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Michał Kopczyński, Wojciech Tygielski, eds., *Pod wspólnym niebem. Narody dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* [‘Under a shared sky: The nations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’], Muzeum Historii Polski [Museum of the History of Poland] Bellona, Warszawa, 2010; 255 pp.

The book is composed of three parts, each divided into separate chapters. It opens with an introduction, has a bibliography attached, authors’ bios following each text, and a table of contents. The first part, titled ‘Locals’, comprises three essays – on Lithuanians, Byelorussians, and Ukrainians. Those on Germans, Jews, Armenians, Tartars, Karaites, and Gypsies/the Roma, form the second part, entitled ‘The dwelled-into’ [*Wmieszkani*]. The third is about the ‘Comers’, that is, Italians, Scots, and the Dutch Mennonites. Wojciech Tygielski’s essay, bearing an astonishing title ‘And, where are the Poles?’, placed last in the book, deserves the reader’s attention.

The book opens with an introduction, penned by Michał Kopczyński, one of the editors, explaining the reasons for the way the texts are arranged within the book. The nationalities of the Nobility’s Commonwealth have been categorised into three groups: the locals – i.e. those who have long been dwelling in the country’s main parts; the ‘dwelled-into’ the country, or, immigrants arriving in these lands in as early as the Middle Ages, before the state extended its area to Lithuania and Ruthenia; there are ‘comers’ too, that is, foreigners inflowing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in search of better conditions for their lives and careers. The locals include Poles – inhabitants of Wielkopolska [Greater-Poland], Małopolska [Lesser-Poland] and Mazovia; Lithuanians – settled in Samogitia and ‘Lithuania proper’; and, Ruthenians – dwelling in today’s Belarus and the Ukraine. The ‘dwelled-into’ include Germans arriving as settlers, since end 12th century, in Pomerania or Silesia, and in the central Poland’s areas; Jews; and, less numerous, Tartars, Armenians, Gypsies, and Karaites. The ‘comers’ are the Scots, Italians, and Dutch Mennonites, who arrived in the modern period. The introduction specifies that the Commonwealth’s nations were diverse, as far as religions and customs, and the social composition and position within the social hierarchy are concerned. The Poles, Lithuanians, and Ruthenians each had their nobility who took active part in their state’s political life.

The Jews, Tartars, and Gypsies, in spite of their having their own elites formed, they were not treated on equal terms with the nobility. The Italians did not develop their self-government or internal hierarchy, in spite of a high social position they attained in the Commonwealth.

Tolerance was one of the systemic principles in the nobility's catalogue; it became the strengthening factor for separate ethnic groups – the examples being the Jews, Armenians, Mennonites, and Tartars. The latter easily and quickly accepted the Polish language as their own, while preserving their distinct character well into the twentieth century.

The unifying driver for this multiethnic and multi-faith nation was the building of a dynastic state and, consequently, a common ruler – along with liquidation of separate institutions, or preservation thereof in a relic form only.

To me personally, the book *Under a shared sky: The nations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* appears very interesting. It shows that “the multi-cultural experiment run in the Commonwealth for several hundred years has enriched the Polish history with a specific concept of citizenship based upon a historical tradition”. If tendencies for searching one's own local identities are not charged with political accents, then ‘small homelands’ will never pose a threat to the existing state structures – enriching them instead.