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Political and administrative system of Waldstein’s Lands

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify and describe basic mutual and different political and administrative characteristics of the lands under the rule of imperial generalissimo Albrecht of Waldstein. This man of European importance created in the twenties of the 17th century the Duchy of Frydland in north-eastern part of Bohemian Kingdom, moreover he became the ruler of German Duchy of Mecklenburg, as well as Emperor’s vassal in two Silesian Principalities, Sagan (1627) and Głogow (1632). It is quite interesting to learn about his arrangements in individual domains and to see, how some general principles of his reign were combined with specific steps proceeded from older particular traditions. It also shows undoubtedly, that Waldstein was really brilliant organiser, administrator and lawgiver who deserves intensive attention of legal history.

Key words: Albrecht of Waldstein (Wallenstein), Thirty Years War, history of administration, Silesia, Bohemian Kingdom, reign on the absolutistic foundations, Duchy of Friedland, Duchy of Głogow, Principality of Sagan

Słowa klucze: Albrecht von Waldstein (Wallenstein), wojna trzydziestoletnia, historia administracji, Śląsk, Królestwo Czeskie, rządy absolutne, Księstwo Frydlandu, Księstwo Głogowskie, Księstwo Żagańskie

Imperial generalissimo Albrecht of Waldstein (or Wallenstein) († 1634) is undoubtedly among the most significant figures of Czech history. His importance definitely goes beyond the nation’s borders. Since the 19th century, he has even been considered to be a great national figure by the Germans, thanks to Schiller’s well-known drama.1 Waldstein played a considerable role in the history of Poland, both as a co-creator of European politics and as a military leader, whose activities during the Thirty Years’ War had influenced the Polish Respublica. In 1627, he became Duke of Sagan, and in 1632 he was also Duke of Głogow. Thus he ruled over two countries, both of which belonged,

1 The overview of older German literature about Wallenstein (both expert and artistic) compiled S. Davies, The Wallenstein Figure in German Literature and Historiography 1790–1920 (Modern Humanities Research Association Texts and Dissertations, Vol. 76), Maney, Leeds 2010.
with other Silesian vassal principalities, to the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. However, they are part of the Polish Republic nowadays. From this perspective, he can be perceived as one of the important personalities who had mediated the interconnection between the Czech and Polish history.

European historiography shows enormous and unflagging concern for Waldstein. Logically, what stands in the centre of attention is the personality of the Duke of Friedland as a politician, soldier and military leader/manager. What is substantially less explored and scientifically researched is the issue of Waldstein’s administration in particular countries which he gradually acquired within the expansion. An exceptional role is played by the Duchy of Friedland, a quasi-state structure, built in the era following the battle of White Mountain within the borders of the Bohemian Kingdom. It was built on the basis of confiscation of the property of those who participated in the anti-Habsburg uprising. In 1624, Waldstein reached the elevation of his possessions in northeastern Bohemia to the state of Principality, which became the Duchy three years later. Until Waldstein’s death, the Duchy of Friedland was the economic platform of his power. There has practically been no complex description of the history of the Friedland region, except for an antiquated publication by Fridrich Förster. More elaborate information about its administration can be found in the study of Josef Svátek, focusing on Court Chancery as one of its central offices.

The Duchy of Mecklenburg in northwest Germany played another significant role in Waldstein’s military and personal ambitions. In 1628, the Emperor gave it to Waldstein as a pledge and a year later it was granted to him as a fief. Even though Waldstein had formally rose to the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire before, he endeavoured for this duchy openly for the reason that seizing control over one of the German states would strengthen his position within the Empire and would give him the right to gain a seat in the Imperial Diet in the College of Princes. But in this regard, he ran into opposition of the league of German monarchs, who refused to recognize his tenure to be legal. From the beginning, his reign was complicated by the claims from the side of the original land owners, from whom the Duchy of Mecklenburg had been confiscated. The Swedish invasion resulted in the restoration, and thus the Duchy of Mecklenburg remained a void part of the generalissimo’s abundant title holding. Nevertheless, Waldstein managed to carry

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2 A lot more or less extensive bibliographic databases exist. In the most recent past, a wide choice of Wallenstein literature was published by E. Fučíková, L. Čepička, Ladislav (eds.), Valdštejn: Albrecht z Valdštejna Inter arma silent musae?, Academia, Praha 2007, p. 589–605.
3 The original copies of the Emperor’s charters are deposited in Státní Oblastní Archiv (SOA) Praha, Rodinný archiv Valdštejnů, Listiny, i.č. 26, sign. N-12, i.č. 33, sign. N-18.
6 The original copies of the Emperor’s charters are deposited in SOA Praha, Rodinný archiv Valdštejnů, Listiny, i.č. 39, sign. N-24; i.č. 47, sign. N-34.