

**The House of Vasa and the House of Austria: correspondence from years 1587 to 1668, Part I: The Times of Sigismund III, 1587–1632, Volume 1, edited by Ryszard Skowron et al. (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), pp. 807, ISBN 978-83-8012-959-7**

*Anna Kalinowska*

Diplomatic relations between the Polish line of the Vasa dynasty and the Habsburgs have occupied in the centre of historians' attention for a long time. However, the biggest progress has been made only in the last 20 years, due to the work of Professor Ryszard Skowron, who published extensively on Spanish diplomacy in Poland-Lithuania. He was also instrumental in assembling together a group of young historians, from both Poland and Spain, who decided to focus their research upon the role that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth played in Imperial and Spanish diplomacy, as well as in relations between the two branches of the House of Austria.

One of the latest results of this scholarly cooperation is the project of a multi-volume edition of primary sources documenting relations between Polish-Lithuanian rulers from the House of Vasa and the Habsburgs from the election of Sigismund III to the Polish throne (1587) until the abdication of John Casimir (1668). This project received funding from the Polish National Programme of the Development of Humanities. One can be sure that it was money well spent as the materials included in the edition, derived from collections all over Europe (including Warsaw, Krakow, Vienna, Vilnius, Brussels, Madrid and Simancas), not only illustrate bilateral relations between the Polish court and numerous Habsburg capitals, but also allow historians to follow its evolution and complexity.

The book reviewed here is part one of the first volume of what will hopefully be a new editorial series. According to information provided by the editor in the introduction, one can hope for two more volumes, focusing on Polish kings' (i.e. Ladislaus IV and John Casimir) correspondence with the Habsburgs and two covering letters by Polish queens with Habsburg origins (Anna, Constance and Cecilia Renata). The series will also incorporate the treaties and contracts negotiated and signed by both dynasties respectively. When completed, the series will provide the historian with an impressive range of materials. It is crucial to note that the publication was designed not only to make printed versions of documents scattered all around Europe available to Polish researchers. As it is annotated in English, it should be very helpful for historians who do not read Polish but who are looking for more detailed information on Poland-Lithuania's international stance during the Thirty Year War.

Volume One, Part One covers the years between 1587 and 1623, and includes nearly 390 letters. These are printed in extenso, in their original language (mostly Latin) and are fully annotated. When compared at random with the original documents (mainly from *Liber Legationum* from the Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych) there was no indication of any mistakes and omissions, so there is every reason to believe that the edition adheres to all required editorial standards. The letters are organised in chronological order and include both Sigismund III and his son's correspondence with members of the House of Austria (among others emperors Rudolf II, Matthias and Ferdinand III, Philip II and III of Spain, Margareta of Austria, Archduke Albert of Netherlands) as well as their letters sent to Poland. The documents are, of course, the most important part of the volume, but there are also six essays prepared by the members of the editorial team. In most cases, these are full research articles in their own right. In the first of these, José Martínez Millán outlines the basis of the special position of the Spanish Habsburgs in Europe in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the ideology underpinning the *monarchia universalis*' evolution into the *monarchia catolica*. He discusses a number of sources, including correspondence, papal documents and treaties, like *La Fama Austiaca* by Josse Pellicer Tovar. The second text, an article by Ryszard Szmydki on relations between Sigismund III and the Netherlands is, definitely, the weakest point of the volume. Not only was it written solely from an art historian's perspective, but also it is basically a summary of some letters dealing with Polish kings' contacts with Flemish artists or dealers, with very limited, almost non-existent, analysis of any primary sources. Fortunately, it is followed by an extremely interesting article by Miguel Conde Pazos. This is a detailed case study showing the Spanish Habsburgs' approach to the election of Sigismund III to the Polish throne by analysing the embassy of Don Guillen de San Clemente (1588–1589) and his role in the shaping of Spanish policy towards Poland-Lithuania. Ruben González Cuerva also deals with diplomacy, however his interests are focused on how Spanish ambassadors in Vienna perceived the role of Poland-Lithuania and its relations with other countries, and how these perceptions influenced Spain's approach to the geopolitical situation in central Europe. Another author, Tomasz Poznański, focuses more on dynastic policy and presents his argument more from the Polish perspective. He analyses in details relations between Sigismund III and the two Emperors Matthias and Ferdinand II, arguing that although Sigismund was eager to confirm his alliance with the Habsburgs, for him it was most of all a matter of pragmatism. The final essay by Manuel Rivero Rodríguez presents the problem of succession to the duchies of Bari and Rossano (dating back to Bona Sforza's marriage to Sigismund I in 1518) and the importance of this dispute in relations between the Vasas and the Habsburgs.

The text that deserves extra special attention is the introduction by Ryszard Skowron. Not only does it give the general outline of the whole editorial project, but it is also a valuable introduction to the Polish chancellery system for researchers who are unfamiliar with the way it functioned. It also provides crucial information on the contents of the edition and introduces the reader to the way the volume is organised. Unfortunately, using the volume – especially when looking for some specific information – is a bit difficult due to the lack of an index, but one can presume it will be provided in Part Two. There are also some minor misprints, like the one on p. 35 (*aNrealitevely* instead of *a relatively*). The quality of English translations is good, but it does need some extra attention, preferably by an editor who is a native speaker of English. On some occasions the editorial work should have been done more carefully, for example to eliminate the repetitions (such as on p. 136, regarding the securing of the Golden Fleece for Ladislaus). These are however minute objections when set against the benefits of the edition. A project that brings together material from so many archives and can be used by historians interested in looking at the events of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries from the wider international perspective, deserves the height of praise regardless of the tiny slips, especially as there are more volumes to come, where they can be successfully dealt with.