

Stanisław Wiech, *Litwa i Białorus. Rządy Potapowa (1868-1874)*, Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego, 2021. 615 p. ISBN 978-83-7133-921-9

The processes of Russification and de-Polonisation in the western provinces of the Russian Empire have been widely researched by Lithuanian, Polish, Belarusian, American and Russian historians. Repressive Imperial Russian government policies after the 1863–1864 uprising changed life in the land, having an influence on the formation processes of modern nations. Russification and de-Polonisation remain a relevant historical problem, which is precisely the focus of this new work by Stanisław Wiech.

One of the most important figures who implemented Imperial national policy was the governor-general. The Polish historian Stanisław Wiech belongs to the group of researchers who notice the difference between the Russification or de-Polonisation policies enacted by different governor-generals. He is a proponent of the concept whereby each governor-general performed his own policy, one that did not always correlate with the position held at the Imperial centre. He has published works about the activities of Mikhail Muravyov, Konstantin von Kaufmann, Eduard Baranov and Piotr Albedinski in Lithuania and Belarus, or more specifically, the Northwest Province, and their influence on the social, political, cultural and economic life of society.<sup>1</sup> The author can be attributed to the relatively large group of imperiologists who take an active interest in the roles of governor-generals in implementing Imperial policy in the annexed territories.<sup>2</sup> Wiech heads the project

<sup>1</sup> S. Wiech, *Dyktatura serca na zachodnich rubieżach Cesarstwa Rosyjskiego. Dzieje kariery wojskowo-urzędniczej Piotra Albedyńskiego (1826–1883)* (Kielce, 2010); S. Wiech, *Depolonizacja Ziemi Zabranych (1864–1914). Koncepcje – mechanizmy decyzyjne – realizacja*, t. 1: *Litwa i Białoruś. Od Murawjowa do Baranowa (1864–1868)* (Kielce, 2018); S. Wiech, *Warszawscy generałowie-gubernatorzy o sytuacji społeczno-politycznej Królestwa Polskiego. Raporty Albedyńskiego i Szuwałowa z lat 1881 i 1896* (Kielce, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> The issue of Russification and de-Polonisation is analysed in numerous works, some of the most important ones are listed here: W. Rodkiewicz, *Russian nationality policy in the Western Provinces of the Empire (1863–1905)* (Lublin, 1998); M. Dolbilov, *Russkii kraj, chuzhaia vera: etnokontsional'naiia politika imperii v Litve i Belorussii*

'De-Polonisation of the Conquered Lands. Concepts-Decision-Making Mechanisms-Realisation', which includes some of his own studies on the analysis of the activities of governor-generals who wielded authority in the territory of Lithuania and Belarus after the 1863–1864 uprising. The book under review covers the period of the activity of Aleksandr Potapov (1868–1874), which is marked by changes to the de-Polonisation policy in the Northwest Province. Thus, Wiech formulates the research problem by distinguishing key aspects of Potapov's policy. This method of analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the methods of governance and instruments the governor-general enacted, and those prevailing in his political environment. The author specifies the research chronology that was followed. Even though it is declared that attention is focused on the period of Potapov's rule (1868–1874), the author notes that due to the necessity of including contextual material, chronological boundaries are sometimes crossed.

Part I of the book is divided into several themes that correlate with the key points in Aleksandr Potapov's policy (pp. 15–328). The political situation in the land, and policies affecting religion, education, local nobles and the contribution tax, are all examined. In Part II, the author publishes the main documents relating to the rule of Aleksandr Potapov in the territories of Lithuania and Belarus (pp. 331–579). From the documents gathered, we can see that the author chose to publish the governor-general's reports to the emperor, reports by the governor-general and his deputy and circulars that described the war situation, the status of the Polish language, and the situation of the Catholic Church. According to the author, these documents are better known to Lithuanian and Belarusian historians than they are to Polish historians.

In the first chapter, the author looks at Potapov's life, pointing out his military achievements (he had participated in the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1848 and the Crimean War), his experience in the position of civil governor, as part of the administration of the governor-general of Vilnius in the time of Muravyov, and as the adjutant of Iwan Paskiewicz, the governor-general of Warsaw. His command of the corps of gendarmes reveals Potapov's initiative and his experience in various fields. Wiech adds that when working with Mikhail Muravyov

*pri Aleksandre II* (Moskva, 2010); A.A. Komzolova, *Politika samoderzhavii v Severo-Zapadnom krae v epokhu Velikikh reform* (Moskva, 2005); *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii*, ed. M. Dolbilov, A. Miller (Moskva, 2006); D. Staliūnas, *Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (Amsterdam, New York, 2007).

to suppress the 1863–1864 uprising, Potapov became familiar with Lithuania and Belarus and the socio-political situation in the territory. An approach that was more liberal than that of Muravyov allowed him to consider ending the martial law, reducing the percentage tax, and the expansion of the schools network. He talked about issues like the economic revival of the land rather than enduring punishment, which is what Muravyov sought, along with successors and Slavophiles who supported the latter's views (pp. 15, 32). A detailed account of Potapov's personality shows that the governor-general's character was critical of Imperial policy directions implemented in a specific region.

In the second chapter, as in his other monographs, the author reviews the political situation in the territories of Lithuania and Belarus. The situation after the rule of Muravyov, Kaufmann and Baranov was difficult; according to Wiech, the regime aroused fear in the people. The population in the land lived under total control, which Muravyov and his successors had tried to introduce. Maintaining the martial law in towns and villages impoverished people, and the Treasury was poorly balanced due to the large income from fines that Muravyov had devised, sometimes without even receiving authorisation from the emperor.<sup>3</sup> Even though Potapov tried to change the socio-political situation, to make it slightly less restrictive, it is likely that the changes were implemented slowly. Despite ending the martial law, the governor-general adhered to a strict policy regarding the Poles, even increasing the number of political police officers (*gendarmes*), which was twice as large in the Northwest Province as in the Polish Kingdom (pp. 56–59, 60).

The third chapter looks at religious policy. According to the author, Potapov tried to reinstate and strengthen the Orthodox Church as a competitor of the Catholic Church. On this point, the governor-general upheld a strict policy regarding Catholics, changing the programme for training clergy to one that was more ideologically favourable towards the Russian government, and introducing restrictions on Catholic priests conducting pilgrimages and living abroad. This choice was driven by the understanding that the dominance of the Catholic Church in the Northwest Province was too strong, and interfered with Russification

<sup>3</sup>Wielding great political power, governor-generals often set out rules that would be initiated without the prior, preliminary authorisation of the emperor. K. Matsuzato, 'General-gubernatorstva v Rossiiskoi imperii: ot etnicheskogo k prostranstvennomu podkhodu', in: *Novaia imperskaia istoriia postsovetskogo prostranstva*, eds. I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovskii, M. Mogilner, A. Semenov (Kazan, 2004) pp. 438, 439.

processes in the land. In addition, he took to strengthening Orthodoxy and constructing Orthodox churches with revenue from percentage tax collection. This practice was not successful or effective, due to the deeply entrenched Polish language and culture, the opposition of the local population to Orthodoxy, and even their anger over the publication of liturgical books in Russian, expressed by throwing eggs at priests loyal to the tsar (p. 108).

The fourth chapter, aimed at educational policy, is about the desire of Potapov to improve the socio-political situation in the Lithuanian and Belarusian lands, by increasing the number of schools and educational institutions, and devoting more attention to girls' gymnasiums and ideological understanding, for it was alleged that women, being religious fanatics, urged men to oppose the Russian government (pp. 156, 182). Education was used to form groups of loyal people; however, this policy encountered difficulties, as there were shortages of teachers from the central governorates, teacher training colleges did not receive sufficient attention, and there was a lack of funds for the construction of schools. In the end, parents did not send their children to schools run by Orthodox priests (p. 161).

In the fifth chapter, devoted to a discussion of policy regarding the Polish nobility, Wiech writes that extensive restrictions, the percentage tax, sequestration and fines impoverished the local nobles. The government transferred sequestered lands to Russian army officers and landlords. The expectation was that the Russian nature or character would come to dominate, in place of the Polish nature, which would then spread to the colonisation of the territories of Lithuania and Belarus. This policy direction also ran into difficulties. Even though there were attempts to restrict the possibility for nobles of 'Polish origin' to purchase land and manage estates, the land still ended up by various means in the hands of the local population, largely Jews. The strict policy stopped the land from growing more prosperous or developing, and the *zemstvo* reform was not introduced here (p. 221).

The last, sixth, chapter in Part I contains information about the percentage tax issue. The author particularly stresses Potapov's liberal approach to contributions and his suggestion to reduce or eliminate percentage taxes to counteract the land's economic degradation (pp. 256, 267). Percentage taxes were a measure conceived by Muravyov aimed at reducing the potential to support an uprising. The tax was applied to Polish, Russian and Baltic German nobles. Later, it was applied only to the Polish nobility. Nobles had to pay a 10% tax on income received

from their estates. It was meant to draw attention to budgeting and the distribution of funds. Wiech distinguishes figures who avoided paying the percentage tax. Local nobles holding important positions at the imperial court, the governor-general's chancery or the military could avoid this tax burden. One of the more distinctive examples was the mother of Ireneusz and Bogdan Ogiński, who was a *fräulein* at the court of Alexander II, and thus managed to avoid both land tax and percentage tax obligations (pp. 247, 307).

According to Wiech, Potapov is considered to be the person who 'built a new house in place of the one that had burnt down' (p. 323). If Muravyov, Kaufmann and Baranov were officials who tried to stabilise the situation in conflict lands by using strict means, Potapov was one who tried to dress de-Polonisation and Russification in new clothes. Holding the position of governor-general of Vilnius for an extraordinarily long time, Potapov had enough time to set out guidelines for future officials. Wiech's study does a good job of conveying the complexity of the situation and Potapov's attempts at improving the economic and socio-political situation in the land. There is a detailed analysis of the symbiosis between central and local government, and the attempts at trying to solve the political issues that arose. The researcher highlights the problems that posed the greatest threat to the Imperial Russian government. The visibility of Latin and Polish cultural aspects in education and religion went a long way in showing the lengths local and central government went to in pursuing the Russification of the Lithuanian and Belarusian territories. In his research, Wiech manages to show that even a different direction in de-Polonisation and Russification in the Lithuanian and Belarusian territories did not improve the socio-political situation, as restrictions still applied to the Polish nobility regarding land ownership and education. Potapov rather stabilised the socio-political situation, trying to integrate the local population into Russian culture. However, some comments should also be made about what deserves criticism in the book.

According to Wiech, Potapov tried to change the socio-political situation in the Lithuanian and Belarusian territories that had formed under the rule of Muravyov, Kaufmann and Baranov: however, when reading the text, it is difficult to find statements on specifically how the socio-political situation changed with Potapov in command. It is clear that he devoted a great deal of attention to strengthening the land's economy; however, even the economy had to be pointed down the path of Russification, where attention was given to the development

of Russian culture via education, religion, the colonisation of territories, and de-Polonisation, which was the elimination of expressions of Polish culture from public life (advertising stands, the use of Polish in schools and churches, the sequestration of lands belonging to the Polish nobility). Potapov also continued the ban Kaufmann introduced on using Polish in public places, *trebniks* (prayer books in Russian) continued to be published, Polish was banned from secondary schools, and ultimately, opportunities for 'people of Polish origins' to study at university, attend military academies and teacher training colleges were all restricted (pp. 101, 166, 192). Thus, when reading the text, it remains unclear how Potapov actually changed the socio-political situation. The author's vague explanation in the conclusions that the governor-general 'built a new house', i.e., created a new dynamic in the land, does not show exactly how the socio-political situation in the Lithuanian and Belarusian territories changed (p. 323).

It is worth mentioning that the book would appear more well-rounded had the author defined the concepts of Russification and de-Polonisation. For example, permission to publish liturgical texts in Russian could be viewed as an expression of Russian nationalism or Russification; however, the author denotes this as an aspect of de-Polonisation (p. 101). This fusion of concepts means that we cannot fully understand what policy was applied in the territories of Lithuania and Belarus. Subsequent studies would benefit from making the distinction, or at least an explanation, of the differences between these concepts.

Doubts also arise from Wiech's decision to focus all his attention on the situation of Poles in the Lithuanian and Belarusian territories. In his research, he uses the term *Zemie Zabrane*, which is more applicable to the Polish historiographic tradition. Perhaps it is this approach that stopped the author from trying to look at the region in more detail, as his choice makes the work one-sided and narrows the perspective. It should be stressed that each process of Russification differed. When analysing Wiech's research, one sometimes gets the impression that the Poles and Catholics were the only ones to experience the Russification of holy texts or education system problems; whereas the restrictions applied to Poles also affected Catholic Lithuanians and Catholic Belarusians, not to mention Jews. Little reference is made to Lithuanians or Belarusians, even though some attention is given to Motiejus Valančius as a defender of Catholicism, and to Lithuanian education (pp. 89–93).

Even though the author's argument that Polish historiography has not conducted many studies on this issue is legitimate, a broader critical

and comparative analysis, and a reformulation of the study's title, would allow for a clearer depiction of national policy trends in 1868–1874 in Lithuania and Belarus. In spite of the few comments listed here, this research by the Polish historian Stanisław Wiech, and his selection of new documents, constitutes a considerable contribution to the history of Poland, as well as Lithuania and Belarus.

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