

Volume 18, Issue 4  
December 2020

ISSN 1731-8297, e-ISSN 6969-9696  
<https://czasopisma.uni.opole.pl/index.php/osap>

CHRONICLE  
received 2020-10-15  
accepted 2020-10-20



## The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Stanisław Żółkiewski, Hetman and Great Crown Chancellor, Senator of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

400. rocznica śmierci Stanisława Żółkiewskiego,  
hetmana i kanclerza wielkiego koronnego,  
senatora Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów

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**Citation:** Kaczorowski, Włodzimierz. 2020. The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Stanisław Żółkiewski, Hetman and Great Crown Chancellor, Senator of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. *Opolskie Studia Administracyjno-Prawne* 18(4): 153–164. DOI: 10.25167/osap.3438

**Abstract:** In the period of Nobles' Democracy, the art of war of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth attained the highest level, making a real phenomenon in the then Europe. It owed its development, among others, to outstanding Hetmans of the Crown and Lithuania, victors in many battles, leaders surrounded by fame and admiration, genuine patriots. In the hall of fame of Grand Hetmans, Field Hetmans and Lithuanian Hetmans, a most prominent place is taken by Stanisław Żółkiewski (1747-1620).

On 13 June 2019, Members of Parliament passed an occasional resolution dedicating the year 2020 to Stanisław Żółkiewski. The resolution reads, among others, "Stanisław Żółkiewski always put the good of Poland above his own benefits, stood faithfully on the side of successive kings, also in internal conflicts, despite the critical opinion of Sigismund III's politics. He advocated religious tolerance and easing conflicts. [...] The *Sejm* of the Republic of Poland, upon acknowledging the great contributions of Stanisław Żółkiewski, creator of the victory of Klushino and a conqueror of Moscow, tenacious defender of the Mother Country for which he sacrificed his life, establishes the year 2020, which marks the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, the Year of Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski."

**Keywords:** hetman, chancellor, senator, *Sejm*, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

**Abstrakt:** W okresie demokracji szlacheckiej sztuka wojenna Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów osiągnęła najwyższy poziom, stanowiąc prawdziwy fenomen w ówczesnej Europie. Swój rozwój zawdzięczała między innymi wybitnym hetmanom koronnym i litewskim, zwycięzcom wielu bitew, wodzom otoczonym sławą i podziwem, autentycznym patriotom. W poczcie staropolskich hetmanów wielkich i polnych koronnych i litewskich poczesne miejsce zajmuje Stanisław Żółkiewski (1547–1620).

Dnia 13 czerwca 2019 r. parlamentarzyści w drodze okolicznościowej uchwały ustanowili rok 2020 Rokiem Hetmana Stanisława Żółkiewskiego. W uchwale czytamy między innymi: „Stanisław Żółkiewski zawsze przedkładał dobro Polski ponad własne korzyści, stał wiernie po stronie kolejnych królów, także w wewnętrznych sporach, mimo krytycznego zdania o polityce Zygmunta III. Opowiadał się za tolerancją religijną i łagodzeniem konfliktów. [...] Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, uznając wielkie zasługi Stanisława Żółkiewskiego, twórcy wiktorii kłuszyńskiej i zdobywcy Moskwy, wytrwałego obrońcy Ojczyzny, za którą oddał swoje życie, ustanawia rok 2020 w 400-lecie Jego śmierci Rokiem Hetmana Stanisława Żółkiewskiego”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** hetman, kanclerz, senator, sejm, Rzeczpospolita

## 1. Introduction

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a state established as a result of the union concluded between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the *Sejm* held in Lublin in 1569. In compliance with the act of the Union of Lublin, there was established one state with the common monarch bearing the double title of the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth spreading over the territory of 1 million square kilometres united the lands of the Kingdom and the Duchy upon annexation of the lands of Smolensk and Czernihiv in 1618 (Uruszczak 2010: 188). According to European historians, states covering an area of 1 million square kilometres were classified in the category of empires. The Polish-Lithuanian state was inhabited by 8-10 million people who were greatly varied as regards the nationalities and religions. The Lublin Union changed the system of power in Central-Eastern Europe and strengthened the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fight for regaining of the provinces lost to Moscow in the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the history of the Kingdom of Poland that was a period of glory and might of the Polish-Lithuanian military forces and dominance in this part of Europe. For the first time, beginning with the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Commonwealth had stood a chance of subordinating Moscow and the ruling Dynasty of Polish Vasas – that of taking over power in the state bending under the yoke of the absolute socio-political system. Regaining Smolensk in 1611, taking the tsar's throne by King Vladislav Vasa and the annexation of the lands of Smolensk, Czernihiv and Seversk, testify to the visible increase in the significance of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the reign of the first Vasa on the Polish throne, Sigismund III (1588-1632) (Nagielski 2012b: 7). It was also during the reign of this ruler that



Figure 1. Portrait of Stanisław Żółkiewski,  
National Museum in Krakow, inv. no. MNK I-219

the Kingdom organized many military campaigns against the Habsburgs, Moscow, Sweden, Cossacks, Turkey, the Tartars, as well as to Moldova and Wallachia. The fight which the Kingdom launched against the Muslim Empire of Turkey was of a particular dimension, since it was waged in defence of whole Europe and the Christian faith. In this way the Polish state became the bulwark of Christianity (*antemurale christianitatis*).

In the period of the Nobles' Democracy, the art of waging wars reached its climax in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, making a real phenomenon in the then Europe. It owed its development, among others, to outstanding Hetmans of the Crown and Lithuanian Hetmans, victors in many battles, leaders surrounded by fame and admiration, true patriots (Leśniewski 2003: 4). In the hall of fame of Old Poland's Grand Hetmans, Field Hetmans of the Crown and Lithuanian Hetmans, the prominent place is taken by Stanisław Żółkiewski (1547-1620).

## **2. Stanisław Żółkiewski among the patrons of the year 2020**

In 2019, the Parliament of the Republic of Poland decided the patronage for the successive year 2020. In this way, the following outstanding persons were honoured: St John Paul II (the centenary of birth), Grand Hetman of the Crown Stanisław Żółkiewski (the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death), philosopher Roman Ingarden (the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death), writer, journalist and publicist Leopold Tyrmand (the centenary of birth and the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death). Moreover, the year 2020 is also celebrated as the centenary of the Battle of Warsaw and Poland's Wedding to the Sea, which took place in Puck.

On 13 June 2019, the MPs – on the basis of Article 33a of Rules of the Sejm – by way of an occasional bill, established the year 2020 to be the Year of Stanisław Żółkiewski. At this point, the resolution says, among others, “Stanisław Żółkiewski always put the good of Poland over his own benefits, faithfully stood on the side of successive kings, also when it came to internal disputes, despite having a critical opinion of Sigismund III's politics. He advocated religious tolerance and soothing conflicts. [...] The Sejm of the Republic of Poland, in acknowledgement of the great contributions of Stanisław Żółkiewski, the creator of the victory of Klushino and conqueror of Moscow, persevering defender of his Mother Country for which he sacrificed his life, establishes the year 2020, being the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, the Year of Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski.”

## **3. Origin, youth and education of the future Hetman**

The House of Żółkiewski, coat of arms “Lubicz” settled down in Red Ruthenia, their ancestral nest being the village of Żółkiew situated in the land of Chełm, in the County of Krasnystaw (not to be mistaken for the town of Żółkiew located c. 25 km away from Lvov, which was founded by Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski in 1603 on the ground of the village of Winniki). The future Hetman and Great Crown Chancellor was born in 1547 in the village of Turynka. He was the third child (following Mikołaj and Anna) of Stanisław

Żółkiewski (c. 1520-1588), Castellan of Halicz (1580-1581), Voivode of Bełz (1581-1585), Voivode of Russia (1585-1588), buried in the Lvov cathedral, and Zafia Lipska of Goraj, coat of arms “Korczak”. Stanisław Żółkiewski, Sr, belonged to the deputies’ elite, since he represented the nobility of the Voivodeship of Bełz four times in sittings of the *Seym* (1556/1557 in Warsaw; 1569 in Lublin – he signed the Union of Lublin Act; 1576 in Cracow – the coronation *Seym* of Stefan Batory; 1578 in Warsaw). Following his nomination to the position of Castellan of Halicz in 1580, he became a senator of the Commonwealth. He was also an excellent soldier who took part in the Moscow campaign in 1580. Owing to his experience gained in public offices as well as the accumulated wealth (towards the end of his life he owned 30 villages), he gained a significant position as a magnate in the Commonwealth.

Stanisław Kobierzycki (c. 1600–1665), historian and writer, in his work entitled *Historia Władysława królewicza polskiego i szwedzkiego* [A history of Vladislav, the Polish and Swedish King], wrote that Stanisław Żółkiewski Jr, “came from an old family [...]. When the future leader reached his adolescence, he was sent to be educated by his relation – Jan Zamoyski, who realized the boy’s exceptional abilities” (2005: 310). Stanisław Żółkiewski’s education developed at two stages. Initially, he was taught by private preceptors at home, and then was sent to the cathedral school in Lvov. He gained his knowledge mainly in the fields of Latin, history, philosophy, natural sciences and ancient literature. In the opinion of Stanisław Kobierzycki, he was a brilliant expert in history. “He made his decisions in well-thought-over a way not only owing to his experience, but also because of continuous reading in older and newer historians. What he had read, he remembered so well that – if anybody quoted a fragment with mistakes, he was ready to instantly correct the person, quoting whole pages to the amazement of his listeners” (2005: 310-311). The model of education of the young magnate should properly include also his education at one or several foreign universities. However, the Senior of the House of Żółkiewski decided that studies abroad were too costly and sent his son to the court of his relative Jan Zamoyski (1542-1605), a graduate of the University of Padua, doctor of both laws, perfectly educated humanist, prospective Chancellor and Grand Hetman of the Crown, who was the Secretary to Sigismund Augustus at that time. Consequently, Stanisław Żółkiewski arrived in Cracow in 1566 and took the post of a King’s secretary combining it with transport of correspondence and carrying out tasks delegated to him. His service at the King’s court fell on years which were of breakthrough importance to the Commonwealth. On 7 July 1572 the last of the Jagiellonian Dynasty – Sigismund II Augustus – died in Knyszyn. This gave rise to the rule of monarchs chosen in free *viritim* elections in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

#### 4. Hetman and Grand Crown Chancellor

The first interregnum factually, but not formally, came to an end on 16 May 1573 by proclamation made by Grand Marshal of the Crown, Jan Firlej, of Henri de Valois, French Dauphin, to be the King elect of the Commonwealth, having been chosen prior to that (11 May) in the fields of Kamień, a village near Warsaw. That candidate was also supported by Jan Zamoyski and Stanisław Żółkiewski. On 6 July 1573 Polish envoys led by Adam Konarski, Bishop of Poznan, set out from Międzyrzecz and headed for Paris. They were to officially inform the Dauphin of France of his being elected and obtain the elect's promise to fulfil the conditions which were set in connection of the choice. Among the thirteen persons selected on 16 May by the states, there was Jan Zamoyski accompanied by six trusty persons, among others, Stanisław Żółkiewski. During the journey the latter got acquainted with the western culture, customs and different art of war. In 1574, while being part of the delegation of envoys accompanying Henri de Valois during his journey to the Commonwealth, Jan Zamoyski delegated Stanisław Żółkiewski to go to Vienna to the court of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II Habsburg.

In 1575, Stanisław Żółkiewski participated in his first war expedition against the Crimean horde which crossed the frontier of Volhynia, Podolia and Red Ruthenia. Fortunately, the Tartars retreated and as a result Żółkiewski did not take part in any battle. Two years later, he participated in the war which Stefan Batory fought with Gdansk. Żółkiewski commanded then Jan Zamoyski's rota (military detachment) being part of the army commanded by Court Hetman Jan Zborowski and Starost of Puck, Ernest Weiher. That relatively small, amounting to 1.3 thousand cavalrymen and 700 infantrymen army, even if a select one, opposed far more numerous detachments commanded by von Koln, trying to break the land blockade and capture Tczew. Von Koln's detachments were taken by surprise by Zborowski on 17 April 1577 on a narrow causeway on Lubiszew Lake. As a result of the attack of the armoured regiment several thousand rebels were killed. In the battle, Mikołaj Żółkiewski – Stanisław's elder brother who was in command of Jan Zamoyski's armoured regiment distinguished himself in combat, but got seriously wounded on the battlefield. It was probably for his outstanding services in the war against Gdansk that Stanisław Żółkiewski was nominated King's secretary in 1578.

In the years 1579-1581, Stanisław Żółkiewski took part in Stefan Batory's expeditions to Moscow. On 20 September 1580, in the battle at Toropets, he was in command of his own regiment and greatly contributed to the final victory over the many times more numerous enemy.

During the split election on 19 August 1587, Żółkiewski voted Sigismund III Vasa. He was one of the defenders of Cracow against Archduke Maximilian

Habsburg, chosen by part of the nobility to be the king and intending to accomplish his coronation. Still, after his failed charge, the Archduke withdrew to Silesia, where on 24 January 1588 a battle was fought near Byczyna. Stanisław Żółkiewski commanded then a hundred-horse regiment of Cossacks in the rank of a cavalry captain. Risking his life, he managed to break the ranks of the enemy and seized the Emperor's yellow standard with the black eagle. Until today it has been kept in the crown treasury in the Wawel Castle. Żółkiewski, badly wounded in his leg, was taken off the battlefield. From then on he would walk with a limp till the end of his life.

On 7 March 1588, upon the request of Jan Zamoyski, Grand Hetman of the Crown, King Sigismund III Vasa, nominated Stanisław Żółkiewski Field Hetman of the Crown. Again, the contribution he had made in the war against Archduke Maximilian reaching for the Polish crown, most likely led to the nomination.

The year 1595 saw the beginning of military expeditions led by Jan Zamoyski to Moldova. Stanisław Żółkiewski held the function of the closest collaborator to the Grand Hetman of the Crown, which he performed with utmost success. He participated in the victorious Battle of Cecora, and in 1596 quelled the Cossacks' rebellion led by Severyn Nalyvaiko, whom he defeated in the battle in the wilderness of the Sołonica River. In 1600, Żółkiewski took part in the battle on the Telezina River near the village of Bukov. He commanded the so-called head troops regiment which – according to the Old Polish art of waging wars – was supposed to make the breaking charge. The fight ended in the victory of Jan Zamoyski and Stanisław Żółkiewski, which in turn made it possible to put Simion Movila, who was a boyar disposed in a friendly way towards the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, on the country's throne.

Beginning with 1601, Żółkiewski led actions against the Swedish in Livonia, capturing Valmiera (Wolmar) and Weissenstein (Biały Kamień). In June 1602, he defeated the Swedish in the Battle of Reval (present-day Tallinn in Estonia).

During the Sandomierz Rebellion in the years 1606-1609, the Hetman took side of Sigismund III Vasa. Stanisław Łubieński (1573-1640), senator and historian, in his work *Rozruchy domowe w Polsce w latach 1606-1608* [The domestic riots in Poland in the years 1606-1608] emphasized:

When it turned out that the rebels do not have peaceful intentions and provoke more and more new disturbances, the King – in order to put an end to them – summoned Stanisław Żółkiewski, the Castellan of Lvov and the Field Hetman, man of many virtues. Already as a youth, during the rule of King Stefan, he enjoyed recognition and respect and that not owing to the family connections with Jan Zamoyski, but due to his courage and excellent abilities. Earning successive military ranks, he gained such fame that Zamoyski himself made use of his counsel during wars. The latter acknowledged Żółkiewski to be his most worthy deputy. [...] When Żółkiewski arrived in Warsaw, the King welcomed him with highest esteem and demanded that Żółkiewski give him advice as to the measures which needed to be taken in the then situation. [...] Żółkiewski,

glad that the King trusted him, declared his support and promised to try to persuade the Voivode [Mikołaj Zebrzydowski] not to take such actions. If the other one should not follow his recommendations, he would – with all his might – oppose such actions and would defend the King of the Commonwealth if the need arose” (2009: 82).

On 6 July 1607, in the Battle of Guzów, nearby Radom, the hetmans: Stanisław Żółkiewski, Jan Karol Chodkiewicz and Jan Potocki defeated detachments of the rebels. Sigismund III Vasa forgave the rebels after their lost battle (Pawłowska-Kubik 2019: 160–248).

In 1609, Stanisław Żółkiewski took part in the Muscovy War, also in the siege of Smolensk, and on 4 July 1610, in the Battle of Klushino, he beat the seven times more numerous detachments led by Dmitry Shuisky (Gawron 2012: 23-45), forced the muscovite boyars to choose Prince Vladislav Vasa to be the Tsar and in September of the same year he marched into Moscow (Nagielski 2012a: 47-68). At the ordinary *Seym* held in Warsaw on 29 October 1611, in the Senatorial Hall of the Royal Castle, he presented Sigismund III Vasa with the standards he had won in Moscow and dethronized Tsar Vasiliy Shuisky. In the literature on the subject, that event is referred to as the tribute paid by Shuisky Tsars (see: Byliński, Kaczorowski 2012: 135-141; Chrościcki, Nagielski [eds.] 2012; Gałuszka 2019: 171–203). The triumph of Hetman Żółkiewski, connected with the ceremony of presenting Shuisky Tsars to Sigismund III was captured in the form of a plafond painting by Tomasz Dolabella.

However, the victories in battlefields did not win Stanisław Żółkiewski the desired and coveted grand hetman’s mace. He was forced to stand up to his own inferiors who, towards the end of 1612, upon having returned from Moscow, formed a confederation, waiting in vain to get the due soldier’s pay. In the successive years, he took to fighting Tartars’ invasions of Ukraine and Podolia. Despite the military actions which he had undertaken, Żółkiewski did not gain a wider recognition. The biggest danger to the Commonwealth followed in the Summer of 1617. Iskender Pasha set off leading 50 thousand Turks, Tartars, Moldovans, Wallachians and Transylvanians to take revenge for the devastating Cossacks’ campaigns at the Black Sea. On 12 September 1617 the Turkish Army stood opposite the Polish camp on the bank of the Dniester. Negotiations were commenced in consequence of which the Peace of Busza was signed on 23 September 1617. Stanisław Żółkiewski ceded the control over Transnistrian principalities to the Turks.

Thirty years after Stanisław Żółkiewski was nominated a field hetman, he was granted the Grand Hetmanship on 6 February 1618, and on 6 March 1618 – the Great Seal of the Crown. The last two years of his life were not easy for the deserving chief. Again he met with attacks of magnates when – as a result of the battle against Tartars’ horde, which he lost near Orynin on 28 September 1618 – the Tartars ravaged Podolia and Volhynia.



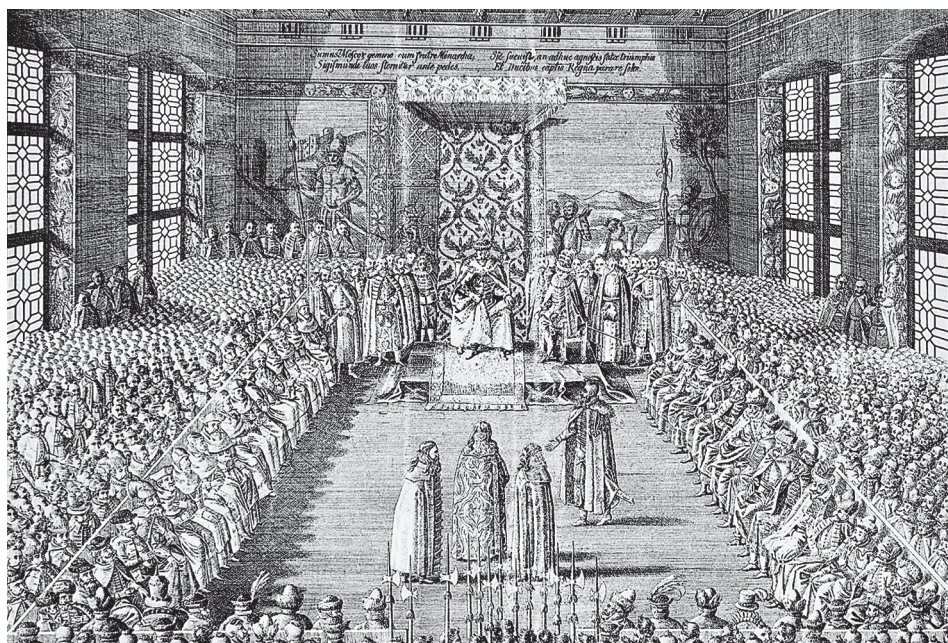


Figure 2. Presentation of Tsar Vasily IV Shuisky and his brothers as prisoners, copperplate by Tomasz Makowski, according to Tomasz Dolabella, from the collection of graphics of the National Museum in Krakow, inv. no. MNK III, ryc. 36474

In August 1620, expecting an attack of the Turkish, 73-year-old Żółkiewski organized an expedition to Moldova with the aim to strengthen the position of Gaspar Graziani on the throne as a Moldavian prince who supported the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. From 7 September 1620 he fended off attacks led by Iskender Pasha's Tartars and Turks near Cecora. Finally, the Polish detachments were forced to retreat. Wanting to avoid disgrace, the aged Hetman refused to flee and suffered a hero's death on 6 October 1620. On the following day, 5 kilometres south of Mohilyv, some Turkish found the Hetman's body. He had had his right hand severed and a deep wound in his brow. His head, stuck on a piqué, was sent by Iskender Pasha to the Khan in Istanbul. For two years it could be seen over the entrance to the Sultan's palace. The envoys sent by Regina of the Herburts, Stanisław Żółkiewski's widow, managed to regain the rest of the body. The Hetman's corpse was buried in St Lawrence collegiate church in Żółkiew (Polak 2020: 305-306).

## 5. Senator of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

The General *Sejm* of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth consisted of two chambers: senatorial and representatives. The Senate comprised: archbishops of

Gniezno and Lvov, bishops ordinary, voivodes, higher and lower castellans and officials of the central offices. In turn, the representatives' chamber was composed of deputies from the provinces, who were chosen by pre-parliaments there.

Before Stanisław Żółkiewski stayed a senator, he had been a deputy representing the Land of Halicz at the ordinary (pacifying) *Seym* held in Warsaw (between 6 March and 23 April 1589), during the sessions of which, on 9 March 1589, the Treaty of Bytom and Będzin was concluded. Among the signatures under the treaty there is that of Stanisław Żółkiewski, Starost of Hrubieszów. On 30 April 1590, he received a dignitary's office – the Castellany of Lvov, which entailed his entering the Senate of the Commonwealth. On 28 February 1608 Stanisław Żółkiewski became a senator of a much higher rank, since he had been promoted to the post of Voivode of Kiev. As it follows from research conducted by me, (Kaczorowski 1993: 86), Stanisław Żółkiewski participated in 16 *Seyms*: 1590/91, 1592, 1593, 1597, 1598, 1603, 1605, 1607 (as the Castellan of Lvov), 1609, 1611, 1613 (I), 1613 (II), 1615, 1616, 1618, 1619 (as the Voivode of Kiev). At the ordinary *Seym* of 1618 he received the office of Great Crown Chancellor and – as a minister – had his seat in the upper chamber during sessions of the ordinary *Seym* in 1619, where he belonged to the group of Members of Parliament distinguishing themselves at that time.

## 6. Diarist and epistolographer

Stanisław Kobierzycki, mentioned earlier, stated that Stanisław Żółkiewski was an excellent expert in history and “when he was not engaged in wars, he wrote a diary of the Moscow campaign run by King Sigismund – in the Polish language and in the military style. He explains in it everything in a true and wise manner. Very often, among so many public duties, he was looking for entertainment in literature.” Żółkiewski is the author of a diary of the years 1609-1611 under the title *Początek i progres wojny moskiewskiej* [The beginning and progress of the Muscovy War] written in 1612 (1<sup>st</sup> edition Żółkiewski 1833; 9<sup>th</sup> edition Żółkiewski 1966; see also Urwanowicz 2011: 55–65). The diary offers a valuable resource for both historians and researchers in the Polish language. An important place in Żółkiewski's output is also taken by the famous *Testament*, in which the Hetman included recommendations for his son Jan (1591-1623): “First of all things, stick with the Christian common faith firmly and effectively; for its sake shed your blood and sacrifice your life [...] to the Polish King, your Lord, offer your faithful services, likewise to the Commonwealth – your Mother Country.” Still another piece of Żółkiewski's literary creativity is his speech of 1602, modelled on Seneca the Elder and known as *Z swazoriej Seneki filozofa i innych niektórych autorów zebrał żołnierz jeden... z mężnych*

*przykładów pobudkę do cnoty* [From speeches of Seneca, the philosopher, and other authors a soldier gathered... brave examples offering an impulse for virtue]. The Hetman's output includes also a rich epistolographic collection. In his letters, written in beautiful Polish, he expressed his civic and soldier's faithfulness to the Polish state.

Stanisław Żółkiewski's tombstone in St Laurent collegiate church in Żółkiew features the engraved symbolic quote from *Aeneid* (song IV, verse 625): *Exoriant aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor* [Rise an unknown avenger from my bones!], which was later referred to the Hetman's famous great grandson – King Jan III Sobieski. There, one can also find Żółkiewski's favourite maxim that comes from one of Horace's odes: *Dulce et decorum est pro Patria mori* [It is sweet and fitting to die for the homeland]. Stanisław Żółkiewski and his soldiers were commemorated in the fields of the last battle they fought. In the place of the Hetman's heroic death (presently the village of Berezovka in Moldova, formerly the Polish village Laszki), upon the initiative of his son, Jan, a commemorative monument was erected, bearing the plaque which lists merits of Stanisław Żółkiewski in the service of the mother country and the Latin quote mentioned above. The legend of Stanisław Żółkiewski has lived in the social consciousness for centuries, finding its reflection in many literary works and in iconography (cf. Polak 2020: 312-337).

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