

ALEKSANDRA BARWICKA-MAKULA
University of Silesia in Katowice
Institute of History
ORCID: 0000-0001-8053-5694

Gustaf Brahe — An *éminence Grise* at the Royal Court of Sigismund III Vasa*

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The main character of my article is the Count of Visinsbourg, Gustaf Brahe (1558–1615) as his character fits very well with the topic of this publication — he was both a foreigner at the Polish royal court and a diplomat in the service of the first Vasa on the throne of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹ He was generally regarded as a person who had influence on the decisions of Sigismund III, although officially he did not hold any high office at the royal court. He was most likely a coordinator of the pro-Habsburg politics of the king, as well as his informal and secret contacts with the Austrian House. It seems, however, that he was never a steward of the royal favours, he had no great impact on the office appointments and distribution of the Crown's lands. His unique position at the Polish royal court resulted from family ties he had with the Vasas² — he was the grandson of Margareta Eriksdotter, the sister of Gustav I of Sweden, and the nephew of Catherine Stenbock, Gustav's the third and the last wife — as well as from the fact that he was brought up together with the children of John III of Sweden.³ He was friends with Prince Sigismund and he fell in love with Princess Anna; the rumour had it that the feeling was reciprocated.⁴

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¹ A biography of Gustaf Brahe is yet to be written; there exist only short biographical sketches by: BOËTHIUS 1925, pp. 660–665; LEITSCH 2009, pp. 2103–2107; MICHALEWICZ 1966, pp. 171–172.

² His parents were Per Brahe the Elder and Beata Stenbock, who had 13 children, including Erik Brahe (1552–1614), Ebba Brahe (1555–1634, wife of Erik Sparre), Margareta Brahe (1559–1638), Magnus Brahe (1564–1633), Sigrid Brahe (1568–1608) and Abraham Brahe (1569–1630).

³ See Sebastian Westernacher to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Vienna, 19 May 1591, HHStA, FK 47, f. 2.

⁴ They were reflected in a pamphlet about Anna Vasa of Sweden, which was a fragment of a 17th-century Swedish chronicle written in the times of Charles IX of Sweden. The rhymed poem described

It is still an open issue why the marriage between Gustaf and Anna never took place, particularly given the high birth of Brahe, his connections to the House of Vasa, and the mutual affection between the young people. What, or who, stood on their way? It seems that Sigismund III himself was opposed to this relationship, because he had other matrimonial plans for his sister — he wanted to marry her off to Archduke Ernest of Austria or the Elector of Brandenburg, John George Hohenzollern. The king was most likely also afraid of the excessive strengthening of the House of Brahe. He projected that his ambitious brother-in-law could seize power in the Kingdom of Sweden. The strong personality of the princess was also of no small importance. Her aversion to marriage resulted from her love of independence, but also from the need to hide the deficiencies in her looks from the outside world. Anna's body, which was far from perfect (asymmetrical face, very curvy spine) strongly contrasted with her outstanding mind. It is highly likely that the decision to live a single life was an autonomous and conscious choice made by Anna Vasa.

In 1595 the relationship between the count and the princess visibly cooled down. The reason was the marriage of Gustaf's sister Sigrid Brahe to Johan Nilsson Gyllenstierna, which took place without the consent of the bride's family, in the atmosphere of a scandal (Sigrid was engaged to Erik Bielke), but under the protection of Anna Vasa. In Brahe's opinion, the princess had gone too far (the wedding was celebrated at the Stegeborg Castle — Anna's main residence in Sweden) and had

the lovers' trysts organised by the princess under the pretext of wanting to hear the count play the lyre, with the help of her mistress of the robes, Margareta Brahe, Gustaf's sister and the wife of the chamberlain of the Princess' Court, Johan Sparre. In the Polish translation it sounds as follows:

“Tak się myśl Anny zagrzała
 Że cnot i praw zapomniała
 Że kochała się nad miarę
 W Brahe Szwagrze Sparre
 Którego chytra a zręczna żona
 A u Anusi bywać wzwyczaiona
 Gdy u niej często sypiała
 Zdradzieckie rady dawała
 Wkrótce braciszek przy Lutni i pieniu
 Wspartą Panienkę miewał na ramieniu
 W miłe zacięcie Panna wpadała
 A zwyczeiem się zabawa stała
 Wnet sam wchodził od poranka
 Sciskał za białe kolanka
 Aż mu Panienska wyznała
 Że go nyczuley kochała.”

More broadly, see OJCEWICZ 2013, pp. 299–322.

acted disloyally to her old friend.⁵ However, the count's feelings towards the princess must have been strong and persistent. Only in the final years of his life was he credited with a relationship with Anna Reibnitz, with whom he was even supposed to have a son, Johan Örnevinge (d. 1685). However, it is difficult to decide whether this is a historical fact or merely a literary fiction created by the 19th-century Swedish novelist and historian Gustaf Henry Mellin. In his novels Anna Reibnitz is “a singer from Warsaw” — but in reality the daughter of Eric XIV — who was taken overseas, on the order of John III, and then taken into by a Silesian nobleman, Raubnitz, who was settled in Gdańsk. Brahe apparently met her at one of her performances at a fair, fell in love, and even married her.⁶ The count's love and private life are, however, the least elucidated part of his biography in the sources.

Therefore, let us move to his activities at the royal court and in diplomacy. It is not entirely clear what official function Gustaf Brahe held at the royal court of the first Vasa ruler — in the sources he is mentioned as the king's secretary, courtier, bailiff, and chamberlain (*cubicularius*). He was most certainly a person who had constant access to the king. Due to the similarities of interests, he became an interesting partner to talk about music and art or a companion to hunt with, i.e. in Grodno on the last day of January 1589, where a hunt for a bear was organised.⁷ This event represents not only the royal way of spending free time, but also the monarch's influence, initially small, on the state politics — to put it simply, while the king was hunting in Lithuania, negotiations were taking place under the actual leadership of the Chancellor, Jan Zamoyski, on the western border of the Commonwealth, in Bytom and Będzin. Negotiations between Sigismund III and Archduke Ernest — commenced a few months later — about the cession of the Polish throne in favour of the Habsburgs and then the monarch's efforts to obtain the hand of the archduchess should be considered as an attempt to get out of the political shadow, to break free from the guardianship of the omnipresent Zamoyski, to take over the initiative and control of the Commonwealth's foreign affairs. Gustaf Brahe played an important role in those negotiations, a point that will be discussed below.

In the first several months of Sigismund III's reign, the count enjoyed the monarch's favour, which is evidenced by i.e. the royal privilege issued in Cracow on 14 July 1588 which allowed Gustaf Brahe and Edward Fortunatus, Margrave of Baden-Rodemachern, the son of Cecilia of Sweden, to search for all kinds of metals on the Babia Góra and its surrounding areas in the County of Lanckorona,

⁵ With time the relations between Gustaf Brahe and Johan Gyllenstierna were settled as proper. The latter turned out to be one of the most loyal Swedish supporters of Sigismund III. Gustaf's nephew, Sigismund (born 1598), did not forget to mention his uncle while founding an epitaph for his father in the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Gdańsk.

⁶ JENSEN 1910, p. 505.

⁷ Jan Bojanowski to Krzysztof Radziwiłł, Grodno, 1 February 1589, AGAD, AR, section V, no. 1082, f. 150.

and to keep all the revenues for the period of three years.⁸ He did not play, however, any important political role for Sigismund III; he remained in the shadow of his elder brother Erik, a deputy to the election Sejm in 1587 (alongside Erik Sparre) and the Marshal of the Swedish court, as well as the Polish supporters of the monarch led by the Castellan of Podlasie, Marcin Leśniowolski. The situation changed diametrically in mid-1589 when the talks were initiated with Archduke Ernest — by Gustaf Brahe's letter, now lost, written on 27 May in Lublin, which was delivered to Vienna by a courtier and Livonian nobleman, Lambert Wrader⁹. The fact that this had taken place before the meeting of the monarch with his father in Livonia is worth emphasising. The congress of Reval (7 September–10 October 1589) only confirmed the increasing political role of the count. Brahe was against the king's departure to Sweden before finalising the talks with the Habsburgs. He did not abandon the king — unlike the monarch's Polish supporters — he showed him his support during the difficult talks with John III, and he brought about an agreement between the father and the son. The king of Sweden allowed the successor to temporarily return to Poland and seek the hand of Anne of Austria. Brahe must have acted very skilfully since he did not earn the wrath of John III, in contrast to other Swedish aristocrats who lost their offices, their feudal estates, and were even put under house arrest.¹⁰ Count Gustaf returned with Sigismund III to the Commonwealth. The abandoned monarch, deprived of the support of his sister Anna and many Swedish courtiers who had to return to their homeland, became more susceptible to Brahe's influence.

Brahe was generally regarded as an inspiration for the king's secret negotiations with Archduke Ernest on the cession of the Polish throne, but the surviving sources do not allow us to unambiguously resolve this matter.¹¹ Undoubtedly, he was, together with Lambert Wrader, the main executor of the monarch's concepts — he prepared documents, wrote letters, went to Graz and Vienna, talked

⁸ Furthermore, these men were also granted with the right to use the royal forests for the construction of houses, workshops, taverns and coal production, SMK, IV, p. 75.

⁹ LEPSZY 1939, pp. 46–49.

¹⁰ LEPSZY 1939, pp. 76–80.

¹¹ A vast majority of the sources on the cession negotiations are included in manuscript W83 from the archives of the Vienna Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv. There are almost 50 documents, copies only, illustrating the intra-dynastic discussion on the offer of Sigismund III Vasa (letters of emperors and archdukes, opinions of the most important advisers to the Habsburgs) rather than the individual phases of negotiations. We will not find there the letters of the Polish king, nor the works by Gustaf Brahe — only three letters of Archduke Ernest written to the count and two letters by Richard Strein to Brahe:

- Archduke Ernest to Gustaf Brahe, Vienna, 28 June 1589, HHStA, HS W83, ff. 558–558v.
- Archduke Ernest to Gustaf Brahe, s.l., s.d., HHStA, HS W83, ff. 559–560v.
- Archduke Ernest to Gustaf Brahe, Prague, 29 March 1590, HHStA, HS W83, f. 623.
- Richard Strein to Gustaf Brahe, Vienna, Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle [3 July] 1591, HHStA, HS W83, ff. 680–680v.
- Richard Strein to Gustaf Brahe, Freidegg, 9 January 1592, HHStA, HS W83, ff. 686–687v.

to Archduke Ernest and his secretary, Sebastian Westernacher. He most certainly coordinated the entire diplomatic endeavour (including the activities of other courtiers, i.e. Jan Sycymiński, Mikołaj Rask and Erik Bielke), and made sure that all the irritating negotiations would be kept a secret. Brahe's key role can be demonstrated by the fact that the imperial deputy Richard Strein, who stayed in Warsaw at the turn of 1590/1591, wanted to use his influence to transfer the collective agreements concerning the conditions of the cession — concluded on 20 November 1590 in Graz — from Ernest to Maximilian. However, the Habsburgs' diplomat did not foresee the magnitude of the king's resentment towards his recent rival, which not even the count would have been able to overcome.¹² Nevertheless, Brahe's previous efforts for the benefit of the Habsburg's succession in the Commonwealth — after Sigismund III's expected return to the fatherland — were positively assessed by the members of the Austrian House. This is demonstrated by a letter, full of compliments, written by Emperor Rudolf II, in which he asked Count Gustaf to not cease in his activities and to bring the joint cause to a happy ending.¹³

Brahe undoubtedly instrumental in the implementation of the king's plans to marry Anne from the House of Habsburg. In spring 1591 he left for Graz on a very delicate mission;¹⁴ he wanted to assess the looks of the archduchesses.¹⁵ The rumours about insufficient beauty of the eldest daughter of Charles II Francis of Austria (d. 10 July 1590) and Maria Anna of Bavaria had most likely reached the monarch. During his stay in Graz Brahe secretly observed the archduchesses Anne and Catherine Renata. In order to see Maria Christina, who was being brought up at the Bavarian court of the Wittelsbachs, he went to Munich. Perhaps the duke also wanted to take a closer look at the daughter of William V the Pious and Renata of Lorraine — Maria Anna. From Bavaria he went to Vienna where he had a meeting with Sebastian Westernacher. During the talk with the imperial adviser Brahe was to confess that there is no more beautiful candidate for the king's wife than Archduchess Anne.¹⁶ Brahe arrived in Cracow on 27 May 1591, but his visit at the royal court was very short because on 16 June he was already on his way to the Habsburg countries in order to pass information about Sigismund III's decision that the monarch's heart was leaning towards Archduchess Anne.¹⁷ After another visit to Vienna and Graz, he returned

¹² Sigismund III to Archduke Ernest, Warsaw, 26 January 1591, in: *The House of Vasa* 2016, p. 248.

¹³ Emperor Rudolf II to Gustaf Brahe, Prague, 27 February 1591, in: *Divi Rudolphi* 1771, pp. 326–327.

¹⁴ San Clemente to King Philip II, Prague, 9 April 1591, EFE, XIX, p. 13.

¹⁵ Jan Bojanowski to Krzysztof Radziwiłł, Warsaw, 13 March 1591, AGAD, AR, section V, no. 1082, f. 191.

¹⁶ The count's words ("Ist niemants schöner dan die Anndl!") were cited by the proud archduchess, Maria, in a letter to her brother. Maria of Bavaria to Wilhelm V Wittelsbach, Graz, 27 May 1591, in: STIEVE 1886, p. 463.

¹⁷ Archduke Ernest to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Vienna, 1 July 1591, HHStA, HaFa 24, ff. 94–101.

to the Commonwealth on 19 July.¹⁸ One month later Sigismund III issued an official request for the hand of the young Austrian duchess.¹⁹

Less than a year later the first rumours appeared about the weakening position of Brahe at the monarch's court. A well-informed royal chamberlain, Jan Bojanowski, reported in a letter to Krzysztof Radziwiłł that the count had moved out of Wawel in March 1592, had settled in the city and had been staying in the monarch's company definitely less often.²⁰ Gossip about the disgrace of Brahe reached even Vienna. Archduke Ernest asked about them, when he met Jerzy Radziwiłł, who came to the Habsburg city for the ceremony of the *per procura* wedding between the young Vasa monarch and Archduchess Anne. Radziwiłł, who had been away from his homeland for a year — conducting diplomatic missions in Graz and Rome — was not convinced of the truth of this information. He attributed the plausible weakening of the count's position at the royal court to Lambert Wrader's intrigues.²¹ Other available sources, however, are silent about them, so we are not able to verify the cardinal's revelation about the conflict in the king's close circle and, at the same time, in the narrow group of people initiated into negotiations with the Habsburgs.

The necessity to move out of the castle may have been just as well dictated by organisational and logistic considerations linked to the preparations for the monarch's wedding. However, Brahe did not occupy any particularly prominent place during the wedding ceremony. The sources record more broadly only his participation in a pedestrian tournament in the castle on 6 June 1592.²² Perhaps this was a result of Sigismund III's intended strategy, which was a reaction to the increasing political tension in the country. "Hiding" the unpopular Swedish man — accused of collusion with the Habsburgs — was supposed to calm down the mood of the opposition.²³ After ending the session of the so-called inquisitional Sejm, we see Brahe once again in the monarch's close circle — he sat at the royal table during a festive meal which took place in the castle on 25 November 1592, in the company of Sigismund III, Anna Jagiellon, Anne of Austria, Anna Vasa of Sweden, Great Chancellor of Lith-

¹⁸ Camillo Caetano to Paolo Emilio Sfondrati, Prague, 9 July 1591, in: *Nuntiaturreberichte* 1919, pp. 335–338.

¹⁹ Sigismund III to Emperor Rudolph II, Cracow, 19 August 1591, in: *The House of Vasa* 2016, pp. 256–258.

²⁰ Jan Bojanowski to Krzysztof Radziwiłł, Cracow, Good Friday 1592, AGAD, AR, section V, no. 1082, ff. 201–202.

²¹ Archduke Ernest to Emperor Rudolph II, Vienna, 18 May 1592, HHStA, Polen I 50, ff. 163–168.

²² HEBERER 1610, p. 557.

²³ Complicated political situation before the inquisitional Sejm, emerging accusations against the king and his courtiers (Gustaf Brahe, Jan Sycymiński and Lambert Wrader) of collusion with the Habsburgs were described by Stanisław Fogelweder, chancellor of the young queen, in a letter to Archduchess Maria. See Stanisław Fogelweder to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Warsaw, 20 August 1592, HHStA, FK 43, ff. 29–30.

uania Lew Sapieha, and the queen's chamberlain Stanisław Krasicki, as well as six young ladies from the queen's court.²⁴

However, it seems that at the turn of 1592 and 1593 the paths of Brahe and the king started to slowly diverge. The count hoped that Sigismund III, after the death of his father, would return to his homeland for good. He expected to play a leading role by the young monarch's side in his hereditary kingdom, inexplicably higher than his position in the Commonwealth. He did not notice the changes that had happened in Sigismund III, but also in connection with his marriage to Anne of Austria. The king was becoming increasingly more independent, he was maturing as the ruler of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and — under the influence of his wife — he eventually abandoned the intention of leaving the Commonwealth.

In spring 1593 the monarch sent Gustaf Brahe to the courts in Pomerania, Mecklenburg and Denmark. The count was to reassure John Frederick (from the House of Griffin) and Ulrich, as well as King Christian IV of Denmark of his friendship, and also to inform them about the plans of the young Vasa ruler concerning the taking over of power in Sweden after the death of his father.²⁵ In Brahe's opinion, his diplomatic mission was successfully accomplished.²⁶ However, the excessive ambition of the count would soon become a reason for more serious discord between him and the king.

At the beginning of their stay in Sweden, the relations between Brahe and the royal couple were still proper. The count introduced Queen Anne into the Swedish affairs; he was her translator during her first meeting with Sigismund's family — with his stepmother, widow of John III, Gunilla Bielke, and her five-year-old son John.²⁷ A few weeks later the king's spouse complained in a letter to her mother that Brahe had acted strangely, that he had become "calm and secretive."²⁸ A clear estrangement in the relations took place in connection with the count's participation in the talks regarding Sigismund's guarantee of the rights and privileges to his Swedish subjects, and his recognition of the Lutheran religion as prevailing, but also regarding the granting of consent to the Royal Council, led by Prince Charles, to rule Sweden during the king's absence in the country — the queen blamed Brahe for the extent of concessions; she regarded his conduct as treacherous, as a misap-

²⁴ LEITSCH 1976, pp. 282–283.

²⁵ The State Archives in Szczecin have a notebook with material on Brahe's deputation to John Frederick, Duke of Pomerania, i.e. a letter of credence and instructions of Sigismund III (Warsaw, 1 May 1593) and a letter by John Frederick to Otto von Ramin, Chancellor, written from Podlesie (Friedrichswalde) on 30 May 1593 about the means of welcoming the diplomat of the Polish king. See APS, AKS, I/611, ff. 3–9, 19.

²⁶ Gustaf Brahe to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Gdańsk, 14 September 1593, HHStA, FK 43, ff. 43–44v.

²⁷ Anne of Austria to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Stockholm, 14 October 1593, in: DOBNER 2015, p. 48.

²⁸ Anne of Austria to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Stockholm, 29 November 1593 in: DOBNER 2015, p. 72.

propriation of the interests of Sigismund, whom he represented.²⁹ According to Anne, the king no longer trusted Brahe,³⁰ although he had appointed him, together with his brother Erik Brahe, the governor of Stockholm, Uppland and Norrland. However, the appointment meant that they were required to remain in Sweden.

Two letters by Gustaf Brahe to Maria Anna of Bavaria, written from Stockholm on 13 April and 23 May 1594,³¹ come from this period. Kept in an abject and humble tone, they are full of assurances of devotion and readiness to serve. In the first letter, he says that he is happy about the coronation of the royal couple, that he feels joy due to the soon-expected birth of the royal child, that he hopes this will be a prince, heir to the throne, and the future hereditary king of Sweden. He also talks about the planned return of Sigismund and Anne to Poland. In the second letter, he gives information about the birth of a princess and good health of her parents, but without providing any details on his current relations with the royal couple. He reassures Maria Anna of Bavaria that Sigismund III can safely return to Poland since he has settled his affairs in the hereditary kingdom. These briefly discussed letters deserve to be emphasised due to their particular value as ego-documents, rare testimonies to the mentality and opinions of Gustaf Brahe that were preserved.

Brahe remained in Sweden until 1597. Then he accompanied Sigismund III on his military expedition to his homeland in 1598 as commander of the king's Swedish troops. He once again participated in the talks with Charles, Duke of Södermanland, and brought about the agreement in Linköping. He did not return with the king to the Commonwealth, he fled there only in 1599 and remained there until the end of his life. Very little is known about his final years. He was still connected with the royal court of Sigismund III, which is evidenced by the registry list of Charles IX from 1609, recently published by Wojciech Krawczuk.³² However, it is difficult to decide what his capacity was — he was by no means as influential and prominent as he was in 1589–1592. The sources do not record his presence at the wedding celebrations of Sigismund III and Constance of Austria (1605). Nor was he mentioned in any special way in the anti-royal publications from the time of Zebrzydowski's rebellion, which may suggest that he was no longer in the group of Sigismund III's favourites at that time. His place was taken by the Great Marshal of the Crown Zygmunt Myszkowski, Voivode of Poznań Hieronim Gostomski and Chamberlain of the Crown Andrzej Bobola. Nevertheless, the count may have continued to advise the king on the Swedish affairs and even undertake or coordinate some intelligence activities in this regard, alternatively — to take up activities consolidating the Swedish emigrant community. Brahe died in Gdańsk in 1615.

²⁹ Anne of Austria to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Uppsala, 5 March 1594, in: DOBNER 2015, p. 99.

³⁰ Anne of Austria to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Stockholm, 20 May 1594, in: DOBNER 2015, p. 134.

³¹ Gustaf Brahe to Maria Anna of Bavaria, Stockholm, 13 April and 23 May 1594, HHStA, FK 43, ff. 44–43, 46–47.

³² KRAWCZUK 2019, pp. 223–231.

Gustaf Brahe was and still is a mysterious figure. Taking into consideration his importance by the side of the young Vasa ruler attributed to him, Brahe left disproportionately few testimonies behind. This is to a large extent due to the fact that the most important evidence for the unofficial diplomatic contacts of Sigismund III with Archduke Ernest was destroyed by Maria Anna of Bavaria already in the 1590s. We are practically deprived of any information from the sources on his personality — individual opinions on his greed, self-interest or foresight in collecting grants and privileges — fit with a stereotypical image of a foreign courtier as a social climber. We know very little about his motivation and opinions, and have at our disposal only elements of a puzzle which do not give us a coherent picture. It is difficult to answer the question about the nature of his relations with Charles, Duke of Södermanland, and with the Habsburgs, about whether he was always fully devoted and loyal to Sigismund III. The issue of his confession (he probably remained a Protestant) stays unclear.³³ His love life and private life remain a secret. He always remained in the shadow, thanks to which he could conduct his own behind-the-scenes politics and undertake secret diplomatic actions. In 1589–1592 he was undoubtedly a person who had a great influence on Sigismund III and he played a role of an *éminence grise* at his royal court.

SOURCES, STUDIES, MONOGRAPHS AND OTHER MATERIALS USED IN THE TEXT

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 APS [Archiwum Państwowe w Szczecinie], AKS [= Archiwum Ksiąząt Szczecińskich], I/611
 HHStA [= Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna]
 FK [= Familienkorrespondenz] 43, 47
 HaFa [= Hausarchiv Familienakten] 24
 HS [= Handschriftensammlung] W83
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³³ The alleged place of burial is the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Gdańsk, the largest Lutheran church in the Commonwealth; he was most assuredly commemorated in the epitaph by Gyllenstierna family members. However, his elder brother, Erik, converted to Catholicism in 1591. He died in 1614. He was initially buried in the church of the Bridgettine Order in Gdańsk, then his remains were moved — in accordance with his last will — to Kartuzy. See NIERZWICKI 2001, p. 55.

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Gustaf Brahe — An Éminence Grise at the Royal Court of Sigismund III Vasa

The article is an analysis of the figure of Gustaf Brahe — a Swedish courtier and diplomat in the service of Sigismund III Vasa. It focuses on the period of 1589–1592, when the Count of Visingsborg was commonly believed to be a person influencing the king's decisions. Brahe found himself among the young Vasa's trusted advisors already in May 1589, when negotiations began with Archduke Ernest over the cession of the Polish throne to the Habsburgs. He was the main executor of the monarch's concept, coordinator of the king's pro-Habsburg policy and his secret contacts with the Austrian House. He was undoubtedly instrumental in Sigismund III's marriage to the Habsburg princess — during a congress in Reval he brought about an agreement between John III and his son, also over the young Vasa's marriage to the archduchess, and then travelled several times as an envoy in this matter to the courts in Graz and Vienna. He was trusted by the Habsburgs, complimented by Emperor Rudolf II, appreciated by Archduke Ernest, and the king's mother-in-law, Archduchess Maria of Bavaria, made him one of her correspondents. What brought Sigismund III and Brahe together was not just great politics, but also friendship of many years and shared interests — fondness for music and hunting. However, the relations between the king and the count became less close when Sigismund III abandoned the intention of returning to his homeland. The monarch's decision in fact put an end to Brahe's ambitious plans — to play the role of “the first minister” in Sweden. As a foreigner he had limited possibilities for promotion in Poland. In a way, he was doomed to operating informally, behind the scenes. With time more and more rivals emerged — Brahe was forced to compete for the king's favour with a growing number of Sigismund III's Polish and Lithuanian favourites. In 1594–1597 he was in Sweden, where, together with his brother Erik, he served as the governor of Stockholm, Uppland and Norrland. In 1598 he took part in Sigismund III's military intervention in Sweden. In the following year he returned to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where he remained until the end of his life (d. 1615). He rarely stayed at the royal court, settling in Gdańsk instead. It is highly likely that he continued to advise the king in Swedish matters. However, the last years of Brahe's life are not very well documented by the sources and like many other aspects of his biography remain shrouded in mystery.

