Gintautas Sliesoriūnas, *Lietuvos istorija*, VI tomas: *Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė XVI a. pabaigoje – XVIII a. pradžioje (1588–1733 metais)*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2015. 648 p. ISBN 978-609-8183-07-8

This is volume six of a multi-volume synthesis of the history of Lithuania. The idea of a new synthesis to summarise the results of the latest scholarly research and conceptualise the development of the Lithuanian state and society in a European context was launched by the Lithuanian Institute of History in 2000. Similar multi-volume histories have been written and published in many European countries.

Sliesoriūnas' book covers the period 1588 to 1733. By offering new time scales for the 'post-Lublin' period, it puts forward the concept of the 'long 17th' and the 'short 18th' century, and departs from the conventional practice of periodising Lithuanian history with the dates 1569 (the Lublin Union), 1655 (The Deluge), and 1696/7 (the death of Jan Sobieski and start of the Saxon era).

Sliesoriūnas admits that this volume concentrates on changes in Lithuanian society rather than political events. This makes the choice of 1588 reasonable and well argued. The adoption of the Third Lithuanian Statute in 1588 finished the formation of the noble estate, consolidated the institutions of noble democracy at provincial and state levels, and made a few minor amendments, significant for Lithuanians, to the Union, which remained unchanged for almost 200 years.

The book is organised thematically, rather than chronologically. After dealing with a survey of Lithuania's territory, inhabitants and state institutions, in the second part Sliesoriūnas analyses Lithuanian society, presenting its estates, ethnic composition and religion. He finishes with a short chronological survey of political events between 1588 and 1733 in part three.

Despite not being clear who should be the main reader of the book (is it the academic community or the general public?), the author strikes a balance between an academic and a popular style, making the book perfectly readable and understandable not only to academic circles but also to students and non-specialists in history.

There are many newly interpreted issues in this book, pointing out historiographical errors and offering explanations. The chapter on the borders of Lithuania (pp. 62–86) deserves special attention. Few people have bothered to dedicate time and effort to analysing the frequent changes in

Lithuania's borders in the second half of the 17th century. This is the first time these changes have been so exhaustively analysed in the Lithuanian language, indicating errors in previous scholarship. On another occasion, on pages 560 to 576, the author presents a more-nuanced picture of Ludwik Pociąg (1664–1730), the grand hetman of Lithuania, who is traditionally portrayed by scholars as one of the greatest villains in Polish-Lithuanian history, who sold his soul to the Russian devil.

Sliesoriūnas, however, does not depart from the issue of 'Lithuanian statehood', which has been a lodestar for Lithuanian historians to guide them in search of 'Lithuanianess' in the history of the grand duchy (the chapter The Type of Union on pp. 15–62), starting from the interwar period. Although the author does not construct his narrative on the basis of Lithuanian statehood, the book basically continues to study Lithuanian history as a *sui generis* phenomenon. Despite having a high degree of sovereignty, Lithuania was an integral part of the Commonwealth. It is simply not possible to fully understand Lithuanian history without properly placing Lithuania and the political and cultural processes in it within the processes which affected the Commonwealth as a country, and without making comparisons with Poland, or parts of the Polish Crown, like Wielkopolska, Małopolska, Mazovia or Royal Prussia. This book is a short step forwards compared with other syntheses, but a lot remains to be done in this direction.

The book is based on an impressive array of primary printed sources and scholarly literature, but it also has all the drawbacks of syntheses of history. Like all scholars who write on huge subjects and periods, Sliesoriūnas relies on scholarship by others, whose depth in this period varies greatly; this means there are gaps and misinterpretations throughout the book.

One such issue concerns the role of the local noble assemblies, called *sejmiks*. Scholars sometimes define the 17th century as a golden age of *sejmiks*, but since there is a serious dearth of scholarship on Lithuanian *sejmiks*, it is no surprise that this issue is barely touched on by Sliesoriūnas. In an account of the decline of the Sejm, particularly visible in the early 18th century, this would be a place for a close study of the role of *sejmiks*, but this is not done in the book. The recent scholarship rehabilitates *sejmiks* as an institution, and shows that they had a good understanding of the country's problems. Although more research is needed in this direction, it is certainly plausible that local noble assemblies balanced the negative effect of the decline of the Sejm, and provided a basis for the functioning of the Commonwealth in the second half of the 17th century.

The 50 years of communist rule in Lithuania, when historians were instructed to base their research on the concept of the class struggle, are reflected in the presentation of the Lithuanian estate structure: a mere four pages are dedicated to the nobility (pp. 218–222), and 15 pages to the peasants (pp. 239–254). This would not be a problem had the presentation

of relations between the middling and petty nobility and the wealthy nobles or magnates not been shaky. What was the role of the king in the promotion of new families to the Senate? What was the social stratification of the noble estate in Lithuania? How common were anti-magnate attitudes among the middling and petty nobility, and in what particular period? These issues are barely touched upon in part two. Some of this emerges in the course of the narrative, but one has to read very carefully in later chapters.

Few would argue that research on the fiscal system in the second half of the 17th and the early 18th century was one of the more under-researched topics of Lithuanian history. It is certainly not the author's fault that the survey of Lithuania's budget is limited to roughly four pages (pp. 190–194), while the description of coins in circulation amounts to an impressive 12 pages, three times what we have on the budget. This is an indication that new research must be undertaken in these areas in order to fill the critical gaps in scholarship.

There are a few minor errors. For instance, on pages 30 and 37, Sliesoriūnas argues that, starting from the mid-17th century, Lithuanians no longer demanded that the king live in Lithuania; whereas in reality, the demand was made in negotiations before the Silent Sejm of 1717. The general *sejmiks* of Lithuania did not become extinct in the mid-17th century (p. 34): the last one was summoned by the king in 1710. Even though the grand hetman formally lost his powers to allocate winter quarters with the adoption of the *coaequatio iurum* law of 1697 (pp. 43–44), sustained warfare in the early 18th century allowed Lithuanian hetmans to increase their powers. This was very visible in the first years of the hetmanship of Ludwik Pociąg (ca. 1710–1714), who arbitrarily appointed winter quarters and issued tax allocations. This was a very strong lever of government, which allowed him to ruin his political adversaries and favour his supporters. There was one more meeting of Lithuanian rabbis in 1714 (p. 396), which revised and compiled a new poll tax roster for Lithuanian Jews. The author is not consistent in the use of a term to define what is known in Western historiography as 'the Great Northern War' (1700–1721). On some occasions, he uses this term (pp. 146, 173, 418, etc), which is also an acknowledged definition among Polish scholars, while in other cases he reverts to the use of 'Northern War' (pp. 196, 289, 406, etc), which is a conventional term in Lithuanian historiography.

The author sometimes assumes too much knowledge on the part of readers. Some specific terms, like *indygenat*, or Lithuanian citizenship (pp. 280, 355–356), could have been explained. There is no subject index, and the reader has to rely on a four-page table of contents to navigate the book. While the author sometimes makes references to other pages where a particular topic is discussed (for instance, p. 523), it is obvious that the book should have been supplemented not only with personal and geographical indexes, but also with a subject index. This would have made navigation of the 600-page book much easier.

There are a few organisational issues, which, like a fly in the ointment, spoil the book's good impression. Links to primary sources are presented in footnotes, and links to scholarly literature are presented in brackets in the text, but it is not clear on what criteria this is based, and consistency is not followed throughout the book (for instance, p. 403). Polish-Lithuanian surnames are lithuanianised, but the original form is presented the first time a person is mentioned. It is not clear, however, why Italian surnames are left not lithuanianised (for instance, pp. 384–385), while a Swedish surname is lithuanianised, and supplemented with the original form in brackets, on p. 447. The author may have had a reason for this, but a sentence or two explaining these issues in the introduction would have made the reader's life easier.

Finally, there are a few odd slips: Lithuania was represented by 48 delegates at the Chamber of Envoys of the Sejm, not 24 (p. 145); the Radziwiłłs bought, not inherited, *Żółkiew from the Sobieski family* (p. 363); the Lithuanian marshal Marcin Wołłowicz was appointed extraordinary envoy to the Russian court at the confederate Council of Warsaw in 1710, not the castellan of Witebsk Marcin Ogiński (p. 561). The same meeting determined the Polish-Lithuanian military establishment at 64,000 men on paper, not 40,000 (p. 561). The meeting between Augustus II and Peter I in Gdańsk, where the conditions for peace and the foundations of Russian mediation were laid, took place in April 1716, not February (p. 567).

To sum up, this is a first-rate work of academic scholarship, which deserves to find a place in serious academic libraries and personal libraries of non-specialists. It is certainly worth translating the work into foreign languages, English in the first place, provided enough context is given for the foreign reader.

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