

LEMKOVYNA

A History of the Lemko Region
of the Carpathian Mountains
in Central Europe

By Father Ioann Polianskii
(writing as I.F. Lemkyn)

Translated and Edited
By Paul Best
Michael Decerbo
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Carpathian Institute
The Lemko Association
Higganum, Connecticut
2012

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Wooden Lemko tserkva [church] in Ropki, twenty years after the ethnic cleansing of 1945–1947. Ropki, 1968.

FOREWORD

Ioann Polianskii and his *magnum opus*



Ioann Polianskii (1888-1978) was a Greek Catholic priest who witnessed and to a certain extent took part in many events of the twentieth century important for Lemkos. He was born early enough to be submerged in the Rusophile ideology which dominated the Lemko Region before the outbreak of World War I. As were hundreds of others, he was arrested during the early stages of the war, imprisoned and eventually sent to an internment camp in Talerhof. This suffering and the martyrdom of his fellow Rusyns contributed to the strengthening of his ethnic and political beliefs.

Relatively long service at a village parish in Smolnik (1918-1935) brought Father Polianskii back to the type of environment he knew from his childhood years in the Lemko village of Banica, in Nowy Sącz county. But now he was the most important person in the village, where life was simple, hard and not always fulfilling. In his autobiography "*Droga Ciernista kapłana katolickiego*"¹ [A Priest's Thorny Path]— which is published in this book in an English translation but remains unpublished in its Polish language original— he claimed that those years were actually personally very fulfilling. His flock appreciated his work, which was not limited to ecclesiastical matters, but also included efforts to raise the cultural and economic level of his parishioners.

Father Polianskii eventually moved to a bigger stage, the Lemko Apostolic Administration, where he served as a chancellor and later as an interim administrator, while also serving as a pastor in Wróblík Królewski.² The Lemko Apostolic Administration was established in 1934 by the Vatican with the goal of removing Lemko parishes from the jurisdiction and Ukrainian propaganda of the Greek Catholic Bishop of Przemyśl. This ecclesiastical separation was very much to the liking of Father Polianskii who also got involved in the activity of the Lemko Association, the organization which promoted the view of Lemko distinctiveness from their eastern neighbors.

The official Polish policy favorable for Rusynophile Lemkos ended quickly. Polianskii witnessed this change firsthand when he went to Warsaw as a member of a Lemko delegation ignored by the prime minister. Even more changes occurred under Nazi rule, during which Father Polianskii encountered persecution, several arrests and imprisonment. Although the "liberation" was a welcome development for Father Polianskii as it removed Ukrainian rule from the Lemko Region, the resettlement to the East and the subsequent Operation "Vistula" shattered the Lemko world in the Carpathians.

Under Communist rule,³ Father Polianskii had to do what other Greek Catholic priests did in this new environment. He had to find a place for himself within the structures of the Roman Catholic Church as the Greek Catholic

1 I received a typewritten copy of this work from Jerzy Starzyński of Legnica, Poland.

2 Dmytro Blażejovskij, *Historical Šematism of the Eparchy of Peremyśl Including the Apostolic Administration of Lemkivščyna (1828-1939)* (Lviv, 1995): 808.

3 In addition to his memoir, his activities in Communist Poland and some of his letters are presented by Jarosław Zwoliński in his *Rapsodia dla Lemków* (Koszalin, 1994). <http://lemko.org/pdf/rapsodia.pdf> See also: Aniziiia Put'ko-Stekh, *Ukrains'ki sviaschchenyky Zakerzonnia. Khronika represii* (Ukrainian priests of Zakerzonnya) (Lviv, 2007): 306–307.



Deportations conducted by soldiers of the "Poznań" battalion, 2nd brigade of Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych troops. Ustrzyki Górne, 1947.

Church ceased to exist. He is, however, credited with celebrating the first Eastern Rite liturgy in Poland after 1947. Apparently for this act he was transferred to Opole Diocese where he briefly served in a few parishes before settling in Rogi (1953), a village located some thirty kilometers west of Opole where he spent the rest of his working years. He became ill in the late 1960s and was paralyzed and bedridden after September 1970, but he continued to write.

Father Polianskii was indeed a "priest unlike any other" as Petro Trokhanovskii described him.⁴ Throughout his life he was always very resourceful and very much capable of finding sometimes surprising— or even eyebrow-raising— connections that allowed him to move on with his life and work. Under Communist rule it meant some level of compliance with the government's policies. In return, he was able to use his contacts and favorable opinion in governmental circles to lobby for Lemkos, or at least to find out what sort of Lemko activities would be permitted by the Communist regime independent of Ukrainian influence. He tried to keep in touch with and influence Lemko activists in various parts of Poland and in the United States. After the political thaw of 1956 he was instrumental in spreading information about Lemko activities and linking Lemko leaders with each other. He also lobbied the highest Roman Catholic circles on behalf of Lemkos.

4 Petro Trokhanovskii, "Sviashchennyk inchy od inchýkh," in *Lemkivskii kalendar 1998* (Krynica-Legnica, 1998): 84-87.

It was in Rogi that he wrote his History of the Lemko Region. The text was written at the request of Lemko activists who lived in western Poland and were engaged in the post-Stalin era's Lemko renaissance. The first part of the text, called "Geography," was sent to Nikolai Tsisliak (1910-1988), the editor of the American Lemko newspaper *Karpatska Rus'*, by March of 1959. The second part, called "History," was at that time almost ready. In 1959, Father Polianskii planned one more part which was to deal with current developments. It is not known how much time it took him to finish the text but it did spend considerable amount of time in a drawer perhaps due to internal power struggles within the Lemko Association. The book was finally published by the Lemko Association of the United States and Canada in 1969 thanks to the efforts of Teodor Dokla (1931-1982), a high ranking member of the Association.⁵ The final, printed work consisted of five parts, with history and contemporary developments stretched over four parts and the fifth part carrying biographies of accomplished Lemkos.

While it is the work of a person not trained to be a researcher or a historian, it is nevertheless based on a sizable number of works in a number of languages. It is clear that Father Polianskii had a long-lasting interest in history which allowed him to write a monographic overview of Lemko history, a task which could not be achieved without considerable work and knowledge. He also had to assemble a sizable library. After all, materials that he used while working on his History were not readily available anywhere close to the village of Rogi. One may speculate that libraries of Wrocław, where he traveled to meet with Lemko activists, could have been utilized by him.

Father Polianskii also used scholarly apparatus in the form of footnotes, which in the original version were sometimes erroneously printed in the middle of a page. In his undated "Observations on the History of the Lemko Region"⁶ he voiced his displeasure at this and other shortcomings. He pointed out that some pages were left blank and his collection of some one hundred photographs was not used in the book. Instead other illustrations were used as well as additional text that was not written by him (it was added at the end of the book and marked as such).⁷ Most importantly, Father Polianskii complained

5 For more on him see: Petro Trokhanovskii, "Teodor Doklia," in *Lemkivskii richnyk* 2002 (Krynica-Legnica, 2002): 108-113.

6 I received a copy of this text from John Madzik of Ansonia, Conn. It is also reprinted in this volume.

7 This part consists of articles from a book edited by Ivan S. Shelepetskii, *Priashhevshchina: istoriko-literaturnyi sbornik* (Prague, 1948).

that some parts of his text were excluded from the book, but we do not know which. Therefore he was eager to prepare a second revised edition but it is impossible to say with any certainty whether he ever set out to do that.

Technical problems that occurred in the first edition are not repeated in this English translation, but other shortcomings could not be removed. Despite a substantial bibliography some may question the sources of information for some of Father Polianskii's statements. In some parts of the work a reader will ask: "what is this statement based on?" Back in 1959 Father Polianskii announced to his Lemko friends that he wrote a brand-new, scholarly treatment but the emotionally-charged-language of some of its passages does not belong to a scholarly work. It may, however, be somewhat acceptable in a memoir. Father Polianskii's book could actually be considered to consist of two parts. One of them deals with the distant past up until the time when he entered adult life. The other one, which covers the first part of the twentieth century, could be treated more like a memoir as he either witnessed or was a contemporary to the events that he wrote about.

Father Polianskii's ethnic, religious and political viewpoints had significant impact on his work but that can be said about many— if not all— other works written by amateur scholars who were deeply involved in their ethnic group's life. Actually, the value of this work is precisely in the reflection of how a person of certain ethnic, religious and political convictions viewed the historical evolution of his own people. His occasional harsh words towards Ukrainians or Poles have their roots in what Father Polianskii would describe as the long-lasting suffering of the Lemko nation. Although a staunch Catholic until his last breath he was not shy to criticize some Catholic priests, whether Polish or Ukrainian, for their actions that in his opinion hurt Lemkos.

What a reader will find puzzling in a book published in America are the author's praises for the Communist system. Father Polianskii writes about Lemkos' involvement in the fight against fascist Germany and about some support for and high hopes for a better life under "the people's rule." He is quick to point out major disappointments: (1) the resettlements, (2) the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church, and (3) the official treatment of Lemkos as Ukrainians and associating them with what he calls "Ukrainian nationalism." Writing the book during the post-Stalin era he blames those undesirable developments on decisions of flawed leaders of the previous period.

It is obvious now and was without doubt obvious to Father Polianskii that an official distribution of his book among Lemkos in Poland could be

achieved only if the book presented a favorable picture of Communist Poland. While this may have been the reason for his rosy picture of Communism, it is also possible that a person who originated in an underdeveloped, impoverished, and struggling environment (his parents were illiterate) could have been somewhat receptive to Communist propaganda.⁸

While we do not know how many copies of the book were printed it is quite possible that the still formidable Lemko Association (with its own printing shop) produced a sizable number of copies.⁹ They were made available to American Lemkos and some did make it to Poland where they were cherished by many and known as *Istoriia Lemkyna* (A history by Lemkyn), as Father Polianskii published it under the pseudonym of Y. F. Lemkyn. Hardbound, with the title and author's name in golden letters, and produced in America it was at the least intriguing if not impressive. Even today people continue to ask for it, as it is still the largest history of Lemkos written— as many would describe it— *po nashomu* [in our own language].¹⁰

Lemkovyna: A History... is the love-child of a person who was not a trained historian but most of all a Lemko patriot. A person who during his short reign as interim Administrator of the Lemko Apostolic Administration made sure to communicate to all Lemkos, whether Greek Catholic or Orthodox, that unity is what they need the most. For him, Lemkos came first, before anything else.

Bogdan Horbal
New York Public Library

8 In his memoir, which was finished in 1972, he concentrates on his pastoral service and dealings with Roman Catholic priests and hierarchy without addressing the issue of the current political system in Poland. Thus we do not know what his real attitude towards it was.

9 Before the sale of Lemko Hall in Yonkers in the late 1990s, boxes with dozens of uncirculated copies of the book were removed, eventually to end up in storage in Higganum, Connecticut, twenty-first century headquarters of the Lemko Association.

10 The somewhat complex issue of the language of the original edition book is addressed separately in this volume. For a listing of monographic works on Lemkos see Bogdan Horbal, *Lemko Studies: A Handbook* (New York, 2010): 317-323.

PREFACE

Although they are a small stateless people, the Lemkos of the Carpathian Mountains of Central Europe have the right to a history too. Despite not ever having a united political entity of their own, although several parts tried to wrench free from the grasp of neighboring states right after the First World War, and despite the magnetic pull of the East Slavic Russians and Ukrainians plus the assimilationist pressures of living within a space claimed by Poland, nonetheless there is a provable historic continuity of the Lemko people going back at least a thousand years.

As European populations approached modern times, the concept of nationhood/nationality became popular, especially with governments, which attempted to draw to themselves the greatest number of people possible. The Lemkos, in their mountains, were not immune to this and in the early



The Maslej family. Berest, 1938. (© M. Maslej).

nineteenth century these Carpathian mountaineers felt the first stirrings of nationalism. Near the middle of the century Aleksander Dukhnovych became active in Prešov and in 1849 the imperial Russian army went through the Carpathian passes to crush the Hungarian nobility's rebellion against the Habsburgs. The Russians and Lemkos recognized in each other fellow East Slavs of similar culture and religious persuasion.

Eventually, while most Lemkos probably ignored the situation, several political/social/religious orientations developed: Staro-Rus' (Old Ruthenian)/Russophile, Ukrainophile, and Carpatho-Rusyn. The Staro-Rus' idea included the notion of a commonality of all East Slavs, a single social and religious Rus' entity. Russophiles carried that idea further into the *Rus'ka Idea* that not only was there a common East Slavic identity, but that there ought to be a single united, undivided state "from the Carpathians to Kamchatka" or "from the Poprad [river] to Vladivostok," ruled over by "our Tsar" in Moscow— a concept which, for some, after 1917 transmogrified into rule by Soviet Moscow. Ukrainophiles, on the other hand, rejected a common East Slavic identity, whether Staro-Rus' or Russophile (much less a common state) and claimed all "Ukrainian lands"; this included the Carpathian region and the Lemko area, as "Western Ukraine." The Carpatho-Rusyn idea is that *Karpatska Rus'* is simply *Karpatska Rus'*, an ethnic territory not dependent on any other entity for its right to exist.

The author of *Lemkovyna: A History*, Father Ioann Polianskii, clearly was of the Staro-Rus' persuasion with leanings towards Carpatho-Rusynism. He thought that Ukrainophilism was a negative force, inimical to a common East Slavic identity. Yet while he was sympathetic towards Russians he never indicated that he wanted to be ruled by them. In fact, when forced to choose between East and West he went west, never joining the Orthodox Church even though he had been constantly oppressed and persecuted by the Latin Rite Catholic Church. It is interesting to speculate, as Petro Trokhanovskii does in his article "A priest of a different sort" (see bibliography), why, since he was sympathetic to Orthodoxy, Polianskii didn't transfer to that church, as others had done in similar circumstances. Perhaps the answer lies in his writings on the powers of the successors of St. Peter (see bibliography) which, unfortunately, are not available to us.

The current volume is an attempt to present to readers of English an overview of the Lemko Region of Central Europe written by a man who experienced much of its recent history firsthand. We have also included new



*Lemko school children from Chyrowa on a field trip to a shrine in Dukla.
Between the two adults stands Pavlo Hranychnii.*

material by Mykhailo Almashii, Paul Best, Bogdan Horbal, and Walter Maksimovich which analyzes Polianskii's book in its historical and linguistic context. Finally, a brief biography of the author, as well as his own autobiography, also appear here for the first time in English.

Although most copies of the 1969 Lemko language edition of Polianskii's *Lemkovyna: A History* sat gathering dust in storage for forty years for reasons discussed in "The Lemko Association and *Lemkovyna: A History*," the idea to translate Polianskii into a world language is nonetheless decades old. It only came to fruition with the revival of the Lemko Association in 2010 as a non-profit, tax-exempt, non-partisan, non-political organization for furthering knowledge about Lemkos, the Lemko homeland, and the Lemko diaspora. We hope that the readers of this volume will profit by gaining a greater knowledge of the unique Lemko people.

The Editors



Last remains of human habitation, Lemkovyna, 2001.

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NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY AND TRANSLITERATION

There are multiple uses of the word *Rus'* in the original Lemko language text of 1969. The editors have endeavored to translate this term into English according to its contextual situation, whether as "Russia" (the political entity), "Rus," (the common East Slavic territory), "Rusnak" or "Rusyn" (referring to East Slavs within that territory, particularly in the Carpathians), or "Rus" as an alternative ethnonym to the word "Lemko."

Also, Fr. Polianskii frequently conflates, under the term "German," the German-speaking Austrians of the Vienna-based Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Germans of the Berlin-based German Empire. The editors have tried to make clear which is which.

There are a number of schemes for transliterating the Cyrillic alphabet used in the 1969 text into English. Since this is not a text for linguistic specialists, we have applied the principle of Occam's Razor: to paraphrase, "Don't make things too complicated." Some inconsistency in transliteration of personal names is unavoidable because some people spelled their names differently at different times. However, in keeping with standard scholarly practice, place names appear according to the current spelling in the country where they are now located, e.g. Lviv (Ukrainian) rather than Lwow (Polish), Lvov (Russian), or Lemberg (German).

Fr. Polianskii's notes appeared in a non-standard format in the 1969 edition; he complains about this in his letter to Dokla, reproduced in "The Lemko Association and *Lemkovyna: A History*." While the editors have corrected their placement, we have not attempted to standardize their content or check them for accuracy, since many of the referenced materials are not available in North America. Some materials that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for the North American reader to obtain have been made available by Walter Maksimovich on the lemko.org Web site; we have augmented Fr. Polianskii's notes with references to these copies, where available.

Material, including notes, appearing in square brackets [] was added in this edition to further elucidate the text. Additionally, while the popular Wikipedia Web site is not generally considered a reliable source, for some subjects or persons about which little other material is available in English we provide links to Wikipedia as a convenience, to serve as a jumping-off point for further research.

As a matter of record, the term “Lemko Association,” the publisher of both the original and this English version of Polianskii’s text, is often used generically. In reality, there were six Lemko entities in North America with interlocking directorates: The Lemko Association of the United States and Canada; The Carpatho-Russian American Center, Inc. – Lemko Hall; the Carpatho-Russian American Congress; The Lemko Resort, Inc.; the Thalerhof Chapel Fund; and the Lemko Relief Committee of the United States and Canada, Inc. Lemko organizations in both Poland and North America have often been referred to generically as *Lemko Soyuz*; in this usage, *soyuz* or *soiuz* is not a Soviet or communist term, but rather a common Slavic word with no particular significance, having the meanings of alliance, association, or union, e.g. Polish *sojusz*.

"Father Ioann Polianskii 'was arrested seven times by different political orders and even once condemned to death.' Nevertheless, as 'Pastor to the Lemkos' he laid out the history of the Lemko Region, condemned national and religious splits, and called on the Lemkos to be loyal to their church and the land in which they were born."

— STANISŁAW STĘPIEŃ

South-East Research Institute
Przemyśl, Poland

"Ioann Polianskii witnessed and to a certain extent took part in many events of the twentieth century important for Lemkos: World War One, the inter-war period, the German occupation, resettlement to the East and the subsequent Operation 'Vistula' which shattered the Lemko world in the Carpathians. He was a priest like no other... but most of all a Lemko patriot."

— BOGDAN HORBAL

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