

Martin Faber, *Sarmatismus: Die politische Ideologie des polnischen Adels im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* [The Sarmatism: The Political Ideology of the Polish Nobility in the 16th and 17th Centuries], Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2018, 525 pp., Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau, Quellen und Studien, vol. 35

The book under review, published as part of a series of studies and sources of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, is a result of research carried out over many years. Its author, a graduate of the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, where he obtained a doctoral degree under Wolfgang Reinhard and where he started working in 2002, began after his doctorate to carry out research into the history of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the 'Commonwealth of Nobles'. Numerous study visits to Poland enabled him to collect relevant source material, which he used in his thesis that became the basis of his post-doctoral degree (*habilitation*) granted in 2013.

I should start presenting the book from its title. It announces an analysis of the political ideology of the Polish nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but this is only partially confirmed by the book's contents. Although in the first chapter ('Zur Ausgangslage') the author examines the origins of Sarmatism in the first half of the sixteenth century, in general his analysis focuses on the ideology of the nobility in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the 1569 Union of Lublin and the late seventeenth century. What can be regarded as problematic is his reduction of the term 'Sarmatism' to the political ideology of the nobility and the fact that he associates it with the Polish (or Polonized) nobility (*szlachta*). In the Polish research tradition the term has a broader meaning encompassing phenomena associated with culture, art and customs. Similar reservations are provoked by the fact that the term is linked to the Polish nobility. After all, it

was an idea developed and adopted in the sixteenth century by a society that was still very diverse (in terms of ethnicity, language, religion and culture). It seems that it was only in the seventeenth century that the domination (not only among the nobles) of cultural models described as Sarmatism and of its political ideology accelerated the uniformization, primarily with regard to customs, of the nobility, as well as its Polonization.

The structure of the book seems clear. It is divided into six chapters and these in turn into subchapters, in which the author discusses selected aspects of the ideology of the nobility. Whenever possible and necessary chronological order is maintained, although essentially the structure of the book is based on specific topics. The foreword ('Vorwort') is followed by an extensive introduction ('Einleitung'), in which the author presents the assumptions of his study and tries to explain why the meaning of the term Sarmatism is limited to the sphere of ideology. Chapter 2 ('Zur Ausgangslage') focuses on a description of the nobility as an estate in Poland-Lithuania and on the beginnings of the political ideology of Sarmatism. Chapter 3 ('Die Entstehung der sarmatischen Ideologie') is devoted not so much to the formation of the nobility's ideology, but rather its functioning in the first period examined in detail by the author and encompassing the first two interregna, the evolution of the canon of the ideology of liberty in 1576–1606 as well as the Sandomierz rebellion (Zbrzydowski's rebellion) described here as 'Der sarmatische Aufstand'.

Of key importance is Chapter 4 ('Inhalt der Ideologie'), which features a description of the most important — according to Martin Faber — characteristics of the ideology of the nobility. It encompassed a sense of community as an estate, immanent conservatism, the limited role of royal power, justification of the leading role of the nobility by its military merits, finally — idealization of the nobility as knights and farmers. At the end two subchapters present the most important arguments used in the defence of Sarmatism thus defined against internal and external criticism.

Chapter 5 ('Die Entwicklung der Ideologie bis zum Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts') is devoted to the transformation of the political ideology of the nobility in the seventeenth century, that is from the end of the Sandomierz rebellion to the death of King John III Sobieski. Finally, in the last chapter ('Schlusswort') the author offers a few pages of a summary and conclusions. The book, published in the series' traditional hard green cover, contains a list of abbreviations, extensive bibliography of sources and literature as well as an index of names.

Worthy of note is the long list of sources and studies, mainly by Polish historians, used by the author. The contents of the book, above all its numerous extensive, sometimes digressive, footnotes, confirm that Martin Faber is familiar with the Polish research into and discussions about various interpretations of the phenomenon described as Sarmatism. Thus his decision to limit himself to political ideology was a conscious choice. Faber's analyses and conclusions are based primarily on printed sources, both those from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as source editions. In his book he uses no fewer

than 297 printed texts and collections of texts. The number does not fully convey the scope of his research — the bibliography features very varied items, varied also in terms of their volume. Thus we have here collections of official documents (including *Volumina constitutionum* and *Volumina legum*), parliamentary diaries, *lauda* and local assembly instructions, legal and political treatises, journalistic writings, literature (*belles-lettres* and popular literature) as well as various egodocuments. The author's research encompassed a vast and varied collection of sources. We should, therefore, examine its results.

Unsurprisingly, the introductory chapters are largely based on the literature on the subject. In Chapter 2 Faber describes the nobility in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ('Die Protagonisten') and then goes on to explain the origins of the nobles' political ideology ('Freiheit und Mischverfassung'), the foundations of which were freedom of the members of the nobility and a mixed system of government. Issues like the formation, composition and various elements of the structure of the nobility as an estate have been analysed in Polish historiography many times and from various perspectives. The sixteenth-century concept of freedom-based mixed system of government and its ideologists (Jakub Przyłuski, Stanisław Orzechowski, Wawrzyniec Goślicki and others) are also some of the traditional themes of Polish historiography and Martin Faber's findings could not have contributed anything new.

Similarly, there is a vast literature on the question tackled in the third chapter, devoted to the emergence of the ideological canon of Sarmatism in 1572–1608. The first two interregna (subchapter 'Von der Offensive zur Defensive'), the reign of Stephen Báthory and the first twenty years of Sigismund III's rule ('Die größte Freiheit der Welt'), and, in particular, the Sandomierz rebellion ('Der sarmatische Aufstand') are those stages in the development of the ideology of the nobility for which a novel interpretation in the light of the existing findings in the literature seems a difficult task. Suffice it to mention Edward Opaliński's fundamental study *Kultura polityczna szlachty polskiej w latach 1587–1652: System parlamentarny a społeczeństwo obywatelskie* (Warsaw, 1995) as well as other studies by the same author.

Real disappointment, however, comes with Chapter 4. All the threads of the main part of the book mentioned above are elements recurring almost *ad nauseam* in publications by historians and historians of literature studying Polish culture and literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We might have hoped that Martin Faber would find other elements constitutive of the nobles' political ideology and would go beyond frequently analysed themes. Yet despite his rather harsh criticism of the views of earlier scholars tackling the subject matter in question ('Ratlosigkeit der Historiker', pp. 160–62), we find nothing new in Faber's own conclusions. Neither his discussion of the social determinants of the ideology of Sarmatism ('Symbiose'), in which Faber tackles the problem of the relations between the nobility's ideal of equality and the oligarchic practices of magnates; nor his analysis of the nobility's conservatism ('Omnis novitas nociva'), where we find reflections on the practice of the

ideology of freedom or the *liberum veto* principle; nor his analysis of the role of royal power in the ideology of the nobility ('Der Unentbehrliche') has brought about a revision of the earlier findings. Similarly disappointing are Faber's reflections on the nobility's legitimization of its political claims to domination by references to the military merits of its Sarmatian ancestors — who had apparently won their right to freedom in some distant past ('Der Szlachcic als Ritter') — and on the popularization of the ideal image of a Sarmatian nobleman as a Polish-Lithuanian Cincinnatus, a knight and a farmer in one. Likewise, in the last subchapters of this part of the book ('Gute Gesetze, schlechte Sitten' and 'Polonia defensa'), the author fails to convincingly go beyond the findings of his predecessors.

Despite the fact that on p. 159 Faber firmly says that with the end of the Sandomierz rebellion of 1608 'war die sarmatische Ideologie nicht nur etabliert, sondern auch die Phase ihrer Entstehung im Wesentlichen abgeschlossen,' his reflection is continued in Chapter 5, in which, however, he speaks of the development (*die Entwicklung*) of the ideology of Sarmatism in the seventeenth century. In spite of the evident contradiction between the thesis concerning the end of the formation of the nobility's political ideology and the title of Chapter 5, which speaks about its development, it is hard to blame Martin Faber for tackling the period after 1608, especially the second half of the seventeenth century. After all, it was precisely in that period that growing xenophobia, Catholic proselytizing, disappearance of tolerant tendencies as well as Catholic providentialism — emerging with the ideology of the bulwark and evolving towards Messianism — became important components of the ideology of the nobility.

A discussion of the functioning of this ideology in 1608–48 ('Ruhe vor der Sturm') and during the crisis of the Polish-Lithuanian state in 1648–69 ('Die Erfahrung des Überlebens') is followed by two subchapters, in which the 'Sarmatian king' Michael Wiśniowiecki ('Der sarmatische König') is contrasted with John III Sobieski, 'Der unsarmatische König'. Despite a surprisingly inaccurate assessment of the current state of research into the reign of Michał Wiśniowiecki — which may have resulted from negligence in the editing of the final version of the book in March 2018 (p. 391) — the author's description of the reign is satisfactory.

The same goes for his description of John III's Sobieski's rule, which is regarded as the apogee of Sarmatism in our historiography (p. 450). In defining Sobieski as an 'un-Sarmatian king' Faber develops some earlier findings which slightly modified the traditional image of Sobieski as the ideal 'Polish Sarmatian'. Starting with the concept of 'enlightened Sarmatism' as a tendency characteristic of the king and his milieu, Martin Faber convincingly argues that the 'Sarmatian' background was a conscious creation of an image most likely aimed at erasing the memory of the years when Jan Sobieski, Grand Hetman of the Crown at the time conspiring with France, had headed the opposition against Michael Wiśniowiecki, the 'king who came from the nobility'. The book under review ends with a brief conclusion, in which the author sums up his analysis.

Ending this brief discussion of Martin Faber's substantial study, I have to say, somewhat disappointingly, that it contributes little to our knowledge of the political ideology of the nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, defined here as Sarmatism. Despite the author's references to the methods used by new intellectual historians, we do not find in the book much that is new in comparison with the findings of Faber's predecessors. Nor can we point to many serious errors, with the exception perhaps of the author's too frequent references to opinions from the Enlightenment period, in which Sarmatism appeared as a *bête noire* — 'Gothic barbarity'. The author even seems to forget sometimes that the right point of reference for his analyses should be the views of contemporary historians, so familiar to him, and not criticism of Sarmatism by enlightened reformers from the second half of the eighteenth century.

Thus the overall assessment of the book formulated from the point of view of a Polish reader is not very positive. The book describes, sums up and provides few modifications of the findings of Faber's predecessors and so Polish historians will not benefit much from reading it. I hope that at least German readers, especially those not familiar with the Polish historical literature, will be able to expand their knowledge of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the 'Commonwealth of the nobles', and the most important characteristics of its dominant political ideology in the seventeenth century.

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