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The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences

The First of the Pacas' Secrets¹

Now, just after the publication of “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand” (*Viešpaties dešinės galybė*, a poem commemorating the Battle of Khotyn of 1673 (Narbutas 2023; Benetas et Grinkevičius 2024), one wonders whether this work of fiction remains the only testimony to the wars of 1672–1676 against the Turks and Tatars. Is there any connection between this poem and the Church of the St. Apostles Peter and Paul founded by Mykolas Kazimieras Pacas, the Pacas Palace on Didžioji Street that he built, and several other monuments of Lithuanian Baroque architecture that date from the same time period and still grace Vilnius today?

It makes sense to ask these questions and look for answers to them because all the monuments mentioned above have strong connections to the personality, activities and times of Mykolas Kazimieras Pacas. Andriejus Grinkevičius (Andrzej Hryniewicz) had been writing the poem “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand” between 11 November 1673 and 14 January 1674 – by the latter date it was printed by the Vilnius Academy Printing House. The foundation stone of the Church of the St. Apostles Peter and Paul was laid on 29 June 1668; the vaults were completed in 1674; the dome, at the end of 1675; and the interior decoration was carried out in 1677–1686 (Samalavičius et Samalavičius 1998, 19–33; the construction work was intermittently continued until 1704). After acquiring two buildings on Didžioji Street in 1667 and 1673, Pacas eventually rebuilt them into a luxuriously-decorated three-storey palace (Čaplinkas 2011, 275).

These connections encourage us to look for other links to the personality of the Vilnius Voivode and the events that marked his life and the history of Lithuania: his feud with Sobieski, his efforts to act independently in the sejms and on the battlefields and to defend the position of his state at all times. Both his personality and the events had to be connected by certain symbols, eloquent signs. We might want to look for them in certain extant monuments.

First of all, it is worth briefly to recall the content of these monuments. The heroic poem “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand” opens with an introduction (vv. 1–23) and a lament for the civil unrest and turmoil in the state (vv. 24–45). The narrator depicts the goddess of war, Enyo, her journey to the Turkish Moon and her call to attack Poland at the first opportunity (vv. 46–76). After listening to the goddess of war, the Moon prepares to devastate the Ukraine with all its forces (vv. 77–89). The narrator goes on to depict the main events of the 1672 campaign: the capture of Kamianets-Podilskyi and the siege of Lviv (vv. 90–121). The next episode recalls the most important events of the turn of 1672–1673: the Turkish envoy in Warsaw demanding the fulfilment of the obligations laid down in the Treaty of Buchach (above all, the payment of the annual tribute), the programme of defence of the state adopted by the Sejm, and the

1 The paper was read at the reception of the book *Viešpaties dešinės galybė* (*The Might of the Lords' Right Hand*) by Jokūbas Benetas (Bennet) and Andriejus Grinkevičius (Hryniewicz) at the “Pacai” hotel on 5 June 2024, at the Jieznas Cultural and Leisure Centre on 11 June 2024, at the Maironis Lithuanian Literature Museum on 13 September 2024, and at Vilkaiviškis district municipality public library on 17 October 2024. Published at the request of the participants of these events.

expressed will of the public to resist the aggressors (vv. 122–133). The Polish and Lithuanian preparations for war and the march to Khotyn are depicted next (lines 133–174). The battle is described in a large dynamic episode (vv. 175–219, 223–272) with a short interlude (vv. 220–223) recalling an earlier event when the Apostolic Nuncio Francesco Buonvisi (1626-5-16–1700-8-25) handed over 100 thousand zlotys for the military purposes from Pope Clement X (Emilio Bonaventura Altieri, 1590-7-13–1676-7-22), and 20 thousand zlotys from Cardinal Benedetto Odescalchi (1611-5-16–1689-8-12) (Orłowski 2007, 62–63). The narrator goes on to pay tribute to the Polish military leaders and officers who distinguished themselves in the battle (vv. 273–328). Almost half of the poem (vv. 329–732) is taken up with the honouring of Polish military commanders and officers. “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand” concludes with a short, graceful farewell (vv. 733–743).

The Church of Saints Peter and Paul surpasses the “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand” in grandeur. Making a comparison between the two monuments, it is justifiable to say that if “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand” is a heroic poem, then the Church is a true heroic epic. The Samalavičiuses, who have comprehensively researched and described the church in detail, write: “The visitor who crosses the threshold of this building with a rather unimpressive exterior is struck by its interior, with its lavish abundance of fabulous stucco sculptures, whose number is seemingly endless. Indeed, no other Lithuanian place of worship is so richly adorned with relief sculptures and decorative paraphernalia as the interior of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. It is estimated that the interior of the monument is decorated with over 2,000 reliefs and sculptures, and given the relatively small interior space, this number may seem almost fantastical” (Samalavičius et Samalavičius 1998, 63).

Another important point made by these historians of art and architecture in summarising their research is as follows: “The events of the 17th century found a resonance in the décor of the Vilnius Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. The abundance of military motifs (unparalleled in other Lithuanian sacral buildings) can be seen not only as a feature of Baroque stylistics, but also as a direct reflection of historical events in decoration of buildings. The spirit of war and peace is manifested in the interior spaces in a variety of plastic forms, with different themes and plots. The idea of transcendent peace, culminating in the relief on the tympanum of the church façade, completes the decorative motifs with an optimistic chord” (Samalavičius et Samalavičius 1998, 171–172).

One of the four chapels of the church, the “Sanctorum Militum Martyrum” (the Samalavičiuses call it the Chapel of the Holy Knights), is dedicated to the theme of war and to the honouring of soldiers and military leaders. Its altar is now decorated with a painting of St. Cerbonius². During a renovation, around 1804, it replaced an earlier sacral artwork – a painting of the martyrs St. Processus and St. Martinian (Rogala-Zawadzki 1936,70). These two Roman soldiers were St. Peter’s jailers in the Mamertine prison. Upon witnessing the miracles performed by the Apostle, they took baptism from his hands, released him from prison, and accepted martyrdom.

The stucco sculptures decorating the interior of the chapel are arranged on several levels. At the lowest level, four war demons are depicted in the consoles of the chapel’s two arches. The higher level is occupied by the relief above the altar, which features Mother of the Seven Martyrs, St. Felicitas. On the right, above the arch, we can see one of the patron saints of Poland,

2 St. Cerbonius (d. ca 575) was Bishop of Populonia, a member of the Lateran Congregation of the Canons Regular (for more on him see Rogala-Zawadzki 1936, 76–77). A monastery of this congregation has been functioning near the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul since 1638.

St. Florian, and next to him, St. Maurus, the heavenly patron of this church. On the left, above the arch, there are sculptures of St. Theodore and St. Maurice. The third level has two reliefs. One of them, placed above St. Florian and St. Maurus, depicts the combat between St. Wenceslas (the heavenly patron of Mykolas Kazimieras' brother Vaclovas, who died prematurely; Orda 1933, 2) and Radislav; the other one, placed above of St. Theodore and St. Maurice, depicts the victory of Lithuanian troops over the Muscovites at Polotsk in 1518, achieved with the help of St. Casimir (the patron saint of Mykolas Kazimieras himself and his brother, Bishop Kazimieras of Samogitia; Orda 1933, 2–3). The highest level features a stucco relief on the vault – a knight with a shield, which features Christ carrying the cross. According to the Samalavičiuses, the knight is a warrior of Christ, “for whom the Christian faith is the most important protection amidst the chaos of life” (Samalavičius et Samalavičius 1998, 76; Orda 1933, 8). In addition to the reliefs and sculptures listed above, the vault, piers and other surfaces of the chapel are covered entirely with ornate plasterwork. The interiors of the other three chapels follow a similar architectonic principle.

All the characters in the heroic poem have their counterparts in the interior of the Chapel of the Holy Martyr Knights, and vice versa: all the characters in this chapel have their counterparts in “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand”. The two pairs of war demons featured in the consoles of the chapel’s arches remind us of the pair of antagonists in the heroic poem, the war goddess Enyo and the Turkish Moon (vv. 46–89). St. Felicitas and the two pairs of martyred soldiers, Florian and Maurus, and Theodore and Maurice, are reminiscent of the commanders and officers of the armies of Poland and Lithuania, depicted individually in the “The Might of the Lord’s Right Hand” (vv. 273–324, 366–732). The two reliefs depicting the duel between Wenceslas and Radislav and the victory of Lithuanian soldiers at Polotsk are associated with the battle of Khotyn (vv. 175–272). The soldier of Christ featured in the relief may be viewed as symbolizing the might of the Lord’s Right Hand.

The creative intentions of the authors of the heroic poem (the preface is dedicated to Pacas, Radziwiłł and all the military officers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; the poem extols the merits of the Grand Duchy’s army and the bravery of its leaders), as well as its content, composition and poetics – exactly like the interior of the churches of the St. Apostles Peter and Paul – reflect an important trait of the Vilnius Voivode and the Grand Hetman – his devotion and love for his homeland. This trait also shines through in Pacas’ extant letters and in his testament, which is kept in the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. This is what Pacas stated at the beginning of his testament: “As I prepare to stand before the terrible judgment of my God, where all secrets will be publicly revealed, I call as witnesses my Fatherland, which has fed me by its hands and nourished me with abundant graces, and the brave Knights of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and all those, to whom important letters have been written, words have been spoken, and my decisions have been better known – I call upon all of them to testify how I have ascended the ladder which is obligatory for every Knight by profession, and how I have reached that level by my Virtue, to which God our Lord and the grace of my dear Sovereign Kings have willed to raise me, how I have directed all my works, strength and efforts towards the one goal of the common good, the welfare of the State, in spite of my weak health, and how I have defended my dear Fatherland with my breast and blood, together with the Knights of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and have gone to all dangers sparing neither my blood nor my wealth, in order to defeat the enemy and to bring back the long awaited peace. <...> I also thank the brave Knights of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, who have helped me for so many years on the march together: first as a fellow soldier on the march, then as a lieutenant, company commander, colonel, then a field commander of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and then as

the Commander-in-Chief of the entire army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. I thank them all affectionately at my breast, I kiss the heads of the healthy, the wounds of the maimed, and for the deeds we have done together, for the hardships of war, for the loyalty to their Sovereign and their Fatherland, as I bid them a chivalrous farewell, I say the following words: *Fight for the altars and for the hearths*³. For the sake of these Knights, and for the sake of the entire army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which has been the mainstay of my manly marches and chivalrous valour, which has suffered the cold of winter with me, for their sake I ask my dear Sovereign, His Grace the King, and the entire Republic, that His Grace the King will take paternal kindness especially to those who, having served so long in the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, have lost their health, depleted their wealth, grown old under the shield, and are unable to earn a crumb of bread, and who find it difficult to wait for their long-overdue wages. For all of them, as I have earlier prayed to His Grace's predecessors the Kings, so I pray to the present King, who reigns happily, that the faithful and well-meaning Knights of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania may be fed by the generous hand of the King with the crumbs of the Sovereign's bread."⁴

The ending of the heroic poem is just as optimistic as the decoration of the heroic epic – the Church of the St. Apostles Peter and Paul. According to the Samalavičius, “the optimism of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul is not only expressed by the triumphant spirit of peace, but also by other motifs related to the Christian faith. The motif of darkness and death, which echoes in some of the war scenes, is specifically and at the same time symbolically expressed in the sculptural decoration of the church by the relief featuring Death with a scythe concealed in the darkness of the vestibule. However, this eerie motif does not prevail. The triumph of Death, which has trampled underfoot the attributes of earthly existence, is only temporary. It is overcome by the optimism of the Christian spirit, the resurrection motif expressing a belief in eternal life. <...> Here too, we see a triumph of Christian hope, a triumph of the belief in resurrection and eternal life, close to the culminating spirit of peace” (Samalavičius et Samalavičius 1998, 172–173).

I have come to this conclusion by leading you along a certain path: by telling you about the connections between the poem that glorifies the victory of the Lithuanian army and the masterpiece of sacral architecture and art that commemorates the memory of the Lithuanian leaders – the Chapel of the Holy Martyr Knights. In his testament, Pacas spoke emotionally of his fellow officers and the Lithuanian army as a whole. In his poem, Hrynkiewicz expressed these intentions, which must have been congenial to the attitudes of the society, in the international language of the time, Latin, and in suggestive images that were understandable to his contemporaries. In this world, nothing happens without a cause and nothing ends without an effect. What do these two works of our ancestors point out to us today? An independent state of our own, upheld by its citizens and defended by its own army, is the greatest asset that you and I have. It is very important and a great pleasure for me to say this here in Jieznas, where the square is decorated with a modern, modest, but at the same time expressive monument to the three generations of the defenders of independent Lithuania, which is a testimony to the might

3 Roman authors used these words to describe the meaning of a just war and a meaningful fight, see.: Cicero' *De nat. deor.* III, 94, 6 (*pro aris et focus certamen* – fight for the altars and for the hearths), Sallustius Crispus' *Catil. coniur.* LIX, 5, 5 (*pro patria, pro liberis, pro aris atque focus suis certare* – to fight for the fatherland, for the children, for the altars and for the hearths), Titus Livius' *Ab Urbe cond.* V, 30, 1, 3; IX, 12, 6, 2; X, 44, 8, 5 etc.

4 Translation into Lithuanian by an unknown translator, edited by Darius Kuolys; Pacas Mykolas Kazimieras 1682, 22r–23v; the version edited by Dr. Kuolys is available online at: http://www.saltiniai.info/files/literatura/LE00/Mykolas_Kazimieras_Pacas._Testamentas.LE1800.pdf.

of the Lord's right hand. There is no other monument like it in Lithuania. By whose authority did it come into being – perhaps by the spirit of the house of Pacas?.. Be that as it may, it also has a very nice artistic allusion: the shoes belonging to a couple – the Count and the Countess Pacas. The shoes were probably left behind by the couple, who must have been sitting on this chair and who must have risen for a short time – maybe to see the ruins of their palace, maybe to admire the Nemunas, maybe to go to church to pray for the fortitude of Vytautas and all those who won the Žalgiris battle, for the strength of Chodkiewicz and all those who defeated the enemies at Salaspils and Khotyn, and for the Lithuanian partisans who have decided to prove their loyalty to the Motherland with their deaths. They should come back, shouldn't they? Or maybe they have already returned to Jieznas...

SOURCE

The testament of Mykolas Kazimieras Pacas, Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and founder of the Antakalnis Church [written in Vilnius on 1675-07-04]. 1682-04-08. The Manuscripts Department of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, F273-2426.

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