Such burials are encountered across the entire Poland. This is more often the case with the Catholics being buried on the Orthodox cemeteries, since many of the latter simply offer more free burying places (like, for instance, in southern Podlasie and in the region of Lublin). A Catholic priest takes part in such a case in the ceremony.

It is specific for Podlasie that the representatives of different denominations and nationalities are bound by numerous family ties. This is partly due to the isolation of the small localities, but first of all to the history of the Uniates. Forcing a change of faith, and then limited possibilities of return caused that the members of the closest family found themselves in different denominations, which had an influence on the national identity, expressed later on. Good relations between the people of various religions and ethnic groups result partly, as well, from the painful history – war destructions and occupation, when survival depended upon mutual help. Strong attachment to the motherland developed, usually limited to a small territory, on the scale of at most a couple of municipalities. A parallel process is the development of distrust with respect to the aliens and to all decisions originating from the outside, nowadays – from Warsaw.

Yet, human relations in the northern Podlasie are not simply idyllic. The kin tradition preserves the memories not only of the cooperation, but also of the wrong suffered from the representatives of the other groups, sometimes several generations back. The different local interpretations of history, and the fact that the efforts of bringing back history may trigger very intensive emotions, were indicated by, for instance, A. Awramiuk (2011). In such cases the atmosphere is further worsened yet by the unfortunate pronouncements of the politicians, in the majority of cases coming from the outside of the region. Luckily, they are usually treated by all of the locals as stupid declarations of the incompetent persons. Quite a concrete risk is carried even by the cases of a simple vandalism. If crosses are destroyed on a graveyard, or a path towards a hermitage is spoiled, the question arises whether this was not done by the people of the other denomination. The case with nepotism is similar: in conditions of high unemployment in the region those, who have the possibility of employing

others, most willingly offer jobs to members of their family, to neighbours, to the inhabitants of their village of origin. In this manner they express preference for the persons of one faith or nationality, inciting suspicions and apprehension among the other groups. Such negative aspects ought not be disregarded, even though, luckily, there are less of them, in qualitative terms, than of the cases of friendship and cooperation.

## **WESTERN (EUROPEAN) VS. ORTHODOX (BYZANTINE) CIVILISATION – A GREAT ERROR OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE CONCEPT OF CIVILISATIONS AND OF THE POLITICAL SCIENTISTS**

Contrary to what would be expected on the basis of the most commonly accepted divisions of the world (of humanity) into civilisations, one witnesses in Podlasie more of the borderland landscape than of a sharply dividing landscape of the boundary. The specific course of the historical events facilitated this development, but of key importance seems to be the fact that the authors of the divisions into civilisations magnified unnecessarily the cultural differences between the Western and Eastern Christianity. The differences certainly exist, definite cultural borders have their courses, but similar differences exist also between the countries of Europe in which Catholics are the majority, and those, where Protestants dominate. These latter differences did not prevent, though, from uniting the respective countries in one "European (Western) civilisation". In the case of the "Orthodox civilisation" a significant differentiating factor is constituted by the difference of alphabets (Cyrillic and Greek), but this does not apply to all the Orthodox territories and nations (e.g. Romanians). Yet, the separate character of the alphabets would not justify the very high rank that is associated with this boundary, while, for instance, a part of the proposers of the division of humanity into civilisations distinguish one great "civilisation of Islam". Within the framework of this, supposedly one, Islamic civilisation we see similarly deep religious divisions, leading, in particular, to the wars of religion, and that not only the division into the Shiite and Sunni Muslims. The wars in Iraq and Syria had to a large extent exactly the religious dimension. Although Quran was written down in Arabic and only in this language it has the character of the holy scripture, but within the broad framework of the Islamic civilisation various alphabets function, of which the most important ones are Arabic, Persian (Farsi), Latin, and Malay. If we distinguish just one civilisation of Islam, then at the same taxonomic level we should also distinguish only one Christian civilisation<sup>3</sup> and then, inside these two great civilisations, we might define more precise divisions. The present author formulated such an opinion already earlier (Plit, 2008). Conform to the principle that each civilisation develops a specific cultural landscape, one should also speak – at the highest level of generalisation – of the cultural Christian landscape

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<sup>3</sup> With inclusion of the Latin American civilisation as well.

and the Islamic landscape. The differences in the architecture of the Christian temples and in the shapes of the crosses are, certainly, not overwhelming.

The awareness of the cultural differences with other peoples existed since the beginnings of humanity. Yet, the concepts of dividing the entire humanity into civilisations appeared in Europe only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That is why the cultural differentiation of Europe was perceived more clearly, with more precisely defined differences between the societies and regions. It is held that the concept was first fully developed by Oswald Spengler (1918-22). His work was published just after a terrifying war, fought by Germany with Russia (but also with France), in the years, when the communism, radiating from Russia, was considered to be a deadly danger for Europe. Earlier than that, a long-lasting dispute took place among the Russian intellectual elite whether Russia belongs to the same cultural sphere with Western Europe, or the differences in terms of civilisation are insofar essential, that other, independent ways of development must be sought for Russia. This dispute was initiated already under the rule of Peter I (reforms, Europeisation of Russia), and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost all of the great Russian thinkers took part in this dispute. The opposition of the Western and the Orthodox civilisations had at its origins the clearly political roots. These roots persisted in the later periods, associated with the justification of the apprehensions of the Western Europe with respect to communism (the works of Toynbee, 1934, and of Koneczny, 1935, come from this period, with Russia being for Koneczny not just the Byzantine civilisation, but the Turanian one), with the Cold War, division of Europe into the countries belonging to NATO and the Warsaw Treaty, to the European Common Market (later European Union) and the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, and, nowadays – definite resentments and apprehensions, concerning the rebirth of the Russian imperialism (see, perhaps, Huntington, 1996). It appears, though, that in the hierarchy of the cultural divisions (and cultural landscapes) the time has come to lower the rank of the boundary between the Western and the Orthodox civilisations, while science of the cultural distinctions ought not to remain at the service of politics.

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