

An introduction to: *Poland in the Fight for its Borders 1918–1920*

by Mark Plant

Adam Przybylski wrote *La Pologne en lutte pour ses frontières 1918–1920*, a history of Poland's independence struggle, in 1928 while a brevet captain in the Polish Army. He then revised and supplemented this, and published a second edition in 1929. That later edition was translated into French by Lt-Colonel Jèze of the French Army and Commander Teslar of the Polish Army and published in Paris in 1929. I have worked from the French edition and have a tendency to translate rather freely, so it is quite possible errors have multiplied. Anyone requiring accuracy should hunt down the original Polish.

I have stuck to chapters IV to VI, as they provide material not usually available in English. I have omitted the sections dealing with the fighting against Germany and Czechoslovakia, but may come back to them some other time. Chapter I is a discussion of the theatre of the Polish-Soviet war, and really only relates well to the 1920 campaign. Chapter II covers Poland during WWI and Chapter III the overthrow of Austria and Germany in late 1918 to form the core of the new Poland. In Chapter VII the preparations for the 1920 campaign are detailed and that war then fills out the rest of the book.

I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of the military aspects of Przybylski's history, but he obviously cared very little about understanding Poland's opponents in the war. His comments concerning the various enemies of Poland should therefore be read with care. Throughout the text I have foot-noted what I consider the most glaring mistakes, but will address some issues surrounding the Galician war below.

The Basic Issues of the Polish-Ukrainian War of 1918-1919

This war is still a subject likely to raise tempers, but like all conflicts, the military aspects makes very little sense in isolation. Below are some background details glossed over in the material cited above. Inevitably some people will suspect me of bias, so it is as well to note that I have no Ukrainian or Polish ancestors – nor Jewish or Russian ones for that matter – and come to this as a complete neutral.

Up until November 1918 Galicia had been part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The complete collapse of that state had left a vacuum however, which had to be filled one way or another. Superficially the 1919 war was over the simple issue of whether Galicia was to be ruled by Poland or a nationalist Ukrainian régime, but there is a bit more to the matter than that. Later of course the Soviets would assert their “rights” to the area, based on the premise that they represented all Russians and Ukrainians.

The Ukrainians had been quite late to discover a sense of nationalism, in the sense that it distinguished them from Russians (indeed to many Russians there is no such thing as a Ukrainian, they are merely southern Russians). As a matter of firm policy the Tsars had actively sought to deny any suggestion that Ukraine was anything other than an integral part of Russia, and had largely succeeded. But Galicia had been in the Austrian section of the partitions of Poland and for Vienna Ukrainian nationalism had its upside – it sowed discord in the Russian empire, while at the same time making the Austrian Empire-dwelling ethnic Ukrainians less likely to look to St Petersburg for assistance – and so it was not actively discouraged. As a result, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed Galician Ukraine quickly asserted itself as a separate state, with much popular support, whereas the rest of the Ukraine was very half-hearted in its nationalism. Already by 1 Nov 1918 a Galician Ukrainian government was formed, the ZUNR (Western Ukrainian People's Republic), and naturally L'viv as the major city was claimed as the capital.

The fly in the ointment was that about 150 years previously, prior to its incorporation into the Hapsburg empire, the area around L'viv/L'vov/Lwów had been in the Polish Kingdom. The city's rise to prominence had occurred only when it entered the Polish Kingdom and it remained, culturally, dominantly Polish, with all the higher occupations and civil roles monopolised by Poles and the tiny German speaking population. The Poles in the countryside were much less common, often being land-lords. Unsurprisingly, as city-dwelling or land-owning “exploiters”, the Poles were not loved as a group by the mass of the Ukrainian peasantry.

Most importantly, the numerous Poles in Galicia decided that they were prepared to fight rather than submit to Ukrainian rule. And once there was a beleaguered Polish group in L'vov fighting for the right to join newly independent Poland, it forced the issue for Piłsudski and the men around him. No Polish government could allow itself to be seen to desert patriots, whether their immediate rescue was in the best long-term interests of Poland or not.

The vast majority of Poles were determined that L'vov should be part of the newly revived Poland, but were divided about the wisdom of attempting to extend their borders further east – or if they did take western Ukraine, what to do with it. Piłsudski had dreams of setting up independent buffer states in Lithuania, Belarussia and Ukraine, linked in a Polish-centred alliance aimed at hemming in Russia, although this conflicted with his desire to ensure that Vilnius and L'viv, two of the world's biggest Polish cities, remained dominantly Polish. Other Poles took the view that the more of Poland between them and the Soviets the better, and that the locals should at least be grateful to avoid Communism.

The least reasonable claimed vast swathes of the former Russian empire, on the basis that any region inhabited by Poles was intrinsically Polish, and were prepared to make a lot of noise if it looked like any Pole, anywhere, might end up in some other country.

But while the Poles were divided on how much to annex, the ZUNR would never have co-operated with Poland while being denied L'viv, and refused any mediation on that basis (exactly as the Polish annexation of Vilnius made any Polish-Lithuanian co-operation impossible). So Piłsudski decided to conquer all of Galicia first and worry what to do about it later. But it was not a foregone conclusion that the whole area would be swallowed by Poland proper until it became clear that his vision of a confederation of anti-Russian allied states was unworkable and that the only alternative to Polish rule was to give it to Soviet Russia.

Since then partisans of both sides have argued about the rightness of their cause. Sometimes they cite figures that “prove” that the Lwów area was Polish or Ukrainian, but it pays to examine such numbers very carefully (including the apparently irrefutable Polish censuses¹). Sometimes only the area just around the city is taken – to deliberately reduce the non-Polish percentage – despite the fact that Poland took the entire province, not just L'viv. Religion is a guide – but while most Roman Catholics were indeed Polish, a large number of Orthodox were not Ukrainian, but Russian, and strongly opposed to Ukrainian separatism, and so this method of calculating also needs to be used with great care.

For what it is worth, most independent observers, then and now, consider that for the wider area around L'viv the Ukrainians out-numbered the Poles by quite a margin in 1919. The ratio of Poles to Ukrainians got even lower further east, until by the Zbruch the Poles were a tiny minority. This is why in 1919 the Allied Powers wanted to set the River Bug as Poland's eastern border in 1919 (although sometimes they included Lwów and its immediate surrounds in Poland). It is as well to remember though that there were plenty of people in the area who supported parties other than the ZUNR or the Polish nationalists – Tsarists, Anarchists, Russian nationalists, Bolsheviks and other sorts of Marxists, in particular. By the time you include them, and the enormous Jewish population, it is quite possible that no régime could have hoped to claim anything like majority support.

So when Przybylski speaks of a “revolt” in L'viv of the Galician Ukrainians against the Poles, he is not being particularly fair. The Poles were a minority in the wider area, had no administration there and hadn't ruled the city for nearly 150 years – making it not at all clear that the Ukrainians were rebels. Of course, the Ukrainians consider the Poles in L'viv to have been the rebels and that it was the Galicians who were the defenders.

After WWII, when Stalin was resetting the new boundaries of eastern Europe, he came to the same conclusion as the 1919 Allies about the various ethnic boundaries, and so made the eastern border of Poland the Bug–Grodno line – placing the L'viv area in the Ukrainian SSR and Vilnius in the Lithuanian SSR.

Province Names

For provinces I have gone with the form most English readers will recognise.

English	Polish	Other	Location (current borders)
Galicia	Galicja	Halychyna (U)	vaguely Kraków to Ternopil'
Little Poland	Małopolska		Galicia and Volhynia (plus Podolia, in this case)
Masuria	Mazurie	Masurenland (G)	far NE Poland (then mainly in East Prussia)
Podlachia	Podlaskie		NE Poland, around Białystok
Podolia	Podolye	Podillya (U)	W. Ukraine around Vinnytsya/Khmel'nyts'kyy
Polesia	Polesie	Poles'ye (R), Polissya (U)	the Pripjat' marshes
Pomerania	Pomorskie	Pommern (G)	the coastal strip from Szczecin to Gdansk
Great Poland	Wielkopolska	Poznańie (P)	the area around Poznań
Silesia	Śląsk	Schlesien (G), Slezsko (Cz)	Czech-Polish border (Sudeten Mts and north)
Volhynia	Wotyłń	Volyn' (U)	extreme NW Ukraine (Lutsk area and north)

The area generally known in English as Galicia occupies a huge swathe across the southern half of the modern Polish-Ukrainian border, from the area around Kraków to that around Ternopil'. However Przybylski's use of the term is sporadic and erratic in meaning. In any case he generally uses the term “Little Poland” (a direct translation of *Małopolska*). Generally this term is understood to mean Galicia and Volhynia (to the north) but often Przybylski uses it as a synonym for Galicia and sometimes he includes Podolia in its scope (though the latter would not normally be considered part of it). This usage is consistent with his desire to stress Poland's right to the area of Ukraine east of the Bug: though at least he has the decency not to go on and on about how it was previously ruled by Poland, unlike a lot of his contemporaries.

¹In particular, the Polish Census of 1931 shows Polish spoken by about 40% of the population in Galicia. This **cannot** be used to “prove” that 40% of the population were Polish, since many non-Poles spoke it as well. But it is frequently used in just this way – as was intended by the census designers, since their aim was not to count Poles accurately but to “prove” that the area was Polish.

Town and River Names

Przybylski consistently used the Polish forms for place names – and indeed most of the area was in Poland when he wrote. After WWII almost all of the area under discussion left Poland, so unless one is using a pre-1939 map the names used in the original are confusing. For towns I have therefore gone with the modern names according to the style of the country they are now in, as this is what modern atlases will show. Even this has its problems as Belarus and Ukraine are in the process of adopting local spellings of places to reflect their differing dialects of Russian – thus the town known until very recently as Bobruisk now appears to be called Babruysk and will appear as either on modern maps.

Readers may struggle to find many of the places even then, as Przybylski often mentions quite small villages. For some I have therefore given indications of their locations. I have been unable to securely locate a few villages and rivers, in which case I have put the name in italics.

I have omitted from the following list those places with identical names or obvious transliterations, i.e.: where Polish **w** → other **v**, Polish **cz** → **ch**, **y** → **i**, **j** → **y**, **ie** → **e** (or soft sign, ' , when at the end).

Note that the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarussian spellings have a tendency to interchange **a**'s and **o**'s and **i**'s and **y**'s and Russian uses **g**'s where others use **h**'s.

Modern Name	Przybylski's Name	Notes
Adučiškis (Li)	Hoduciszki	
Ashmyany (B)	Oszmiania	50 km from Vilnius on the road to Minsk
Aukštadvaris (Li)	Wysoki Dwor	
Babruysk (B)	Bobruisk	Bobruysk (R)
Baranavičy (B)	Baranowicze	
Barysaw (B)	Borysow	Borisov (R)
Benikontsy (Li)	Bieniakonie	
Berdychiv (U)	Berdyczow	Berdichev (R)
Berezhany (U)	Brzeżany	
Bezdony (Li)	Bezdan	
Bogdanovo (B)	Bodanow	approx 50 km WSW of Maladzyechna
Brest (B)	Brześć	Brest Litovsk (E)
Byaroza (B)	Bereza-Kartuzka	
Cherven' (B)	Ihumen	Igumen (R)
Chortkiv (U)	Czortków	
Dokštas (Li)	Duksza	
Daugavpils (La)	Dunabourg	Dzwinsk (P), Dvinsk (R)
Dzyarzhynsk (B)	Kojdanow	Dzerzhinsk (R) and related spellings, formerly Koydanovo (B)
Galich (U)	Halicz	Halych (R)
Giedraičiai (Li)	Giedrojcie	
Gorodok (U)	Gródek Jagiellónski	
Gorokhov (U)	Horochoń	
Homel' (B)	Homel	Gomel' (R)
Izyaslav (U)	Zasław	
Ivano-Frankivs'k (U)	Stanisławów	
Kamen' (B)	Kamien	
Kam'yanets'-Podil's'kyy (U)	Kamieniec Podolski	
Kamen'-Kashirsky (U)	Kamionka-Strumiłowa	an error – the actual Polish name is Kamionka Koszyrski
Khmel'nyts'kyy (U)	Ploskirow	Proskurov (R)
Khyriv (U)	Chyrów	
Korets (U)	Korzec	
Krasnoye (U)	Krasne	
Kremenets (U)	Krzemienciec	
Lyepyel' (B)	Lepel	
Linkmenys (Li)	Lyngmiany	
Luninyets (B)	Łuniniec	
Luts'k (U)	Luck	
L'viv (U)	Lwów	L'vov (R), Lemburg (G)
Lyuban' (B)	Luban	
Maišialgala (Li)	Mejszagola	
Maladzyechna (B)	Molodeczano	
Marcinkonys (Li)	Marcińkance	
Mazyr' (B)	Mozyr	

Mostiska (U)	Mosciska	
Naujoji Vilnia (Li)	Wilejka	
Navahrudak (B)	Nowogrodek	
Nemenčine (Li)	Niemenczyn	
Nemirov (U)	Niemirów	
Nesvizh (B)	Mir-Nieświcz	
Nizhniy (U)	Nizniów	
Novohrad Volyns'kyy (U)	Zwiahel	formerly Novograd-Volynsk (R)
Novyy Yarychev (U)	Jaryczów	
Oleshonki (B)	Olszany	approx 35 km WNW of Maladzyechna
Orša (B)	Orsza	
Ozėrnaya (U)	Jezierna	
Pabradė (Li)	Podbrodzie	Maloye Podbrodzie (R); on the Vilnius–Daugavpils railway
Papernya (B)	Papiernia	approx 25 km SW of Lida
Peremyshlyany (U)	Przemyslany	
Perjola (Li)	Przelaje	just E of Kaišiadorys
Pererov (B)	Piererów	on Pripyat' S of Lake Chervonoye
Pokamen' (U)	Podkamien	
Podvolochisk (U)	Podwoloczyska	
Polatsk (B)	Polock	Polotsk (R)
Prilesnoye (U)	Maniewicze	
Radoshkovichī (B)	Radoszkowicze	
Radyvyliū (U)	Radziwiłłow	Radzivilov (R); known as Chervonoarmiy'sk from 1940–1991 on modern Lithuanian-Polish border, 25km SW of Augustów.
Rajgrad		
Rava-Russkaya (U)	Rawa-Ruska	
Rivne (U)	Rowne	
Rokitno (U)	Rokitna	
Rokitnoye (U)	Rokitna	
Ruzhany (B)	Rozanka	
Rykantai (Li)	Rykonty	
Seniejei Trakai (Li)	Stare Troki	
Shchitno (B)	Szczytno	10 km south of Ruzhany
Širvintos (Li)	Szyrwinty	45 km NNW of Vilnius by the main road to Ukmergė
Skyrimai (Li)	Pawlow	approx 30 km SSE of Vilnius
Slutsk (B)	Sluck	
Soly (B)	Sola	60 km from Vilnius on the RR to Maladzyechna
Staraya Rafalivka (U)	Rafalówka	a.k.a. plain Rafalivka
Starokonstantinov (U)	Starokonstantynów	
Staryy Chartoriysk (U)	Czartorysk	
Stryy (U)	(Nikolajow) Stryj	
Sudovaya Vishnya (U)	Sądowa-Wisznia	
Švenčionys (Li)	Święciany	
Terebovlya (U)	Tremblowa	
Ternopil' (U)	Tarnopol	
Tonezh (B)	Toniev	
Tsverbuty (B)	Skrzybowce	?
Turgeliai (Li)	Turgiele	approx 30 km SSE of Vilnius
Ugnev (U)	Uhnów	near the RR halfway between Rava-Russkaya and Bełz
Usvitsa (B)	Uswica	
Vawkavysk (B)	Wołkowysk	
Velikiy Lyuben' (U)	Lubien	
Vereshchitsa-Vishenka (U)	Wiszenka	NB: there are plenty of other Vishenkas
Vileyka (B)	Wilejka	
Vilnius (Li)	Wilno	Vilno (R)
Viški (La)	Wyszka	
Vladimir-Volynskiy (U)	Włodzimierz-Wolhynski	now part of Vladimirovka
Yampol' (U)	Jampol	
Zalozhtsy (U)	Załoście	
Žasliai (Li)	Zośle	just west of Kaišiadorys
Zel'vyany (B)	Zelwianka	
Zhlobin (B)	Zlobin	
Zhovka (U)	Żółkiew	
Zolochev (U)	Złoczów	

River and Lake Names

For the rivers that cross international boundaries I have tried to use the term most common in English. I have tried to place them all, due to the difficulty of locating them on atlases.

Modern Name	Przybylski's Name	Notes
Auta (B)	Auta	runs S-N to enter Dysna (Disna) River near Dysna
Bug (E)	Bug	Buh (R); runs N from Zolochiv to Brest, then W to the Vistula
Chervonoye, Ozero (B)	Kniaz, Lake	large lake N of Zhitkovichi
Ditva (B)	Dzitwa	runs just S of Lida
Dnieper (E)	Dnieper	Dnepr (R), Dniipro (U); runs through Smolensk and Kiev
Dniester (E)	Dniester	Dnestr (R), Dnister (U); runs from S of L'viv to Black Sea
Dvina (E)	Duna	Zapadnaya Dvina (R), Daugava (La); runs Vitsyebsk to Riga
Hnyla Lypa (U)	Gnila Lipa	runs S past Peremyshlyany and joins Dniester at Galich
Horyn' (U)	Horyń	Goryn' (R); runs N-S past David-Gorodok into Pripyat'
Lan' (B)	Lan	runs S-N into Pripyet' 10km east of Lakhva
Vozyera [Lake] Narach (B)	Jeź. Narocz	Ozero Narach (R); large lake just W of Myadel'
Niemen (E)	Niemen	Nemen (B), Memel (G); runs W to Kaunas then to Grodno
Oginski Canal		links Yesel'da river north to Vygonovskoye Lake
Oressa (B)	Oressa	a.k.a. Rassa; runs S past Lyuban' then E to join the Ptich'
Pripyat' (U)	Prypeć	Pripet (E); runs E through Pinsk and Mazyr' to the Dnieper
Ptich' (B)	Ptycz	a.k.a. Ptych'; runs S via Glusk and Ptich' town to the Pripyet'
San (P)		runs SE-NW through Przemyśl, to the Vistula at Sandomierz
Servech (B)	Serwecz	starts N of Baranavičy and runs NNE to the Niemen
Shchara (B)	Szczara	runs E-W and joins the Niemen near Mosty
Siniucha ? (La)	Swiniucha	runs S into the lake above Osveya
Sluch' (U)	Slucz	runs N-S through Sarny into the Pripyat'
Smotrych (U)	Smotrycz	runs S through Kam'yanets'-Podil's'kyy into the Dniester
Stokhod (U)	Stochod	runs NNE between Kovel' and Luts'k to the Pripyat'
Styr' (U)	Styr	runs S-N through Luts'k into the Pripyat'
Stviga (U)	Stwiga	runs N into Pripyat' between Turov and Petrikov
Svirzh (U)	Świrż	runs N-S starting just west of Peremyshlyany
Ubort' (U)	Uborć	runs N past Olevsk to the Pripyat'
Ulla (B)	Ulla	runs N via Chashniki into the Dvina at Ulla town
Ushitsa (U)	Uszyca	runs S into Dniester just E of Dunayivtsi
Utvocha ? (B)	Utwocha	runs from O. Chervonoye S to the Pripyat'
Viliya (R)	Wilja	Neris (Li); the river Vilnius is on
Vistula (E)	Wisła	Wisla (R), Weichsel (G); the river Przemyśl and Warsaw are on
Wisłok (P)		runs by Krosno and Rzeszów to the Vistula
Yesel'da (B)	Jasiolda	runs NW-SE just to the east of Pinsk
Zbruch (U)	Zbrucz	runs N-S halfway between Ternopil' and Khmel'nyts'kyy
Zolota Lypa (U)	Złota Lipa	runs past Berezhany to the Dniester near Nizhniy