Arkadiusz Czwołek, *Piórem i bulawą: Działalność polityczna Lwa Sapiehy kanclerza litewskiego, wojewody wileńskiego*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo naukowe UMK, 2012. 734 p., ill. ISBN 978-8323-129-36-3

Ten years ago, the Lithuanian historian Artūras Vasiliauskas described the situation of biography writing in Lithuania in particularly accurate words: ‘Only a very benevolent assessor of our culture would dare to claim that biography is a thriving genre in Lithuania [...] the shelf of Lithuanian works about prominent personalities of old Lithuania is quite modest.’¹ Although over time the situation has changed, and more than one significant piece of research has really reached the world,² some gaps are still very large. In particular, there is a shortage of biographies of prominent actors in the ‘post-Lublin’ period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). Neither the Lithuanian or the more capable Polish historiography can boast an abundance of this. Therefore, the new study by Arkadiusz Czwołek about Lew Sapieha (Leonas Sapiega) is an event in itself.

After all, there are only a few works about the Sapiegas, and specifically the GDL chancellor L. Sapieha (1557–1633). A longtime state chancellor, who late in his career reached the pinnacle of political power and became grand hetman of the GDL and voivode (governor) of Vilnius, he is often presented in historiography as highly fragmented and too one-sided. He was immersed in cultural activities, not participating in political struggles, unconditionally loyal to the king, and not particularly ambitious. Historians usually focus on his law making and cultural activities: his contribution to preparing and issuing the Third Lithuanian Statute (TLS), the funding of churches and monasteries, activities forming the Union of Brest, and the like.

There has not been any serious study presenting the political activities of Lew Sapieha, and the abundant material about them is spread over

¹ A. Vasiliauskas, ‘Apie didiką ir jo aplinką’, *Knygų Aidai* (Vilnius, 2003), no. 1–2, p. 26.

² V. Dolinskas, *Simonas Kosakovskis. Politinė ir karinė veikla Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje* (Vilnius, 2003); U. Augustyniak, *W służbie hetmana i Rzeczypospolitej: klientela wojskowa Krzysztofa Radziwiłła* (Warsaw, 2004); K. Bobiatiński, *Michał Kazimierz Pac – wojewoda wileński, hetman wielki litewski: działalność polityczno-wojskowa* (Warsaw, 2008); G. Kirkienė, *LDK politikos elito galingieji: Chodkevičiai XV–XVI amžiuje* (Vilnius, 2008); E. Raila, *Ignotas Ignotas. Vilniaus vyskupas Ignotas Jokūbas Masalskis* (Vilnius, 2010).

separate parts of many works. The Polish historian Henryk Lulewicz, who gathered all the factual information into one place, wrote probably the best, the most comprehensive and the most valuable, and still not out of date, article about the GDL chancellor.³ Despite the valuable insights, it is an encyclopedic article, not professing to broader interpretations and analyses. The first person to take on this task (albeit very limited) was the Lithuanian historian Stanislovas Lazutka.⁴ In his work, the GDL chancellor is portrayed as a highly educated Lithuanian statesman, enlightened, absorbed in creating wealth in the homeland and safeguarding peace, not participating in disputes between the nobility, and even scornful of them. Of course, his role in the preparation of the TLS is dramatised. The author acknowledges that Sapieha hungrily sought land and wealth, because in spite of all his wisdom, he was typical of his age and his class.⁵ This book developed and strengthened the already-mentioned stereotype of Sapieha as a cultural activist. On the other hand, the author himself admits that it is first of all only a work popularising knowledge, trying at least partially to fill the gaping hole in historiography. Much more recent articles, appearing in the collection *Sapiehowie epoki Kodnia i Krasiczyna*⁶ (The Sapiehas of the Kodnia and Krasiczyn Epoch), see Sapieha as a man of culture. For example, Tomasz Kempa analyses the activities of Sapieha in creating the Union of Brest, and does not ask why he actively supported the union, what benefits he expected and had from it, and whether the opponents of the union simply struggled against the idea of the union, or against the growing influence and power of the GDL chancellor.⁷ Iwan Akinczyc sees Sapieha not only as an activist for the union, church founder and ardent Catholic, but also as an upholder of the old Belarusian language.⁸ Belarusian historians stress the latter activity in an effort to show the GDL chancellor as an

³ H. Lulewicz, 'Lew Sapieha h. Lis (1557–1633)', *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (further *PSB*), t. 35 (Warsaw–Krakow, 1994), pp. 84–104.

⁴ S. Lazutka, *Leonas Sapiega* (Vilnius, 1998).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶ *Sapiehowie epoki Kodnia i Krasiczyna*, ed. K. Stępnik (Lublin, 2007).

⁷ T. Kempa, 'Lew Sapieha a Kościół unicki', *Sapiehowie epoki Kodnia i Krasiczyna*, pp. 27–42.

⁸ I. Akinczyc, 'Lew Sapieha a problem religijny w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim', *Sapiehowie epoki Kodnia i Krasiczyna*, pp. 17–26. One must note that the term *old Belarusian language* in Belarusian historiography is called the language of the GDL Ruthenians, or in other words the *chancellery* Slavic language, i.e. the language, in which up to the 17th century the greater part of the documentation of the state was conducted. This 'appropriation' of the language is one of the most important arguments explaining that the GDL was the old Belarusian state.

educator of Belarusian culture and self-awareness.⁹ Unfortunately, many of these writings 'do not live up' to the popularisation of knowledge, and are more like school-level essays. In the collections mentioned only the article by Arkadiusz Czwołek,¹⁰ analysing the political career and works of Sapieha, stands out.

In particular, the cliché of the chancellor as an erudite jurist is especially exaggerated and exploited. In his fundamental study, Ivan Lappo was the first to refute with scholarly arguments the thesis of Kazimierz Kognowicki¹¹ established in the 18th century that Sapieha prepared the whole TLS.¹² He defined the role of the deputy chancellor in the preparation of the TLS as that of a manager: it emphasises his organisational work in the publishing and translating, or in 'punching through' the privilege of the sovereign, but not in the lawmaking. However, even the halo of the Lithuanian Solon¹³ now surrounds this nobleman. Usually confined to the orations of Sapieha in the analysis of the TLS, the GDL chancellor is presented as an extremely educated ideologue and practitioner of noble democracy, who idealises law and statutes, contrasting them with the rule of tyrants. He emerges as a highlighter of the guidelines of the republican ideology of Lithuania, and also as a defender of Lithuanian independence.¹⁴ The catalogue of the 2012 (so quite new) exhibition 'Crosses are a Sign of Morality, and the Arrow of Victory... The Sapiehas: Statesmen, Patrons of Art and Collectors'¹⁵ reflects the still alive and dominant cliché of Sapieha as a cultural figure. The first part of the catalogue contains articles mostly on the legal and cultural activities of the chancellor. And the inconsistency and eclecticism of the 'block' of texts perfectly reflect the fragmentation of the historiographical material, the lack of historical research, and the very one-sided knowledge of the GDL chancellor.

Czwołek tries to fill the apparent gap in historiography with a really grandiose monograph. According to a statement by the author, a nobleman of such a rank was unduly on the margins of historical research (p. 9).

⁹ Леў Сапега і яго час (Hrodna, 2007); Вялікі канцлер Вялікага княства: (да 450-годдзя з дня нараджэння Льва Сапегі) (Hrodna, 2007).

¹⁰ A. Czwołek, 'Lew Sapieha, dyplomata w służbie Zygmunta III', *Леў Сапега і яго час*, pp. 123–137.

¹¹ K. Kognowicki, *Życie Sapiechów i listy od monarchów, książąt i rozmaitych panujących do tych że pisane* (Wilno, 1790).

¹² I. Lappo, *1588 metų Lietuvos Statutas* (Kaunas, 1934), t. 1, part 1.

¹³ Lazutka, Leonas Sapiega, p. 95.

¹⁴ D. Kuolys, *Res Litwana. Kunigaikštystės bendrija. Respublikos steigimas* (Vilnius, 2009), pp. 237–238.

¹⁵ *Kryžiai yra dorybės ženklas, o strėlė – pergalės... Sapiegos – valstybininkai, meno mecenatai ir kolekcininkai*, catalogue of an international exhibition, compilers: V. Dolinskas, B. Verbiejūtė (Vilnius, 2012), p. 544.

And it seems that the study itself is written according to the rank of the nobleman, which the word 'great' would best describe. It is truly astounding: 750 pages, about 700 literary positions and material from sources in archives in Sweden, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, and, of course, Poland. It is a really ambitious project that demanded the control of a phenomenal amount of material and its systematic presentation.

The structure of the book is very simple: it is a classic *vita*, the presentation of the life of Sapieha from birth to death. So the narration flows like a continuous stream, presenting chronologically in 11 chapters the life and activities of the GDL chancellor. In each of them, Sapieha comes out in a particular historical and problematic context, revealing his actions in specific situations (*rokosz*, wars in Livonia, and so on). Thus, not only is there a certain desirable raising of issues in the text, but in that way it is also easier to read in parts.

In the introduction, not too much time is spent on the methodological and theoretical aspects of the study. Although methodological awareness is usually not generally characteristic of historians, in this case, somewhat greater precision would not have hurt. The objectives of the research are formulated very broadly: to reconstruct the political career of Sapieha and his public activities (p. 9). It is emphasised that a lot of attention will be devoted to the activities of the chancellor in forming the foreign policy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the east. The issues of finance and land ownership, as well as the problems of Sapieha's faith and the functioning of the GDL Chancellery, are not touched on at all. Taking into account the previous articles by Czwolek, we could expect a presentation of Sapieha's activities in the domestic and foreign political life of the country, with the research concentrating most on the chancellor's relations with the Radvilas, and his influence on the Commonwealth's contacts with Moscow.

Such vagueness in the introduction does not allow us to say clearly what the historian specifically sought to do, and how he succeeded. And the unclear objectives of the study spoil the entire monograph. Thus it remains unclear whether or not the author wanted to reconstruct the mechanisms of the accumulation of power by Sapieha and present his political grouping and clientele. In some places in the book, there seems to be an attempt to do that, but it lacks a systematic nature and consistency. Also, although it promises not to touch on the question of faith, a lot of attention is paid to the Union of Brest. Czwolek does not explain his decision. In fact, mostly already-known material is gathered, and nothing new about the union issue is said.

In general, a large part of the book reminds one not of an original scholarly study but of a synthesis, in which all the discovered information in the relatively abundant historiography devoted to the epoch that is already known to historians is gathered in one place. Thus, it is unlikely

that it was dictated by necessity, by the abundance of new material from archives. Of course, in its own way, it is useful, because after all one can find everything in one place. But on the other hand, it does not look like original historical investigation.

What is more, due to its specifically organised scholarly structure, it is very difficult to judge the scholarly novelty of the book. It is hard to say why, but it was decided to put footnotes in the monograph only at the end of a paragraph, and thus all the historiographical positions and sources on which the paragraph is based appear in one footnote. This gives rise to such pearls as on page 200, when a more than page-long paragraph leads to 15 points in footnote 310. So, therefore, it is simply impossible to check the propositions of the scholar. Nevertheless, the more attentive reader will notice that the footnotes do not reflect the multitude of sources demonstrated in the bibliography, and more often the already-published and 'depreciated' material of earlier historians is used.

The strongest and most comprehensive parts of the book are devoted to the affairs of Moscow. Czwolek, through the person of Sapieha, discusses all the subtleties of eastern politics: from diplomatic ritual traditions to long-term strategic objectives and essential barriers hindering their implementation. Although not evaluating the experience of the Sapieha family in eastern politics, the historian emphasises the role of the GDL chancellor in the unionist projects of Moscow. According to him, even when working under Stephen Bathory, Sapieha could have been fascinated by the idea of a union between the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and consistently sought its implementation throughout his entire life. The chancellor was convinced that such a union would not only resolve the problem of the threatening eastern neighbour, but in a three-member state, a serious counterweight to the influence of Poland would be created, and Vilnius would become a mediator between east and west, a solid political centre. It seems that the aim was not only to write a classic biography, but also to undertake a comprehensive analysis of GDL foreign policy.

But it is clear whether this is a big advantage of the book. International agreements and negotiations, unionist projects and minor differences between them, the diplomatic legations and their composition and receptions are described in such detail and so meticulously that the very hero of the book just melts away. The discussions about relations with Moscow clearly overshadow Sapieha, who often turns into just one of the many players, but not the promised 'eyepiece' through which the whole eastern policy was to be seen. And even returning to the chancellor, the author chooses such formulations of the sentence, and also lays down logical accents in such a way that it seems that Sapieha did nothing other than reflect on Moscow's affairs. The impression is that this was not only his primary,

but also his only work. In other words, Czwołek analyses even the most clearly formulated research problem very questionably.

In analysing the past, the author chooses an unusual angle of view for a Lithuanian reader: Sapieha is seen primarily in the context of the entire Republic. We see him closer to the centre, closer to Warsaw, in the whirlpool of political processes of the entire state. And so less attention is paid to the GDL and its internal situation. Overall, this should be a welcome decision, because the Kingdom of Poland and the GDL are shown as one political body. Only it seems that it was not an intentional step, but one dictated by the unreasonably inflated analysis of relations with Moscow, when the Republic becomes one of the players in the geopolitical game. So there is not only a stepping back from the main subject of the research, but the specifics of the GDL are also forgotten. And through such vagueness the study suffers in two ways: there is a comprehensive analysis neither of the activities of Sapieha (what the author should have done), nor of the foreign policy of the Republic (what the author wants to do). Often there is a skimming across the surface of things, by providing a synthesis. The range of activities of GDL Chancellor Sapieha is wide, his life was long, and there is practically no research devoted to him. Therefore, it is not surprising that Czwołek's study has not explored all the possibilities for research. Of course, the author should have formulated his research goals more specifically, and edited his text more tightly. Undoubtedly, research on the land ownership of Sapieha, or an analysis of family consolidation and patronage, would have provided greater benefits. On the other hand, the first steps are always difficult, but one must take them. We hope that this study will stimulate research by young historians. And there really is something to explore.

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