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ALEXANDER SOLTAN, AUREI VELLERIS HISPANICI OBSERVATOR: ORIGINS OF THE MISCONCEPTION AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS OF THE PROBLEM

One of the most widespread misconceptions regarding the person of a Ruthenian nobleman of the 15th century Alexander Soltan concerns his membership of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The roots of this theory lie in one of the most controversial documents of the 15th century, the *Epistle of Misael to Pope Sixtus IV*. Composed in 1476, it has become well known due to its publication by the Uniate Metropolitan of Kyiv Hipatius Potij in 1605. Just a decade before 1596 the Kyivan Metropolis signed the Union with the Holy See and came under the jurisdiction of Rome. This ambiguous step caused a schism and bitter polemics in the Ruthenian elite and in the Church itself. Metropolitan Potij did understand that the appearance of this document drafted in the Kyivan Metropolitanate a century earlier and totally impregnated by the spirit of Union with Rome would create doubts as to its authenticity in the middle of this ferocious debate. This is why the churchman presented the codex with the epistle to the magistrates and aldermen of the city of Vilnius and took from them a certificate of authenticity for the manuscript and the text of the epistle. Potij placed this certificate at the very beginning of the edition of the *Epistle of Misael*, which he prepared himself in the Church Slavonic language¹. He also placed it at the beginning of his own Polish translation of the charter, published in the same year just a few weeks after the Church Slavonic one².

The officials described this codex in the following way: “The members of the magistracy and the aldermen of the city of His Royal Majesty Vilnius, [representatives] of both sides: Roman as well as Ruthenian³, announce to all together and to everyone who needs to know about it, that the most gracious in God, His illustrious Reverence Father Hipatius Potij, Metropolitan of Kyiv, Halych and all Rus, bishop of Volodymyr and Brest, came to the municipality in the town hall of Vilnius and showed a book which had been found in the Church of Kreva. The Codex is written in antiquated script in

¹ Unfortunately no sample of the first edition has been preserved until now. But this authenticity certificate has been reproduced by Stepan Holubiev by the reissue of the epistle on the basis of two defective samples of the first edition, which existed in the 19th c. Див.: Грамота кiev-скаго митрополита Мисаила къ папѣ Сиксту IV, 1476 г. / Архивъ Юго-Западной Россіи; [ред. С. Голубев]. – Киев, 1887. – Ч. 1. – Т. 7 – С. 195–196.

² Poselstwo do Papieża Rzymskiego Sixta IV od Duchowieństwa y od Książat y od Panow Ruskich / [tr. and edit. by H. Potij]. – Vilnius, 1605.

³ It means that there were representatives of both Western (“Romans”) and Eastern Church (“Ruthenians”).

correct Slavonic language, in quarto, very old. The 8th Council of Florence⁴ is in this book, together with the letter to the Holy Father Sixtus IV, the Pope of Rome, written by Misael, Metropolitan of Kyiv and the Archimandrites of Pecherska Lavra⁵ and of Vilnius⁶, and also from the Ruthenian grand dukes and lords in the year 1476 AD”⁷.

Despite these arrangements by the Metropolitan, his opponents from the Orthodox side considered the *Epistle of Misael* as a forgery, assuming that the authenticity certificate was just a part of the strategy of Potij, whom they claimed to be the real author of the epistle. For example, in the polemical work *Perestoroha (Premonition)* they say: “They [Uniates – N. Z.] fabricate books under the ancient date, in old writing, as if this Union had ever existed. But look observantly into the language and you will see that despite the fabrication of such old Corpus, the whole language is that of Potij, as if he was speaking himself by his own lips”⁸.

Since then the *Epistle of Misael* has been defamed as a document of uncertain origin and this disrepute accompanied it until the end of the 20th century. Although, since the end of the 19th century, many scientists raised their voices in favor of the authenticity of Misael’s charter⁹, they lacked ultimate certainty, which could be brought only by discovery of an earlier copy, written at least before the end of the 16th century, before the Union of Brest. Only at the end of the 20th century have two such copies been discovered, which brought the discussion on the authenticity of the *Epistle of Misael* to an end. In the 1970s, a full copy of the charter was found in Smolensk regional museum in the Codex SOKM 9907¹⁰, dated back to the 1520s, that is, long before the Union of Brest and even before the birth of Hipatius Potij. This discovery has brought ultimate certainty concerning the authenticity of the document¹¹. Besides this, a quite big fragment of the epistle (about 1/5) has been identified also in the Codex *Synod.* 700 of the Synodal collection

⁴ According to its tradition, the Eastern Church recognizes only 7 ecumenical councils, which is why the Council of Florence, where the union between the Western and the Eastern Church was concluded, was counted by those in the Metropolis of Kyiv who accepted this Union as the 8-th Ecumenical Council.

⁵ That is the most famous and honorable monastery in the Metropolis of Kyiv, the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra.

⁶ Reference is made here to the most honorable monastery in that part of the country, the Holy Trinity monastery of Vilnius.

⁷ Грамота киевскаго митрополита Мисаила к папе Сиксту IV... / Архив Юго-Западной России (далее – АЮЗР). – Ч. 1. – Т. 7. – С. 197.

⁸ Пересторога // Акты, относящиеся к истории Западной России. – Санкт-Петербург, 1851. – Т. 4: 1588–1638. – С. 229.

⁹ For example the Orthodox metropolitan Makarij Bulgakov (див.: *Макарий (Булгаков)*). История Русской церкви / Макарий (Булгаков). – Санкт-Петербург, 1883. – Кн. 5; *Грушевський М.* Історія української літератури / М. Грушевський. – Київ, 1995. – Т. 5).

¹⁰ According to the report of Olena Rusyna, the honor of discovery belongs to Anna Khoroshkevych, who “detected the copy from the codex SOKM 9907 already in the 1970s”. *Русина О.* Мисаїлове послання Сиксту IV за Синодальним списком / О. Русина // Український археографічний щорічник. Нова серія: зб. наук. праць. – Київ, 2002. – Вип. 7. – Т. 10. – С. 285.

¹¹ Див.: *Семенченко Г.* Неопубликованные грамоты сборника СОКМ 9907 / Г. Семенченко // Русский феодальный архив XIV – первой трети XVI веков. – Москва, 1987. – Кн. 3. – С. 630.

of the State Historical Museum in Moscow. It is dated to the 1550s. This fragment was published in 1992 and 2002¹², while the full copy only appeared in 2013¹³.

Though the document, which opens (sic!) with the signatures of 16 most outstanding representatives of the Church and nobility is authentic, there were (and still are) many misinterpretations derived from its text, one of which will be considered in this article. Among the noblemen who signed the charter was Alexander Soltan. One of the titles next to his signature served for a long time as proof that the Ruthenian aristocrat was a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece. In the original (Church Slavonic) language his signature runs: “Благородный мужъ, панъ Салтанъ Александръ, великославный рыцер божья гробу, и ушьпанский, златаго стрыха носитель, подьскарбій великославного двору пресвѣтлаго короля Казимера”¹⁴.

In the Polish translation, made by Metropolitan Hipatius Potij, this title reads as follows: “Zacnie Urodzony mąż Pan Sołtan Alexandrowicz wielce sławny Rycerz Bożogrobski y Hiszpańskiego Aurei Veleris nośiciel Podskarbi wielkiego sławnego dworu Naiśniejszego Krola Każimierza”¹⁵. And related to the words “ушьпанский златаго стрыха носитель” the interpreter added a marginal note, in which he repeated the same thought, namely that Alexander Soltan was a knight of the Golden Fleece: “to iest luzon albo aurey weleris”¹⁶.

Hipatius Potij's interpretation was noticed by his contemporaries, particularly by heraldists and depicted in the armorials accordingly. For example, Szymon Okolski, a heraldist of the 17th century, relies on his reports about the Soltan family in the *Epistle of Misael* and on the conclusions made by the Uniate Metropolitan¹⁷. With regard to Ioan Soltan, another member of this family who also signed the charter, the heraldist directly indicates his source: the Epistle of 1476 and its interpretation by Hipatius Potij (“ad Sixtum IV Pont. Max. ... de illo Hippatius Pociey”¹⁸). And further, talking about Alexander Soltan, he repeats the thesis of the Metropolitan that the nobleman was a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece (“aurei velleris Hispanici obseruator”¹⁹). It should be mentioned that in the armorials published before 1605 there is no mention about this high decoration of the Ruthenian nobleman. For example, Bartosz Paprocki

¹² Русина О. Мисаїлове послання Сиксту IV... – С. 281–296. A decade before a popular edition of the Synodal fragment was realized in the “Feudal archive of Rus”: Русский феодальный архив XIV – первой трети XVI веков. – Москва, 1992. – Кн. 5. – Р. 1071–1074.

¹³ Заторський Н. “Послання Мисаїла” за Смоленським списком // Український археографічний щорічник. Нова серія: зб. наук. праць. – Київ, 2013. – Вип. 18. – Т. 21. – С. 401–428.

¹⁴ Грамота киевскаго митрополита Мисаила к папе Сиксту IV... // АЮЗР. – Ч. 1. – Т. 7. – С. 200.

¹⁵ Poselstwo do Papieży Rzymskiego Sixta IV... – S. 10. In the Latin translation of the Order of the Golden Fleece Hipatius Potij made a mistake: the word “fleece” in Latin is with double “l” – “vellus”, so in Genitive should be “velleris” and not “veleris”, as in the Polish edition.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Okolski S. Orbis Polonus / Szymon Okolski. – Cracoviae, 1641. – Vol. 3. – P. 166.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

could give no particular information on the Soltans, except a remark that “there were great and glorious men in this house for a long time”²⁰.

With time, both the Polish translation of Hipatius Potij and his Cyrillic edition of the Misael’ charter became so rare that scarcely anybody knew about them. So when, in the middle of the 19th century, a handwritten copy of Potij’s Cyrillic edition was found in one of the Vatican libraries, it was translated into Polish anew. The anonymous translator explains in his preface that he undertook this work because of the importance of the document, because he was unsure if it had ever been edited before²¹. We draw attention to this circumstance because the 19th century anonymous translator, like Hipatius Potij in 1605, translated the words “ушьпанский златаго стрыха носитель” as “hiszpański złotego runa nosiciel”²², considering the aristocrat of the 15th century to be a knight of the Golden Fleece.

However unlike Hipatius Potij, the 19th century translator was mindful of the fact that there was an apparent contradiction in this title, which could indicate an obvious anachronism: “To the title of Alexander Soltan has been added, that he was “ушьпанский златаго стрыха носитель” (a Spanish bearer of the Golden Fleece); but this does not match with the chronology, because the Order of the Golden Fleece became a Spanish order later, only in the 16th century... The fact that it is called here “Spanish”, whereas it could have been called only Burgundian, can be explained by the presumption that the signature was not copied correctly by the scribe but contains a later explanation... Thus it is not a genuine signature but a description of the signatory made by another hand. Later the second or third copyist added to this description the word “Spanish”, which seemed to him requisite, for in his time the Order of the Golden Fleece had already passed to Spain”²³. So according to the notion of the translator, Alexander Soltan had indeed been

²⁰ Paprocki B. Herby Rycerstwa polskiego / Bartosz Paprocki. – Kraków, 1584. – Reprinted edition. – Kraków, 1858. – P. 865.

²¹ “Nie wiemy, czy był on drukowany kiedykolwiek, chociaż w przedmowie do niego wspomniane jest, że ten sam Hipacyusz Pociej miał zamiar go drukować; a Niesiecki jeszcze wyraźniej powiada, że to poselstwo jest u Hipacego Pocięja do druku podane. Wprawdzie nie rozumiemy dobrze tego powiedzenia: *jest u Hipacego Pocięja do druku podane*, i zdaje nam się, że Niesiecki tyle tylko wiedział co i my, i to z tej samej przedmowy do naszego dokumentu, którą tu zamieszczamy, a w której jest powiedziano, że Pociej miał zamiar podać do druku. Rozumiemy przeto, że z tego powiedzenia Niesieckiego, nie możemy jeszcze z pewnością wnosić, aby on widział ów dokument istotnie z *druku wydany*. Atoli gdyby nawet był gdzie drukowany, istnienie tego dokumentu tak jest mało znane, że przedrukowanie jego staje się koniecznem. Poselstwo do Papieża Rzymskiego Syxtusa IV od Duchowieństwa książąt y Panów Ruskich, z Wilna, roku 1476 // Przegląd Poznański. – Poznań, 1859. – Vol. 27. – P. 159.

²² Poselstwo do Papieża Rzymskiego Syxtusa IV... // Przegląd Poznański... – P. 188. In this Polish translation the list with the signatures is placed at the end, which is why we can conclude that the translator used the manuscript which now has the signature BAV, Mus. Borgiano, Illirico 16, for in the other handwritten copy of Potij’s first edition (which earlier was marked as the manuscript H XII and now has the signature BAV, Vat. slav. 12) the list with the persons who signed the charter is at the beginning. См.: Соборное послание русского духовенства и мирян к римскому папе Сиксту IV писанное из Вильны 14 марта 1476 г. / [ред. А. Петрушевич]. – Львів, 1870. – С. 27.

²³ Poselstwo do Papieża Rzymskiego Syxtusa IV ... // Przegląd Poznański... – S. 159–160.

a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece, while the word “Spanish” was added to the description of his title by a later copyist, at a time when the Order was already in Spain.

A few years later, in the same periodical *Przegląd Poznański*, an article was published entitled: „Aleksander Soltan. Szambelan Karola Zuchwałego i Kawaler Złotego Runa”²⁴ (“Alexandr Soltan. Chamberlan of Charles the Bold and a Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece”). The anonymous author of the article argued in favor of the *Epistle of Misael*, published (in its new Polish translation) some 3 years before, even if the title (naming the nobleman a “Spanish bearer of the Golden Fleece”) spoke against it: “Some doubts have been expressed concerning the authenticity of the Epistle, among others regarding the term “Spanish “bearer” of the Golden Fleece”. As it is correctly assumed, in 1476 the Golden Fleece had not yet passed from Burgundy to Spain. This last doubt concerning Alexander Soltan can now be definitely clarified with the aid of the documents, which are until now in possession of the Soltan family, so ancient and so merited before the Uniate Church in Poland”²⁵. Thus, in order to prove the arguments of the publication of 1859, the author presented documents from the family archive of the Soltans that refer to the voyage of Alexander Soltan to the Holy Land and the royal courts of Europe in 1467-1469.

Among those documents there are two charters from the Duke of Burgundy Charles the Bold, who was the sovereign of the Order of the Golden Fleece at that time. As we can see from the first document, a passport provided to the Ruthenian nobleman in Courtrai (now Kortrijk in Belgium) on May 24th, 1469, Alexander Soltan visited the Burgundian court in May of that year. By his second charter, dated by the same day, May 24th, 1469, Charles the Bold nominated Alexander Soltan as his councilman and chamberlain²⁶. But neither of these charters by any word mentioned that the Ruthenian aristocrat held a title from the Order of the Golden Fleece much higher and more honorable than the two received. Despite the silence of the published documents concerning Soltan’s decoration with this high order, the anonymous author of the article in the *Przegląd Poznański* of 1862 insisted that the nobleman really had been a knight of the Golden Fleece. After the reproduction of both charters of Charles the Bold he simply states: „Now it is easy to understand how Soltan became a knight resp. „bearer” of the Golden Fleece”²⁷. As we see, he just passed over the question of the documental evidence in favour of this thesis without giving any argument from the published documents, so it is hardly understandable how this conclusion could have been drawn. Thus, despite the intention declared in the beginning of his article „to clarify definitely with the aid of the documents” the question whether Soltan was indeed a knight of the Golden Fleece, the author neither presented any document about it nor derived any argument from both charters of Charles the Bold to prove his thesis.

Notwithstanding the lack of the documents or convincing arguments, the thesis that Alexander Soltan was a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece has been firmly established in the Polish scholarly and aristocratic milieu, not least because of its support

²⁴ Aleksander Soltan. Szambelan Karola Zuchwałego i Kawaler Złotego Runa // *Przegląd Poznański*. – Poznań, 1862. – Vol. 33. – P. 65.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem. – P. 73.

²⁷ Ibidem.

by the Soltans. In his letter published in 1877 in the necrology *Kronika żałobna rodzin wielkopolskich od 1863-1876 r.* Count Adam Leo Soltan, a member of the Soltan family, also considered his ancestor to be a “bearer of the Golden Fleece”. On the basis of the publication of the *Epistle of Misael* in the *Przegląd Poznański* of 1859, he repeats the title of his forebear in its Polish translation: “Sławny i wysoko urodzony pan Aleksander Soltan, rycerz grobu Bożego i hiszpańskiego złotego runa nosiciel, podskarbi króla sławnego Kazimierza”²⁸ (Glorious and high-born lord Alexander Soltan, knight of the Holy Sepulchre and bearer of the Spanish Golden Fleece, vice-treasurer of the glorious king Casimir). In this letter the count repeats the same reflections about the reason why the Golden Fleece has been called “Spanish”, which had been reported in both publications of 1859 and 1862. As additional arguments in favor of this thesis, the count refers to some unspecified “family traditions and different booklets which describe the appearance of the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary on the pear-tree in 1476, as well as the old images in the church and the Basilian monastery in Zhyrovichy where that image appeared. Zhyrovichy belonged to Alexander. The portrayal in the cupola depicts Alexander with that miraculous icon in the hand and with the decoration of the Golden Fleece”²⁹. In spite of adduction of these new arguments, they cannot be upheld, because the stone church and other stone buildings of the Monastery of Zhyrovichy were erected after the first quarter of the 17th century³⁰, that is, after the *Epistle of Misael* and its first Polish translation (in which Alexander Soltan was presented as a “bearer” of the Golden Fleece) were published. The same is also true for the books about the appearance of the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary in Zhyrovichy: since the first of these was published only in 1622³¹, it is clear that its author took the information about Alexander Soltan from the edition of the *Epistle of Misael* of 1605. The same applies also to the “family traditions of the Soltans”. Finally, no document was found in their family archive to reinforce this thesis, otherwise it would have been published among other documents in the article of 1862, which was intended to present Soltan as a knight of the Golden Fleece. Besides, Count Soltan’s letter uses a very specific term: “Aurei Velleris hispanici Obserwator”³², which reveals another source of the Soltan “family traditions” (along with the *Epistle of Misael* and booklets about the appearance and paintings of the Monastery

²⁸ *Kronika żałobna rodzin wielkopolskich od 1863–1876 r. z uwzględnieniem ważniejszych osobistości zmarłych w tym przeciągu czasu w innych dzielnicach Polski i na obczyźnie.* – Poznań, 1877. – P. 412.

²⁹ *Ibidem.* – P. 412–413.

³⁰ Though according to some reports the stone church was built in the first half of the 17th c., after the earlier wooden one was destroyed by fire, but in light of the destruction of the monastery during the uprising of Khmelnytsky 1655, the frescos mentioned by the count Soltan could not have been painted before the second half of the 17th c., or even in the 18th c. See: *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich.* – Warszawa, 1895. – Vol. 14. – P. 897 (Żyrowice).

³¹ *Borowik T.* Historia abo Powieść zgodliwa przez pewne podanie ludzi wiary godnych, o obrazie przeczystey Panny Mariey Zyrowickim cudotwornym /Theodozy Borowik. – Wilno, 1622.

³² *Kronika żałobna rodzin wielkopolskich od 1863–1876 r. ...* – P. 412.

of Zhyrovichy) – the armorial of Szymon Okolski³³, who in 1641 used exactly the same phrase concerning Alexander Soltan (“aurei velleris Hispanici obseruator”), taking his information from the Polish translation of the *Epistle of Misael* and Potij’s commentaries of 1605. So the circle closes: Hipatius Potij’s thesis was accepted by the historians, artists, heraldists and members of the Soltan family throughout the centuries. Moreover, in the 19th century all these congruent testimonies provided additional proof in favor of the thesis that the Ruthenian nobleman really was honored with the Golden Fleece.

It seems that Potij’s translation of 1605 was also one of the sources for Rev. Ignatij Stebelski’s study of the Soltan family. Although he wrote this work in the 18th century, it became well known thanks to its publication in *Scriptores rerum polonicarum* in 1878³⁴. We can trace some of Stebelski’s sources on the basis of the terminology which he uses to argue that Alexander Soltan was a “knight of the Holy Sepulchre and Spanish *aurei velleris*, i.e. a bearer of the Order of the Golden Fleece” (“Rycerza Bożogrobskiego i hiszpańskiego aurei velleris, t. j. złotego runa orderu nosiciela”)³⁵. Stebelski used exactly the same Latin phrase (*aurei velleris*) which is in the translation of 1605. Moreover, he also explains this Latin term in the same way as Potij did in the marginal note of his Polish translation. Stebelski obviously knew about the edition of the *Epistle of Misael* in its original language, for he mentions the edition of the charter of 1476, “by the efforts of Hipatius Potij, Metropolitan of Kyiv and of all Rus, in the Ruthenian and Polish languages 1605 by print in Vilnius”³⁶. The editors of Ignatij Stebelski’s study also added in the footnotes references to contemporary publications on this topic: the article of 1862 in the *Przegląd Poznański* and Count Adam Leo Soltan’s letter published in the necrology *Kronika żałobna rodzin wielkopolskich od 1863–1876 r.*³⁷

Finally, the same article of 1862 from the *Przegląd Poznański* was reprinted in the monthly *Litwa i Ruś* in 1913. This last publication differs from the first one by a somewhat changed and more extensive title: instead of Polish “szambelan” the Latin term “cambellanus” is used and the second honorary title of the Ruthenian nobleman “*consiliarius*” is mentioned. However, the indication that Alexander Soltan had been a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece was not changed: “Aleksander Sołtan “consiliarius” i “cambellanus” Karola Zuchwałego, kawaler Złotego Runa”³⁸.

However, all the efforts of older Polish historiography to present Alexander Soltan as a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece fade in front of the silence of the documents of this Order. The name of Alexander Soltan is not found in the acts of its chapters and

³³ Okolski S. *Orbis Polonus*... – P. 166.

³⁴ Ignacy Stebelski *O Prześwietnej Familii JMśc PP. Sołtanów* // *Scriptores rerum polonicarum*. – Vol. 4 / *Archiwum komisji historycznej*. – Vol. 1. – Kraków, 1878. – P. 373–394.

³⁵ *Ibidem*. – P. 373.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*. – Footnote 1.

³⁸ *Soltan A. Aleksander Soltan “consiliarius” i “cambellanus” Karola Zuchwałego, kawaler Złotego Runa* / A. Sołtan // *Litwa i Ruś*. – 2-d year. – Vilnius, 1913. – Vol. 4. – Book 10–12. – P. 108–113. Cf. to the publication of 1862: Aleksander Sołtan. *Szambelan Karola Zuchwałego i Kawaler Złotego Runa* // *Przegląd Poznański*. – Poznań, 1862. – Vol. 33.

in the lists of its knights preserved to this day³⁹. Only at the end of the 20th century did scholars point out this fact, as well as the lack of sufficient argumentation and documental testimonies in the Polish publications of the 19th century. Concerning the publication of 1862, the German scholars Werner and Anke Paravicinis remark: “On the page 74 it is stated without any evidence that Alexander Soltan came back as a knight of the Golden Fleece”⁴⁰. Hence, they concluded that this thesis “is based on some misunderstanding or on a later addition”⁴¹. They considered the “copy of the charter from the 14th of March 1476” to be the source of the mistake, as there Alexander Soltan is described as “the glorious knight of the Holy Sepulchre and the Spanish Golden Fleece”⁴². Despite the correct suggestion about the source of the misconception, Werner and Anke Paravicinis could not explore the origin of this concept and adopted, as it seems, their basic thesis from both publications in the *Przegląd Poznański*, assigning all the responsibility to later scribes and stressing the fact that the charter was delivered as a copy.

To solve the problem of the title of Alexander Soltan, we should look at the text of the *Epistle of Misael* in its original Church Slavonic language, where the title of the nobleman reads as “ушьпанский златаго стрыха носитель”⁴³. First of all, we must compare Potij’s edition with the text of the charter in the Smolensk manuscript (which is not copied from that of Kreva and did not have the same antigraph). The title in the manuscript of Smolensk has the same adjective “Spanish”⁴⁴ as in the first edition of 1605. It is almost impossible that the scribe of the Smolensk manuscript coincidentally added the same adjective “Spanish” at the same place in the epistle as the scribe of the manuscript of Kreva. It is rather improbable that the scribe of the Smolensk manuscript dated from the 1520s was such an expert in European phaleristics to be able to say to which royal houses certain orders of chivalry belong. It should also be noted that Charles V was named in his title as king and ruler of many lands, like Germany, Hungary, etc. So it is quite incomprehensible why, out of all his titles, only the adjective “Spanish” should have been chosen, especially given the fact that, in the titles of Charles V, the different Spanish lands were counted separately: Castile, Aragon, Leon, etc. and he never officially used the title “King of Spain”. All these considerations contradict the 19th century Polish scholars’ conviction that the adjective “Spanish” in the title of the nobleman Soltan was the addition of a later scribe. They rather prove this adjective to be a part of the authentic text of the charter.

Comparing the text of the different copies of the epistle, we perceive another problem in the title of the Ruthenian aristocrat: in the manuscript of Smolensk the

³⁹ See: *Les Chevaliers de l’Ordre de la Toison d’or au XVe siècle* / [ed. Raphael de Smedt] – Kieler Werkstücke. – Reihe D: Beiträge zur europäischen Geschichte des späten Mittelalters. – Vol. 3.

⁴⁰ *Paravicini A. Alexander Soltan ex Lithuania, ritum grecorum sectans. Eine ruthenisch-polnische Reise zu den Höfen Europas und zum Heiligen Land 1467–1469* / A. Paravicini, W. Paravicini // *Zwischen Christianisierung und Europäisierung. Beiträge zu Geschichte Osteuropas in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit. Festschrift für Peter Nitsche zum 65. Geburtstag*; [ed. by Eckhard Hübner, Ekkehard Klug und Jan Kusber]. – Stuttgart, 1998. – P. 395, footnote 187.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*. – P. 395–396.

⁴² *Ibidem*. – P. 396, footnote 188.

⁴³ Грамота киевскаго митрополита Мисаила к папе Сиксту IV... // АЮЗР. – Ч. 1. – Т. 7. – С. 200.

⁴⁴ Див.: *Заторський Н. “Послання Мисаїла” за Смоленським списком...* – С. 410.

noun translated as “fleece” reads differently: not “стрыха” (“strykha”), but “страха” (“strakha”)⁴⁵. The first spelling is attested to by another important document – the catalog of the estate of Alexander Soltan composed by his son after his father’s death in 1495⁴⁶. This was before the year 1516, in which Charles V became the king of different Spanish domains⁴⁷ (by which the Order of the Golden Fleece also became a Spanish order). In the catalog, the description of the decoration reads as follows: “На двухъ качалехъ стрыхъ Ушпаньскій перловый”⁴⁸. This proves, that the right spelling is not “strakh” (as in the Smolensk manuscript), but “strykh” (just as in the edition of Potii). We can also notice the difference between the *Epistle of Misael* and the inventory concerning the description of the order: in the last one it is called not “Golden” but “beaded” (in the meaning “encrusted with pearls”). If such a description had been used in the epistle, scarcely anybody would have come up with the idea to translate the description of the decoration of Alexander Soltan as the “Golden Fleece”, while the word “Golden” in it led to this mistranslation. As we see, both translators into Polish walked right into this trap: Hipatius Potij 1605 as well as the anonymous translator in the 19th century.

But even a mistranslation must have some reason behind it. It is not only the context which makes it clear that it is Spanish decoration and attempts to see in it the most famous one with the adjective “Golden” in its name – the Order of the Golden Fleece. The noun “стрыхъ” (“strykh”) should also provide some reasons for such a translation. Rev. Anthony Petrushevych points to some such reasons in his commentary on the “Ruthenian” text of the epistle, which he was the first to republish in 1869 (relying on three handwritten copies of the edition of 1605). In his analysis of the lexis of the charter he states that the right spelling must be not “стрыхъ” (“strykh”) but “стригъ” (“stryg” resp. “strig”)⁴⁹, although he did not explain what exactly this word in its “correct” spelling means. We find this word in the dictionary of Dal⁵⁰ with the meaning “clip” (“shearing”) and the example given is the Book of Job 31, 20: “От стрига агнецъ моихъ согрѣшася плещи ихъ”⁵¹ (“if he were not

⁴⁵ Див.: Затворський Н. “Послання Мисаїла” за Смоленським списком... – С. 410.

⁴⁶ The inventory was composed because of the suit of the son of Alexander Soltan against lady Jadwiga Litaworowa, who did not return the property of his father which her husband had to preserve. This is why the son of the nobleman made an exact list of the objects which belonged to the “treasure” of his father and which he sought to regain in court. См.: Русская Историческая Библиотека, издаваемая Археографической комиссией. – Санкт-Петербург, 1903. – Т. 20. – С. 871–877.

⁴⁷ We can determine this because the verdict in this case was delivered in 1516, and the judgment states that the son of Alexander Soltan “has showed the registry of those treasures of his father in front of us” // Ibidem. – P. 869. Thus the mentioned registry must have been composed earlier, before the verdict of 1516, the execution of which was based on the registry // Ibidem. – P. 871.

⁴⁸ Ibidem. – P. 872.

⁴⁹ Соборное послание русскаго духовенства... – P. 33.

⁵⁰ Полный церковно-славянский словарь / [сост. Г. Дьяченко]. – P. 673, 677, 1109.

⁵¹ Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка: в 4 т. / [авт.-сост. В. Даль]. – 2-е изд. – Санкт-Петербург: Типография М. Вольфа, 1880–1882. – Т. 4. – С. 348; Див. також: Острозька Біблія, Йова 31.

warmed with the fleece of my sheep”⁵²). It seems that Petrushevych was right in his suggestion, but the problem is that the Church Slavonic word “стригъ” (“stryg”) means only “shearing” and does not have the meaning of “fleece”, contrary to the German “Schur” and contrary to the English translation of this verse of the Book of Job. For there is another word with the meaning “fleece” in Church Slavonic, as in the Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian languages – “пуно” (“runo”)⁵³.

This brings us back to the cryptic word “стрыхъ” (“strykh”), for which we have found no suitable meaning in any dictionary. The only approximate semantic could be found in Hrinchenko’s dictionary of the Ukrainian language. There is a word with the same spelling “стрих” (“strykh”) which means the same as “стрихиль” (strykhl) – an instrument on which leather was stretched and dried⁵⁴. At first sight this meaning can also refer to fleece, but the exact description of the decoration helps to find another possible interpretation: “На двухъ качалехъ стрыхъ Ушпаньский перловый, со шлягомъ трясенымъ, уроблено в него чотыри гривенки перель, а за пять копъ шлягу”⁵⁵. The word “шляг” (“shlag”) could mean “ribbon” or “strap”, because in the dictionary of Hrinchenko we find such semantics for the “шляк”⁵⁶ (“shlak”) (changing of the voiced consonant “r”/“r” (“g”) into voiceless consonant “к” (“k”) at the end of the word can be explained by assimilation which is quite typical for some regions of Ukraine). This brings us to the conclusion that the Spanish decoration of Alexander Soltan was worn on a ribbon and the nobleman could have had the concept of “stretch” or “strain” in mind when he used the word “стрыхъ” (“strykh”) to show that the decoration is suspended from two pieces of ribbon. Another possible explanation is that the Ruthenian aristocrat used some word from another language or from a local dialect. In any case, we would be grateful to philologists for any suggestions which could help us to clarify this mysterious word which has caused so many misunderstandings and misconceptions.

As we have already stated, contrary to the presumptions of Polish scientists of the 19th century, it is quite sure that the decoration of Alexander Soltan was of Spanish origin, which complicates the matter of its identification.

During his voyage to the Holy Land and to the royal courts of Europe, Alexander Soltan indeed visited the court of the Spanish King Henry IV of Castile. Though no document from the Castilian king has been preserved, such documents clearly existed, as they are mentioned in a charter of the King of Portugal Afonso V. In his charter dated 17th of March 1469 he says that the travelling knight “has committed letters from the Emperor and from the King of Poland and from our relative the King of Sicily, further also from the King of Castile, our blood relative and neighbor” (“ab imperatore et a rege Polonie et a rege Sicilie, cognate nostro, tum et a rege Castelle, consanguineo afinique nostro, suarum amplissimarum vertutum litteras detulisset”)⁵⁷. Unfortunately, the letter from the King of

⁵² King James version.

⁵³ Словарь української мови / [упоряд. Б. Грінченко]. – Київ, 1958. – Т. 4. – С. 88.

⁵⁴ Там само. – Р. 216.

⁵⁵ Русская Историческая Библиотека... – С. 872.

⁵⁶ Словарь української мови... – С. 504.

⁵⁷ See: *Paravicini A.* Alexander Soltan ex Lithuania, ritum grecorum sectans... – P. 383.

Castile which could probably clarify the mystery of which Spanish decoration was given to Alexander Soltan is missing. Therefore, all we have to identify the decoration by is its description in the *Epistle of Misael* ("Golden") and in the catalog of the estate made by the son of the nobleman (richly decorated with pearls, and probably worn on a ribbon). There are only few Spanish Orders of that time which could match such a description, among others the Order of the Jar which had as its insignia a Golden jar with lilies and the Golden Griffin, also worn on a white ribbon, corresponding to the description in the catalog of the estate. However, the Order of the Jar belonged to the Kingdom of Aragon and not to that of Castile, and we can therefore exclude it. If we seek only among the orders by which kings of Castile honored travelling knights, we can point to the Order of the Scale (del Scama). For example, the German knight Jorg (Georg) von Ehingen 1457 (only a dozen years before Alexander Soltan) was honored by the same King of Castile Henry IV with three decorations: the Order of the Scale, which he calls in his diary "Spanish Order" (sic!), the Order of the Band (de la Banda), which he calls "the Band of Castile" and the Order of Granada which had as its insignia a pomegranate on the bough with a few leaves⁵⁸. But since there is no other insignia besides the ribbon mentioned for the Order of the Band, it could not be that in question. Other Castilian orders which existed at that time do not match the description of the cryptic "Golden strykh".

If we bring together all the pieces of information which we have gathered, we can say that the words "ушпанский златый стрыхъ" from the *Epistle of Misael* or "стрыхъ Ушпаньский перловый" from the catalog of the estate of Alexander Soltan certainly do not refer to the Order of the Golden Fleece. Instead, they refer to some other golden insignia richly decorated with pearls of Spanish (Castilian) provenance, possibly worn on a ribbon. Since another travelling knight Jorg von Ehingen identified the Order of the Scale as the "Spanish order", it is highly possible that Alexander Soltan meant the same one, as he added to its description the adjective "Spanish". The fact that the son of the nobleman used the same adjective (and the same word "strykh") attests that this expression has been common used in the Soltan family for the Spanish decoration in question. Consequently, the correct translation of the phrase "ушпанский златого стрыха носитель" should be "wearer of the Spanish Golden Order" where the "Spanish Order" apparently referred to the Order of the Scale.

Unfortunately, the misconception that Alexander Soltan was a knight of the Golden Fleece has not as yet been revised in Polish historiography. For instance, in the article dedicated to Alexander Soltan in the 40th volume of the *Polish biographical dictionary* published 2000-2001, it is stated that the Ruthenian nobleman "according to the family tradition confirmed by armorials and also according to R. Trimoniene became in that time [as he was at the court of Charles the Bold – N. Z.] a knight of the Golden Fleece; A. and W. Paravicinis contradict this"⁵⁹. As we see, although the survey of the Paravicinis which proves definitely that A. Soltan could not be a knight of the Golden

⁵⁸ Boulton D'A. J. D. The knights of the crown. The monarchical orders of knighthood in later medieval Europe 1325–1520 / D'A. J. D. Boulton. – Woodbridge (Suffolk), 2000. – P. 63.

⁵⁹ See under [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/index.php/a/aleksandrowicz-soltan>.

Fleece appeared after the publications of Trimoniene⁶⁰, the author of the dictionary entry for Alexander Soltan Henryk Lulewicz disregarded the arguments of the German scientists in favor of the testimony of a “family tradition” (an argument of Count Adam Leo Soltan in the 19th century) and that of armorials. As shown above, the only source for all those references was the *Epistle of Misael* translated into Polish and commented by H. Potij 1605 or the Polish translation of the 19th century. It may be painful to give up this 400-year-old myth; however, the task of the historian is not to cultivate pleasant myths, but to ascertain facts relying on the testimony of authentic documents, none of which, including the *Epistle of Misael* in its original Church Slavonic language, say a word about Alexander Soltan as a knight of the Golden Fleece.

⁶⁰ Trimoniene R. Aleksandras Soltanas – XV a. Piligrimas // Mokslas ir gyvenimas. – 1991. – Nr. 2. – P. 12–13. Trimoniene R. Vakarų Europos valdovų rekomendaciniai raštai Lietuvos Didžiojo Kunigaikščio Kazimiero dvariškiui. Aleksandro Soltano politinės veiklos štrichai // Lietuvos istorijos studijos. – Vilnius, 1996. – Nr. 3. – P. 101–119.