

Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius
and his Funeral Sermon *Laska marszałkowska*
(The Marshall's Sceptre)

Summary

Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius (Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, Motiejus Kazimieras Sarbievijus, 1595–1640) was a Jesuit, a literary theorist and a preacher, and a professor at Vilnius University who in the seventeenth century gained fame as one of the best known Latin-writing poets. His creative work (poetry, works on poetic, rhetoric, and mythology) has been addressed in depth by Polish and Lithuanian scholars, but his activities as a preacher have not attracted as much attention. In 1635, he was appointed the preacher of St John's Church but in the same year he left for Warsaw where he was a preacher and a confessor in the royal court of King Władysław IV Vasa (1595–1648). Sarbievius had to preach numerous sermons but at present four sermons in Latin are known, which he delivered between 1631 and 1636. The best-known of them is *Oratio panegyrica habita [...] in solenni corporis S. Casimiro translatione... anno 1636. 14. Augusti* (A Panegyric Speech Given on the Solemn Occasion of the Transfer of the Remains of St Casimir on 14 August 1636, Vilnius, 1636) and the only funeral sermon in Polish *Laska marszałkowska na pogrzebie [...] Iana Stanisława Sapiehi marszałka wielkiego W. X. L.* (The Marshall's Sceptre Displayed at the Funeral of Jan Stanisław Sapieha the Marshall of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vilnius, 1635). The importance and significance of the latter text unfolded in as early as the epoch of Baroque, and the existing copies – one of 1641 at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, and two incomplete copies, of the seventeenth-eighteenth century and of 1681 at the library of Vilnius University – are a proof of that. *The Marshall's Sceptre* was reprinted in the eighteenth century in the popular collection of various speeches and sermons *Swada polska i łacińska* (Polish and Latin Suada, Lublin, 1745) compiled by Jan Ostrowski-Danejkwicz (?–1751). The translation of this sermon into Latin – *Scipio marschalcalis*, which was published in 1645, points to the fact that it was popular and in demand. The sermon was translated by the Jesuit

preacher Wojciech Cieciszewski (1604 or 1607–1675), who wanted to adapt it to the academic environment.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, the abundance of funeral sermons attributed to occasional literature was related with the post-Trident reforms of the Catholic Church when the focus was placed on religious rituals, in particular funerals, where the sermon occupied an especially important place. A funeral sermon had to fulfil two purposes: first, to introduce the ideal of the individual who had deserved eternal happiness and, second, to praise the deceased and his or her family. The sermon, or elocution, is closely associated with rhetoric that had become an important part of culture in the Baroque epoch. In the Jesuit educational model rhetoric was defined as the key discipline that crowned the studies of the humanities. An educated individual of the time understood elocution as a necessary and useful landmark in various situations of life. Sarbievius's *The Marshall's Sceptre* highlights the extraordinary elocution of Jan Stanisław Sapieha (1589–1635), the Marshall of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Greater attention to the word and the style of the sermon was encouraged by the first aim of rhetoric – *movere* (to move), others being *docere* (to teach) and *delectare* (to delight). The emphasis on elocution and the actualisation of the word stimulated the formation of the theory of the conceit. Sarbievius, who had written the work on rhetoric *De acuto et arguto, sive Seneca et Martialis* (On Acute and Witty Style, or Seneca and Martial) in which he described the acute style by the phrase *concors discordia seu discors concordia* (concordant discord or discordant concord), is considered its creator. Although Sarbievius applied the theory of the conceit to poetry, it can be used for the analysis of Baroque funeral sermons that are often referred to as emblematic sermons. In texts of this kind an especially important role falls to the pericope, a quotation from the Bible that was moved to the opening of a funeral and frequently became the structural foundation of the sermon as it suggested the overall theme – the conceit. On the basis of the pericope from the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 48:17: 'How broken is the mighty sceptre'), in *The Marshall's Sceptre* the conceit of the sceptre underlies the structure of the sermon: the image of the sceptre is imparted with a multitude of allegorical meanings. Sarbievius adheres to the traditional structure of praise of the deceased and builds up his text on the statement '*Non genere tantum, sed et ore, et re, Scipio* – A support

not only in the origin, but also in elocution and in deeds' from the work *De insignibus Heroum* (On Heroes' Insignias) by Tomacherus (an unidentified author) by adapting it to Sapieha. The choice of this statement is also prompted by its linguistic ambiguity. In Latin, the word *scipio* means 'a branch' or 'a staff' that one can lean on; it is also perceived as a symbol of power (the sceptre of a hetman, a marshall, or the sejm). An additional meaning is lent to this word by its associations with the famous Roman family of Scipio quite a few representatives of which are seen as examples of valour and love of their homeland. Baroque preachers enjoyed taking a sentence, or even a single word, from the Bible and reflecting or interpreting it for in this way they could develop various approaches and conceptions. The word, thus, would be freed of its original meaning and, with the aim of imparting an impact or persuasion, would be given new meanings. In the sermon, the Marshall's sceptre is associated with a tree, a branch, a pillar, a flower, language, elocution, a grass-snake, a cross, and bread, and in each instance the comparison is based on a quotation from the Bible or from some historical source. The Polish equivalents of the sceptre are intertwined with the Latin ones, the Latin ones with Greek equivalents, the Greek with the Arabic, and the Arabic with the Hebrew. This text can be compared to a palimpsest: a classic example of an occasional speech – a traditional pattern of a praise of a human (the origin, the deeds and merits of the deceased, and the death) – shine through the intricate allegory of the sceptre brimming with various associations, analogies, quotations, references, allusions, commentaries, and ample examples from Antiquity, the Bible, the Church Fathers, historical or scientific books. The Polish scholar Włodzimierz Piątkiewicz counted about 150 of such examples (*exempla*). In the sermons they not only set out the truths of faith but have the role of practical references of life and common norms of demeanour. Among more curious and even surprising examples there is a reflection on the infinity of space revealed by an actual number of a million, which indicates how far away from people God's thoughts are. Resorting to Jan Jonston (1603–1675), a Polish naturalist, historian, and medical doctor of Scottish descent, Sarbievius speaks about trees growing in West Indies and on the islands of Cimbubon and Malabarica: the branches of these trees have healing powers and grow snake-shaped fruits called *dracones* ('snakes'). The narrative about the miraculous trees of Cimbubon and the miracle ointment made of

their branches is as though continued in another episode of the sermon where the author refers to the Indian medic Vernerius (an unidentified author). The preacher links these examples to the biblical context and draws a conclusion that the tree of heaven from which God produces the miracle ointment is the cross and the suffering of our Redeemer, and it was his agony that resulted in the healing ointment that cures and closes people's wounds and fractures. Such miraculous examples as well as exotic and imagination-stirring actual things were to charm the addressees, to spark their curiosity, and to keep them away from the complex philosophical conclusion.

Intensive astronomical and geographical explorations of the Renaissance epoch and various scientific discoveries were changing the view of the world and the notion of the individual. The perception of the infinity of the world in the epoch of Baroque revealed the minuteness of the human and the complexity of his nature. Quoting the Alexandrian theologian and ascetic Isidorus Pelusiota (c. 360–c. 431–451), Sarbievius calls the world a permanent ruin of ruin and people – ‘a tiny world’, ‘a microcosm’. The earthly world is viewed from above, like some sort of an arena. The motif of flight and dashing, the striving to rise above reality and to free oneself from everything mundane and mortal is prominent in the poetry of Sarbievius and of the Jesuits in general. The preacher sees the world untidy, weak, and in collapse, and therefore in need of a firm support. The agent in this lifelike episode is a pious citizen – the Christian soldier (*miles Christianus*) distinguished for his valour and endurance, serving God and defending the Homeland. His main weapons are piety and virtues.

The preacher develops the portrait of Jan Stanisław Sapieha by discussing his family origins, political activities, and virtues. One of the central parts of a funeral sermon is the topos of intrinsically valuable origins, which had been known from Antiquity and was associated with an individual's virtue. The image of the origins is inseparable from genealogical descriptions which were an important argument in praise not so much of the deceased as of the living. Sarbievius presents the panorama of the genealogy of the Sapieha family, highlights the prominent ancestors, their significant deeds and military victories, and compares it to a spread-out tree that had matured its fruits. At the same time, the preacher does not accept the description of the virtues of the deceased based on the merits of his family members: inheriting virtues

from one's ancestors was a popular seventeenth-century concept. Sarbievius stood out among other preachers of his time by casting light on the activities of Sapieha and his whole family that had been exclusively related to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, thus imparting the aspect of reality and historical value to his sermon. In Baroque funeral sermons all noble men are depicted as politicians faithfully serving their homeland and as courageous warriors. Still, the civic spirit is inconceivable separately from religion: the concepts of 'Homeland' and 'the Church' always go side by side. Sarbievius broadly discusses Sapieha as a perfect master of the sceptres of an envoy, a deputy, and a senator, and at the same time extols his extraordinary piety and Christian humility that had unfolded in his young years. In the Baroque epoch, the focus is placed on Christian virtue and piety. According to Sarbievius, Sapieha was the foundation and consolidation of the entire Kingdom. Unlike in Antiquity, virtue was perceived not as an aim, but as a means to reach God. Sapieha's piety and virtue show through in his extraordinary, even divine elocution that supported his dear Homeland, the Church, and the Catholic faith. Sapieha unfolds as an ideal Christian in his communication with ordinary people. The preacher describes him stereotypically as 'a kind and good master to his servants'. In order to convince and move his audience, Sarbievius quotes a true story about a young man doomed to death. He was a stranger, but Sapieha saved him in Vilnius by paying a thousand-zloty bail for him. The preacher's concern about the lower estates can be seen as rhetorical. However, the statement about peasants as the foundation, support, and the most useful part of society is as though echoed in the epoch of Enlightenment. Baroque preachers mostly depict ideal and even passionate piety that approaches that of the saints. Sapieha is shown as a humble man who prayed often and, as was usual in the epoch of Baroque, proved his piety in corporeal ways by mortification of the flesh, self-flagellation, or wearing inferior clothes. When speaking of the virtues of the deceased, giving of the alms is mentioned in all funeral sermons. It is one of the most popular episodes of Catholic funeral orations and frequently the only testimony that allows the identification of the real benefactor of a church, a monastery, or a hospital, who had donated a painting, a sculpture, or an ecclesiastical implement. Sarbievius lists Sapieha's generosity in giving of the alms: he had erected a beautiful stone church in Slanim and hospitals in Lyakhavichy and his other estates and holdings; he

had supported the Bernardine fathers in Slanim, took care of and supported monasteries, temporary homes and shelters for the poor, and hospitals in the lands bordering on his own. The image of *miles Christianus* closes with the episode of good death. Although from the times of Antiquity the ultimate example of valour is death for the Homeland, Baroque funeral sermons speak of deaths of many a warrior in their own homes upon accepting the necessary sacraments, bidding farewell to their households and the like. This was the outcome of the intensively instilled concept of *ars bene moriendi* ('the art of a good death'): the human of Baroque was scared to die suddenly without appropriate preparation. Sarbievius depicts Sapięha reconciled with God: he had confessed all his sins, accepted the Holy Sacrament, and is reflecting on the Redeemer's enormous suffering. The sermon is beautifully framed by the mournful hymn of the author's choice – the reponsorium *Subvenite, Sancti Dei...* (Come to Assistance, the Saints of God) that testifies the power of the word. The aim set at the beginning of the sermon – to assemble the parts of the Marshall's broken sceptre into one – is fulfilled: the fragments of the sceptre of the Great Marshall of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania have been picked up and joined into one, while Jan Stanisław Sapięha himself is standing in the gate leading to eternity and bliss.

Not only are the readers of *The Marshall's Sceptre* engaged into a peculiar game in which they have to recognize the sophisticated quotations and unexpected examples, to solve the conceit of the sceptre; they, who have lost the firm support, are offered certain references that will help them find a stable foundation for their existence.

This book is the first publication of Sarbievius's funeral sermon. It consists of the translation of the sermon into Lithuanian with commentaries, the facsimile of the sermon, and the introductory article. It will provide an opportunity to learn about the peculiarities of this genre, the uniqueness and beauty of Baroque rhetoric, and will facilitate the understanding of the dramatic world perception of the human of that period. At the same time, it will show that Sarbievius was not only an outstanding poet, but also a talented preacher.