

Damian Kała,

‘Jan Długosz’ Academy, Częstochowa

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**Marceli Antoniewicz, *Protoplaści książąt Radziwiłłów. Dzieje mitu i meandry historiografii* [‘The progenitors of Princes Radziwiłł. A history of the myth and the meanders of historiography’], Wydawnictwo DiG, Warszawa, 2011; 423 pp.**

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It was over two hundred years ago that Richard Roepell, the great German scholar, expert in the Polish mediaeval history and professor with the University of Breslau, greeted the attendees of the first Congress of Polish Historians, held in Krakow in 1880, with the exclamation: “Science does not divide nations; it unifies them!”<sup>1</sup> The idea, however beautiful, is not applied anytime anywhere, though. Still, there is no other science than the historical science which exerts an impact thus considerable on the relations between nations. Presently, however, it is increasingly often used to divide rather than unify. In the recent years, to give an example, the Polish-Lithuanian relations go incessantly worse and worse, to which fact the historical policies pursued on both sides have made their contributions. Therefore, worth reading are unbiased studies (showing positive or negative phenomena, be it very painful ones) on the shared past of both countries and states, authored by historians of expertise, not liable to political influence: this should certainly render the neighbouring nation, with which we have more in common than it could commonly seem, closer to our minds and perceptions.

March 2011 saw the appearance on the bookshelves in Poland of a work by Marceli Antoniewicz, a valued specialist in Lithuanian studies, titled ‘The progenitors of Princes Radziwiłł. A history of the myth and the meanders of historiography’, published by Warsaw-based DiG publishers, attractive at first glance with its cover artwork, designed by Andrzej Desperak, a known painter and graphic artist based in Częstochowa. The book’s considerable advantage is the illustrations, many of them unique, all enriching its content to a significant degree.

The book is more than just a monographic study of the Radziwiłł house of the coat-of-arms Trąby (including, in particular, its intricate genesis): the author has

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<sup>1</sup> Klaus Zernack, *Posłowie* [‘Afterword’], [in:] Richard Roepell, *Dzieje Polski do XIV stulecia* [‘A history of Poland, till 14<sup>th</sup> century’], transl. by Kazimierz Przyborowski, Poznań 2005, p. 425.

combined research done in the areas of genealogy and history of historiography, with elements of heraldry, prosopography, and sociology. One could state it is, simply, a gripping story about Lithuania and the Lithuanians. Mr. Antoniewicz takes the reader on a thrilling journey across the region on the Niemen River, over the years of history, with its picturesque landscapes and extraordinarily rich universe of local legends.

The reader's imagination is affected strongest by the fragment concerning a pagan priest (*krive*) Lizdeika, one of alleged ancestors of the Radziwiłł family.<sup>2</sup> The Polish-Lithuanian relations between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century were much more intense, with unions established between the two countries. Their coexistence worked well most of the time, beside the several cases referred to in the book, the stormy incidents at the reunion in Parczew, 1453.<sup>3</sup> There is, thus, a fondness appearing with respect to those 'golden' times, when the two nations collaborated in view of their common welfare.

The issues tackled by the study are very interesting, but has until then remained marginal within the field of professional historians' interest.<sup>4</sup> There are seven chapters in this book<sup>5</sup>, of which only the first one (and the largest, encompassing a third of

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<sup>2</sup> M. Antoniewicz, *Protopleści książąt Radziwiłłów ...*, p. 179ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90. The affair is shown by the *Kronika Bychowca* chronicle, whereby the Polish lords attempted to exterminate the Lithuanian nobles attending the Parczew assembly; the design failed since one of the Poles warned the Lithuanians against the impending threat. The actual result was that the Lithuanians broke the friendship with the Poles and returned the coats-of-arms assumed in Horodło, resuming their 'old signs'.

<sup>4</sup> The major studies on the Radziwiłł house include (as selected by the undersigned): Edward Kotłubaj, *Galeria nieświejska portretów radziwiłłowskich* ['The Nieśwież gallery of the Radziwiłł portraits'], Wilno, 1857; Aleksander-Fryderyk Radziwiłł, *Losy najstarszej linii Xiążąt Radziwiłłów* ['The vicissitudes of the earliest line of Princes Radziwiłł'], Wilno, 1926; Kazimierz Bartoszewicz, *Radziwiłłowie* ['The Radziwiłł family'], Warszawa, 1928; Tadeusz Nowakowski, *Die Radiwills Die Geschichte einer grossen europäischen Familie*, München 1967; Mirosława Malczewska, *Początki rodu Radziwiłłów. Przegląd i krytyka badań* ['The origins of the Radziwiłł house'], [in:] *Studia z dziejów Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego XIV-XVIII wieku* ['Studies in the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> cc.'], ed. by Jerzy Ochmański, Poznań, 1971; Stanisław Cat Mackiewicz, *Dom Radziwiłłów* ['The house of Radziwiłł'], Warszawa, 1990; Teresa Zielińska, *Radziwiłłowie herbu Trąby – dzieje rodu* ['The Radziwiłłs, of the coat-of-arms Trąby: A history of the family'], [in:] *Radziwiłłowie herbu Trąby* ['The Radziwiłłs, of the coat-of-arms Trąby'], Warszawa, 1996; *Radziwiłłowie. Obrazy literackie. Biografie. Świadectwa historyczne* ['The Radziwiłłs: Literary images, biographies, historical testimonies'], ed. by Krzysztof Stępnik, Lublin, 2003. For a complete review of the reference literature, see M. Antoniewicz's introduction to his *Protopleści książąt Radziwiłłów ...*, pp. 11-18.

<sup>5</sup> 1. 'The family circle and ancestors of Mikołaj Mikołajewicz Radziwiłł, the first duke of Goniądz and Medele'; 2. 'Legendary genealogies of ducal, princely and lordly/magnate families in the *latopis* [annals] tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania'; 3. 'The fam-

the story's narrative; pp. 19-139) pertains to the genealogical matters. It spans from the first Radziwiłł generations and the family's first full-fledged historical exponent – Krystyn Ościk (Astikas), to his sixteenth-century straight-line descendants and their more distant relatives. The remaining six chapters present so-called 'meanders of historiography', that is, the roads and the wilderness of historical literature concerning the genesis of this princely family, exquisite as it was, also in the European context. To this end, meticulous analysis has been applied to the output of many an illustrious scholar dealing with the family's origins: from Maciej Strykowski, through Augustyn Rotundus Mieleski, Samuel Dowgird of Pogowie, Maciej Strubicz, Salomon Rysiński, Conrad Götke, Wojciech Wijuk Kojalłowicz, Joachim Lelewel, Adam Boniecki, Józef Wolff, up to twentieth-century scholars – e.g. Władysław Semkowicz and Tadeusz Wasilewski.

In the conclusive section, the author shares with the reader the following reflection on the issues under discussion: "Ultimately, the ways made in historical studies turn out to be, from time to time, much more interesting than the goals they are set toward. Had the Radziwiłł family had at their disposal in mid-sixteenth century a reliable and well-evidenced ancestral chart, reaching back to the time of, say, Duke Troiden [Traidenis], how many absorbing works would have never been created at all?"<sup>6</sup> Indeed, one could agree with this last statement – never neglecting the fact, though, that a historian's task is always to strive for critically analysing creative output or works of any sort. The opinion of the outstanding Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto should also be taken into account: "It is just the imperfection of human mind that multiplies the splits between sciences that divide astronomy from physics or chemistry; natural sciences from social sciences. Science is essentially a single entity, and is nothing but the truth."<sup>7</sup> History too ought to strive for discovering the truth, in the first place.

Enormous appreciation is owed, in particular, by the author's very professional methodological approach toward the subject of his study, a dependable source criticism, and non-deference to the hitherto-prevalent scholarly stereotypes (the impression is that this historian finds such approach so easy, if not enviable!). The numerous influences of the ongoing politics upon the genealogical awareness of the

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ily traditions of the Radziwiłł incorporated in the genealogies of mythical dynasties in Lithuania'; 4. 'The earliest genealogies created in the circle of Radziwiłł manors'; 5. 'Wojciech Wijuk Kojalłowicz's works complement the mythical genealogy'; 6. 'Propagation of the Radziwiłł House tradition in the time of Michał-Kazimierz, nicknamed 'Rybeńko''; 7. 'The tradition of a knazh genesis of the Radziwiłł in 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>-century historical writings'.

<sup>6</sup> M. Antoniewicz, *Protopłaści książąt Radziwiłłów ...*, p. 354.

<sup>7</sup> Vilfredo Pareto, *Wykłady z ekonomii politycznej* ['Lectures in Political Economy'], [in:] idem, *Uczucia i działania. Fragmenty socjologiczne* ['Sentiments and actions. Sociological fragments'], transl. into Polish by M. Dobrowolska, M. Rozpędowska, A. Zinserling; selected, edited, and with an introduction by Andrzej Kojder, Warszawa, 1994, p. 38.

Radziwiłł family over the centuries are also shown meticulously. Marek Cetwiński's general opinion is worth quoting in this context: "The existing historiographic practice provokes one to conclude that knowledge about the past often serves as an armoury of propaganda arguments. Instead of knowledge, myths are all too often propagated, in line with the political theses advocated."<sup>8</sup>

Being a scholarly study by assumption, this book was not to aspire to be called a bridge connecting Poland and Lithuania; it can nonetheless easily be regarded in this way. It will certainly make an impact on the way Lithuania is perceived among its readers; Lithuanian culture will also become more familiar to them. Thus, the author has deserved our thanks for the effort put into the preparation of this study. It would also be worthwhile that Polish historians again venture to render the readers better acquainted with the origins of the Lithuanian state, which took shape in the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> centuries, as in the recent years such issues did not enjoy much interest.<sup>9</sup>

All in all, what one deals with here is an absorbing narrative, reliable in its scholarly aspect, and enriched with numerous anecdotes<sup>10</sup> making the reading a genuine intellectual feast. However, it is professional historians that form the target group of readers; expectedly, the book will suit their taste.

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<sup>8</sup> Marek Cetwiński, *Historia i polityka. Teoria i praktyka mediewistyki na przykładzie badań dziejów Śląska* ['History and politics. The theory and practice of mediaeval studies, based on the research of the history of Silesia as a case-in-point'], [Kraków] 2008, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> The valuable book by Grzegorz Błaszczyk, *Dzieje stosunków polsko-litewskich. Od czasów najnowszych do współczesności* ['A history of Polish-Lithuanian relations: from the most recent period till the present'], vol. 1: *Trudne początki* ['The tough beginnings'], Poznań 1998.

<sup>10</sup> So as not to diminish the pleasure of reading in the potentially interested reader, just to encourage them, let me quote an exemplary anecdote: "When, after one of the numerous libations, he appeared [Karol-Stanisław Radziwiłł, Prince Voivode of Vilna, nicknamed 'Panie Kochanku'; note by D.K.] before King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, in his shabby and blotchy *kontusz*, and the king remarked to him that he was a mighty lord and so could have arranged for a new *kontusz* for him to wear, Prince Karol is reported to say: 'Panie kochanku ['My dearest Sir'], Your Majesty, this *kontusz* has been worn by twelve voivodes in a row; no surprise, then, it has gone greyish a little.'" M. Antoniewicz, *Protopląści książąt Radziwiłłów ...*, p. 261.