

Jacek Drozd

Institute of History, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS), Lublin

**Piotr Derdej, *Kamieniec Podolski 1672*,
Wydawnictwo Bellona, Warszawa, 2009; 180 pp.**

The seven Cardinal Sins are: wrath, avarice, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony: the adverse features of human character that spoil any society. Societies are spoiled, too, by false and/or erroneous convictions. Kamieniec-Podolski: the soundest stronghold of the Commonwealth; the Commonwealth, the soundest stronghold of the Christian Europe? Among the nobility estate, whose position was privileged within the political-social system of the seventeenth-century state, such conviction was probably commonplace. Yet, for any such conviction of belief to become true, and conformant to the reality, it is a must that it be supported by a concrete act or deed. The study in question is about, among other things, an almost unbelievable thoughtlessness, and the sin of omission, or sloth indeed, committed by our ancestors in the latter half of 17th century. All the other six vices were also reflected in the occurrences discussed in this book.

The south-eastern provinces of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (or, the First Republic) were the arena which during the seventeenth century frequently saw clashes between the Polish-Lithuanian state and the Ottoman Empire. The reasons for these conflicts and clashes were diverse, and the combating parties included nominal subjects of both states – the Cossacks and the Tartars (those from the Crimean Khanate and the Black-Sea-area hordes). The study by Piotr Derdej concerns the history of one of the abovementioned conflicts. The book consists of an introduction, nine chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and a list of illustrations. Since it is a mini-monograph of the 1672 conflict, the author's main purpose being to show the military aspects (with the necessary presentation of the political context of the incident), it has been published by Bellona – the publishing house specialising in studies on military issues.

Let us just mention that it comes out as yet another Bellona release dealing with the conflict between the Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire in 17th century – thus adding to this publisher's 'Polish-Turkish series', so to name it on a tentative basis.

The starting point for Mr. Derdej's considerations, in the introductory section, is the image of the clash as recorded in the awareness of the Polish reader on the basis of belles-lettres and motion-picture works. As the author states: "The powerful literary-and-film fiction created by [the novelist Henryk] Sienkiewicz and [the filmmaker Jerzy] Hoffman has so overwhelmingly captured our consciousness that we regard today the historic occurrences of the years 1668–73 through the eyes of a fiction writer and a film director" (Introduction, p. 6). On the following pages, the author describes the reference literature and the sources he has used.

Chapter 1, titled 'Kamieniec-Podolski: A history of the town and the stronghold' provides the reader with a description of the semi-legendary history of the town and the castle of Kamieniec-Podolski, with historical facts of the town and its population, plus basic information of the local fortress system. Chapter 2 – 'The Ottoman Turks: their state, army, and conquests', offers a synthetic review of the history of Turkish state and its territorial expansion within Europe. Chapter 3 – 'A history of Polish-Turkish conflicts' is a brief survey of Polish-Turkish conflicts occurring before 1668, starting from the Varna battle of 1444. Chapter 4 – 'From the abdication of the last Vasa king to a new war with the Turks' describes the Commonwealth's internal situation in the last years of the reign of king John II Casimir (Jan Kazimierz) Vasa and after his abdication, and the circumstances related to the election of Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki to the Polish throne, with internal frictions between the faction loyal to the monarch and the so-called 'malcontents' – the period's anti-royal opposition.

The fifth chapter, 'Turkey sets off for a war against Poland', discusses the direct reasons and political background of the 1672 clash was the Cossack question. As the author puts it: "as the Polish and Muscovite voivodes demanded absolute obedience to the king or the tsar, putting the swains to the sword for disobedience, gaoling them, or sending to Siberia, the good father from Istanbul promised to the Cossacks a liege state, modelled after Crimea, Valachia, Moldavia, or Transylvania" (p. 66). However, as it turned out later on: "Soon thereafter, the *Zaporozhetss* painfully realised how naïve they were by assuming the sultan's protectorate" (p. 67). The 'problem' of Polish-Lithuanian Tartars, called the '*Lipkas*', is also briefly presented, along with the reasons for their joining the Turkish party; discussed are also confederations of unpaid Commonwealth troops and these confederations' impact on the defensive capability of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Chapter 6 – 'The Poles face the treat from the Turks in the winter, spring, and summer of 1672' describes the actions or, rather, relinquishments the Polish-Lithuanian party committed while getting prepared for the war campaign. The *sejm* (parliament) and decisions made thereat were key to those preparations; still, the situation prevailing on the eve of the war with Turkey made the *sejm* completely incapable of making any concrete decision whatsoever. Ongoing political battles involving the king's adherents and opponents were

predominant. “The crisis of the state, and in the citizens’ thinking of the state, which had commenced in this country in as early as the early 1650s, has hit rock bottom now.” (pp. 75-6)

The central idea of the study under review is displayed in its seventh chapter – unsurprisingly, the largest one: ‘The siege and the fall of Kamieniec-Podolski, 12th-26th August 1672’. One finds here a detailed account of military and diplomatic actions taken and occurring within the said timeframe by the fortress’s walls, with all the relevant details and nuances of those actions displayed. We meet the key characters of the struggles, watching how they behaved in a crisis situation. Mr. Derdej believes that this chapter provides the foundation for an attempted denial of the Kamieniec legend, as recorded by Henryk Sienkiewicz in his *Pan Wołodyjowski* – “a legend that has got solidified in our national memory” (p. 127). This debunking, or attempted demythologisation, of the image of Kamieniec heroes and occurrences is carried out in chapter 8 – ‘The siege of Kamieniec-Podolski as seen by Henryk Sienkiewicz’. Here, the author, using his own words, aims at rectifying the errors going to the credit of Messrs. Sienkiewicz and Hoffman (p. 129). This rectification exercise is done through a systematic breakdown and juxtaposition of the facts presented in the literary work and the movie against those known to the author from his own experience, their mutual confrontation and verification of certain ideas or depictions. This concerns e.g. topographic details of the battle venue. It is this personal, ‘visual’ knowledge of the battle-of-Kamieniec site that seemingly is an important asset of the study. An integral part of this chapter is its verification of the information regarding the central hero, and the title character of the Sienkiewicz novel – Jerzy Wołodyjowski, Master-of-the-Pantry (stolnik) of Przemyśl, carried out with use of relevant historical sources.

The ninth, and last, chapter – ‘From Buczacz to Karlowitz, 1672–99’ – presents the later history of the Polish-Turkish struggle, until 1699. This includes: conclusion of the peace treaty in Buczacz (Buchach), its terms-and-conditions, and the circumstances that have led to their approval; hetman Jan Sobieski’s combat against the Tartar hordes desolating the southern/south-eastern lands of the Commonwealth, as well as against his opponents – followers of king Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki – within the country; Wiśniowiecki’s vicissitudes are also presented in this chapter. The author has not neglected the issues around the election of Jan Sobieski as king (John III Sobieski), and his policies with respect to Turkey, the Tartars and the Cossacks during his reign. The chapter is concluded with a discussion on the treaty of Karlowitz, entered into with Turkey in 1699. In the conclusive chapter (subtitled ‘A conclusion, or, the history of Kamieniec-Podolski after its reintegration to the Commonwealth in 1699’) shows the later-period history of the town and its inhabitants in the eighteenth century, then already under the reign of the Commonwealth, as well as past 1793 – the date Kamieniec become part of Russia’s realm. A considerable space

and effort in this section is focused on presentation of eliminations of the Polish identity and culture from the area of the town on the Smotrich River. To the author's mind, this is of enormous symbolical importance, enabling the Poles to preserve a memory of Kamieniec-Podolski, and to protect the town from falling into oblivion.

The source base for the study needs being referred to, at last. The starting point for the author was Pan Wołodyjowski – Part 3 of H. Sienkiewicz's novelistic trilogy, as confronted with Stanisław Makowiecki's account, being in fact the only actual source used in this work. Considering a popular nature of the study and the author's declared objectives, the choice seems obvious and completely satisfactory – especially that, quoting Mr. Derdej, “based upon what I have managed to find, there are no sources or foreign studies concerning the Polish-Turkish war of 1672–3” (pp. 11–12).

The bibliography used in preparation of the book is completed with less than 500 historical studies, such as memoirs, monographs, or collective-authorship publications concerning the history of the Commonwealth of the two Nations, the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Khanate, and the Cossack community.

As for the character of the study, it is primarily targeted at readers other than dealing with history as their daily business. The book's popular character and military subject-matters hopefully makes it reachable by a broader reading public in Poland, as well as foreigners interested in the issues concerned. However, the advantage in a broader aspect is a minus from the standpoint of professional historians wrestling with this particular matter. Such readers will certainly take note of no broader source base present – be it handwritten or printed, a rather modest bibliography, unable to meet a professional's needs, and the evident complete lack of maps or site plans or situation sketches, e.g. in the form of attachments or annexes. The latter is astonishing to us too, given, especially, the study's military context: here, presence of a map imaging the situation, in political/military terms, should simply be the structure's foundation, to use a figurative expression. It is worth emphasising, though, that the author has fulfilled the task he set for himself; it can be believed that he has met the goals delineated in the introduction, showing, in effect, rather successfully the fragment of the Commonwealth's history in question. To use a military jargon phrase, the study forms an ‘input basis’ for further penetration of the issue by beginner students, Polish or foreign. For historians of experience and expertise, this work will probably remain but a complementing item, and a reliable one.

¹ The other studies in the series, focusing on this same 17th-c. conflict, include, in order of issuance: Kacper Śledziński, *Cecora 1620*, Warszawa, 2007; Leszek Podhorodecki, *Chocim 1621*, Warszawa, 2008; Damian Orłowski, *Chocim 1673*, Warszawa, 2007; Leszek Podhorodecki, *Wiedeń 1683*, Warszawa, 1983; and, Janusz Wojtasik, *Podhajce 1698*, Warszawa, 2008.

² For more on these issues, the reader is kindly referred to, e.g.: Konrad Krzemieniecki, *Mieszkańcy Kamieńca Podolskiego w świetle spisu ludności z 1795 roku* [‘The inhabit-

ants of K.-P. in light of a 1795 census’], ‘Rocznik Przemyski’, vol. XLVI:2010, book. 4, pp. 39-49; Renata Król-Mazur, *Miasto trzech nacji. Studia z dziejów Kamieńca Podolskiego w XVIII wieku* [‘A city of three nations: Studies in the history of K.-P. in 18th century’], Kraków, 2008.

- ³ *Relacya upadku Kamieńca r. 1672 i ostatnich czynach P. Jerzego Wołodujowskiego przez IMCI pana Stanisława Makowieckiego stolnika Latyczowskiego* [‘An account on the fall of Kamieniec in the year 1672 and on the last deeds of Mr. Jerzy Wołodujowski, by Rt.Hon. Mr. Stanisław Makowiecki, Master-of-the-Pantry of Latyczów’], [im:] Jan Przybył, *Kamieniec Podolski albo trylogia na nowo przeżywana* [‘K.-P., or, the Trilogy experiences anew’], Wrocław, 1988.