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A Lutheran, Maciej Vorbek-Lettow (1593–1663) and his Studies in Padua

ABSTRACT

Maciej Vorbek-Lettow – Hetman Krzysztof Radziwiłł’s physician, and later one of King Władysław IV, left a memoir, *Szkarbnica pamięci* [Treasury of Remembrance], in which he described his medical studies in Padua in detail. Many factors contribute to the great source value of this work: Vorbek-Lettow studied in Padua in 1613–1614 as a 20-year-old; he had previous educational experience from various academic centers (Vilnius, Gdańsk, Paris, Louvain); he held the position of syndic at Padua’s Università Artisti; he actively participated in the reform of the university, which gave non-Catholics equal rights in receiving doctorates as Catholics; and he took part in the first clashes in the *guerra di Gradisca*. The purpose of the article is to show the activity of Vorbek-Lettow in Padua and the Republic of Venice against the historical background, taking into account the role of the Paduan faculty of medicine for the development of medical science in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16th–17th centuries.

KEYWORDS: Vorbek-Lettow, students, university, Padua

RIASSUNTO

Un Luterano, Maciej Vorbek-Lettow (1593–1663) e i suoi studi a Padova

Maciej Vorbek-Lettow, medico dell’etmano Krzysztof Radziwiłł e successivamente del re Władysław IV, lasciò un diario dal titolo *Szkarbnica pamięci* [il tesoro dei ricordi], nel quale descrisse con precisione i propri studi medici a Padova. L’alto valore di questa opera come fonte comprende diversi fattori: Vorbek-Lettow studiò, ventenne, nella città di Antenore negli anni 1613–1614; ebbe precedenti esperienze educative in vari centri universitari (Vilnius, Danzica, Parigi, Lovanio); ricoprì alla padovana Università degli Artisti la funzione di sindaco; partecipò attivamente alla riforma dell’università, che concedeva ai non cattolici gli stessi diritti dei cattolici nel conseguimento dei dottorati; prese parte ai primi scontri nella *guerra di Gradisca*. Lo scopo dell’articolo è quello

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di dimostrare l'attività di Vorbek-Lettow a Padova e nella Repubblica di Venezia sullo sfondo storico, prendendo in considerazione il ruolo della facoltà di medicina dell'Università di Padova per lo sviluppo della scienza medica nello stato polacco-lituano del XVI–XVII secolo.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Vorbek-Lettow, studenti, università, Padova

The aim of my article, kept in the poetics of microhistory, is to unfold an unknown page from the history of Poles at the University of Padua, namely, the stay of Maciej Vorbek-Lettow, the Augsburg Evangelical from Vilnius, later a doctor of Hetman Krzysztof Radziwiłł, and then of King Władysław IV Vasa. Information about Lettow's stay in Padua and Venice was presented in the diary *Szkarbiec pamięci* (*Subsidium reminiscientiae*) [Treasury of Remembrance], written in 1645–1660 and published for the first time in 1968.¹

Social and religious background of Lettow

The diarist originated from a German family that lived on the southern shores of the Baltic Sea (Rügen Island, Lębork, Bytów region, Elbląg) since the Middle Ages. In the second half of the 16th century, the process of Polonization began, linking the Lettow family with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which can be confirmed by the fact that Maciej's father, , settled in Vilnius. The diarist spoke Polish very well (it was the home language of the Lettow family in Vilnius). He wrote down his *Szkarbiec pamięci* in this language and in his life he repeatedly showed his attachment to Polishness, also by providing much larger troops for the war with Moscow in 1654–1655 than it was required.

The author of the diary was born in a middle-class family. His father, also Maciej (called Matys), was a doctor in Vilnius. He had previously gained experience in Prague, Vienna and several major cities of the Crown (Cracow, Lviv, Poznań, Warsaw, Lublin). Faithful to the maxim *Galenus dat opes*, which he later repeated to his son (p. 30), he built his wealth gradually, and already at the end of the 16th century he had a client relationship with Duke Krzysztof Radziwiłł (Sokołowski, 1989, p. 274). In the diarist's youth, however, the wealth status of his father was not high, also because he had a large family (he raised ten children, including four from

1 All quotations from Vorbek-Lettow diary are marked in brackets and come from the second edition (2006) of *Szkarbnica pamięci*. See: Bibliography.

his wife's first marriage). Matys Lettow, remembering that his parents skimped on his education, did not make this mistake and cared for the careful education of Maciej Jr.

His education, of course, took place in religiously profiled schools. As he originated from an Evangelical family, he spent the first three years of his education (1600–1603) at a parish school of the Evangelical church in Vilnius. A crucial stage in the life of young Lettow was the stay with the Lutheran priest Christian Bruno, “a pious and learned man” (p. 30), and, importantly, it was the time when the young man studied at the Vilnius Academy run by the Jesuits. Thanks to the pastor, the fifteen or sixteen-year-old boy got a grip of the dogmas of the Evangelical-Augsburg confession and absorbed the principles of the Protestant work ethic. Distinctively, Bruno's story about his dispute with the Jesuits about the reception of the Sacrament of the Altar was internalized by Lettow. He describes it in his diary almost as his own experience, with details, he even quotes the canon from the Council of Constance in support of his justification for receiving Communion in the form of bread and wine, and he concludes the story with the following sentence: “whenever I read the canon or think about it, it superbly strengthens the true religion of the apostles in me” (p. 40).

Lettow's journey to Padua

Seven years of preparation study preceded Lettow's medical studies in Padua. The first three years, as I mentioned, Lettow studied at the parish school in Vilnius. The next stage was one year in Königsberg (Królewiec), where the boy went to learn German. From there he went to stay with his grandmother in Elbląg “for the reason that I should practice my upper German speech in Elbląg; this one is purely pronounced in this one Prussian city” (p. 33). In one-year studies in Elbląg in the local gymnasium (Pawlak, 1985) Lettow was accompanied by a preceptor, Adam Rassius (Raszewski) (Lukšaitė 2003, p. 104; Sipayło, 1987, p. 600). With him, the thirteen-year-old went to the Gdańsk Academic Gymnasium, where “under the famous philosophy of Bartolomeo Keckermano, [he] listened to *logicam*” (p. 33). From the perspective of Lettow's future career, his presence, albeit “just for listening” (p. 33), at the lectures on medicine conducted by Joachim Adam Oelhaf (Olawiusz), a graduate of Padua and Montpellier, was more important. However, studying in Gdańsk did not last long, because his father, noticing from his letters that his son “started to fail in Polish” (p. 33), ordered him to return to Vilnius. There, in a newly reformed Lutheran church school, Lettow studied under Rassius

and Marcin Chmielewski. However, after a short time (a semester?), his father, convinced by the persuasion of one of the Jesuit professors and the promise not to try to convert his son to Catholicism, sent Maciej to the Vilnius Academy, where the boy completed a two-year philosophy course. At that time, as mentioned above, he was assisted by Christian Bruno, who looked after the boy as pastor and preceptor. Years later, Lettow fondly recalled his studies at the Academy, despite the fact that, due to his confession, he had felt sorry for him there:

I must admit to the Jesuit Fathers that they teach diligently and kindly, they keep an eye on the youths, even if they do not want to, they must follow dense repetitions so that it is most impractical to learn. Young people, even if they did not want, need, because of frequent repetition, learn something, even if it would be a little clever. Moreover the Jesuits teach in a methodical way, orderly, young people are not be charged various subjects, as in other schools make and it happened to me. *Ex omnibus aliquid, ex toto nihil* (p. 35)

Before Lettow left for Western Europe in August 1610, his pockets were almost empty because a month and a half earlier his family house had burned down in the great fire of Vilnius. Nevertheless he had a rich educational experience: he had studied for over seven years, in four cities and five types of schools, both Protestant and Catholic:

Years of study	Place	Kind of school (P – Protestant, C – Catholic)
1600–1603	Vilnius	parish school P
1604	Königsberg	parish school (?) P
1605	Elbląg	Gymnasium in Elbląg P
1606 (a semester?)	Gdańsk	Academic Gymnasium in Gdańsk P
1607	Vilnius	parish school, protogymnasium P
1608–1610	Vilnius	Vilnius Academy C

Before arriving in Padua, in October 13 of 1610, Lettow briefly visited the famous botanist and physician Caspar Bauhin in Basel, then stayed in Paris (but because of poverty he did not attend to the university there) and – as a servant at the court of Fryderyk and Aleksander Sapieha – at the University of Lovanium. There it turned out that, as an Evangelical, he could not study medicine, and therefore he “carried files for aristocrats” (p. 45), he listened to lectures on law and even wrote notes for the Sapiehas during private lectures. The experiences from Vilnius and

Lovanium appeared an important factor in stimulating Lettow's career at the University of Padua (Frick, 2013, pp. 146–155).

The medics of Padua

The importance of Padua in the development of medical science is well known (Ongaro, 1981; Windakiewicz, 1891, pp. 33–45). Their reputation in Antenor's city in the 16th and 17th centuries was built especially by two factors: the discovery of a new field – pharmaceutical botany – and anatomical studies, which encouraged the development of surgery. The development of pharmacy based on newly discovered (or re-discovered) plants was possible thanks to the establishment of the first botanical garden in Europe by Luigi Squalerno, called Anqualliar, in 1545 and the scientific activity of Francesco Bonafede. Their work was continued by Melchior Guilandini (actually Wieland) from Prussia (perhaps Malbork) (Quirini-Popławska, 2009, pp. 139–159), followed by Prospero Alpini, tutor of Lettow (p. 47) (it is worth noting, however, that for practical Venetians, Orto Botanico was primarily important due to their trade in spices from the Orient – it was about determining the correct names of plants and their properties useful in trade, sometimes also Padua's botanists had special tasks – making poisons from them for the use of Serenissima). Anatomical and surgical studies, of which Gabriele Fallopio (*nota bene* a friend of Polish students) was the coryphaeus in the 16th century, were continued at the turn of the century by Giorolamo Fabrizio Aquapendente. This scientist, who rendered great service to the study of the circulatory system, opened the *theatrum anatomicum* in Padua in 1594. Lettow also listened to his lectures (in his diary written after 1644, he translated his name to Polish, p. 47).

Lettow's studies in Padua coincided with the great successes of Polish graduates of the Università Artisti – doctors and botanists, professors of the Cracow Academy, the Zamość Academy and the Academic Gymnasium of Gdańsk at the beginning of the 17th century. In 1610 in Zamość, Jan Ursinus (a medical student in Padua from 1598 to 1603) published the first Polish treaty on osteology: in *De ossibus humanis* he invented Polish specialist nomenclature (Wiśniewska, 1998, pp. 15–26, 89–95). In 1613, the monumental *Zielnik* [The Herbar] by Szymon Syreński (Syrenius), Guilandini's pupil (promotion in 1577), the fruit of 30 years of work by Syrenius, left the printing house of Bazyl Skalski in Cracow (Zemanek, 1996, pp. 49–51; 1998, pp. 40–44), and a little later, the Latin botanical work by Gabriel Joannici, a graduate of Padua in 1595 (Barycz, 1964, pp. 247–249) was also published. The multi-talented Sebastian Petrycy, a medical

student from 1589 to 1590, author of commentaries on the works of Aristotle and of a collection of Horace's *Carmina* paraphrases, published *De natura, causis et symptomatis morbi Gallici eiusque curatione* (1591), and in 1613, a guide on the prevention and treatment of plague: *Instrukcyjja abo nauka jak się sprawować czasu moru* (Barycz, 1980, pp. 703–707; Hilfstein, 1997, pp. 78–93). Also in 1613 in Gdańsk, Adam Oelhaf, known to Lettow from his studies in this city, conducted the first public autopsy in Poland and northern Europe. He founded the first botanical garden in Gdańsk and published a series of medical works from 1607 to 1627 (Schwarz, 1986, p. 415).

Patavia virum me fecit

On the 5th of December in 1612 in Padua, having previously relieved himself of being the preceptor of young Sapiehas in Bologna, Lettow began his medical studies, “having signed up for certain reasons to matriculum nationis Germanicae” (p. 46). He writes about this decision with a characteristic discretion, but it is easy to understand the reason for preferring a German, and not Polish, matriculum. Young men from Germany and the Nordic countries, but also Czechs, Hungarians and citizens of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, joined the *Natio Germanica Artistarum* association founded in 1553. On the other hand, the association *Natio Regni Poloniae et Magni Ducatus Lithuaniae* founded on February 8th of 1592, included students of the Catholic denomination (Lenart, 2019, pp. 143–144). After his experiences at the Vilnius Academy and Lovanium University, the Lutheran Lettow chose the option of giving himself religious freedom during his studies. Let us recall that the bull of Pope Pius IV issued in December 1564, which imposed the obligation of Catholic religious declaration on the promoted, initiated a clear confessional division of the University already at the end of the 16th century (Chachaj, 1979, pp. 52–55). However, it was not strictly respected at the University of Padua, and more precisely, in its two structures: *Università Legisti* (lawyers) and *Università Artisti* (medics, philosophers, theologians).

Lettow described his studies in Padua from the perspective of almost 30 years, but the pages of his diary show commitment and enthusiasm (about the professors: “*clarissimus*,” “*vir ingeniosissimus*,” [“miraculous] ingenium”, p. 47). He finishes the enumeration of the professors whose lectures he listened to with the sentence: “It is difficult to enumerate the *omnibus facultatibus*, as there is a great number of them – apart from the Paris Academy any equal in Europe I do not see, where, especially with less cost, the studiosus could learn” (pp. 47–48). The diarist probably meant

the departments of medicine, of which there was a dozen in Padua,² when writing about the size of the university.

Their number caused competition among professors, and thus a certain democratization of relations at the university. Well, the lecturers “*captant studiosorum benevolentiam privata lectione*” (p. 48) in their spare time and free of charge. This is why their students walk them home from the dormitory and then attend their course lectures. There is a great number of them – usually three to choose from at the same time. Attendance of students is important to teachers, because, as Lettow writes, “the better attendance the professor has, the sooner he shall be promoted to a financially more attractive department” (p. 48). The competition among professors’ didactic for attendance improves the didactic. The lectures are not dictated or read, but a given lecturer “preaches like a preacher in a cathedral” (p. 49). Apart from their substantive and rhetorical values, they also had a performative dimension – the professor had to master not only the traditional stages of text preparation (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio*), but also demonstrate rhetorical *actio* – the power of a living word. Such lectures aroused great admiration of the diarist.

Maciej’s study period – from December 5th of 1612 to June 8th of 1616 – was full of extraordinary events and honors. Already in 1613, the students of the Università Artisti *unisono* elected him to be their representative (“syndyk” – *sindiaco*). This function was the third in the hierarchy, after the rector and vice-rector; and the task of the representative was to represent the interests of students to the university authorities, at the same time he was rector’s advisor and supervisor. Exercising it, as the sparing diarist points out, did not involve any own expenses, which in the case of rector were very large (Ćwikliński, 1922, pp. 9–10). Although Lettow does not give reasons in his diary for other students choosing him as a representative, it is highly probable that his age predestined him for this function – he was twenty at the time, and therefore he was several years older than most of his colleagues – and the experience gained during *peregrinatio academica* around Europe could matter here as well. Undoubtedly, Lettow had many great personal qualities – the diary shows us a figure of an intelligent, amicable, hard-working and tolerant person. He spoke German and Polish, so he could be considered to be a compromising candidate by the *ultramontanes*. It is interesting that among the voters there were eminent poets Hieronim Morsztyn and Piotr Kochanowski who were studying in Padua at that time (Windakiewicz, 1888, p. 31).

2 There were 13 departments of medicine at the university in the end of 16th century (Windakiewicz, 1891, p. 34).

The following year, Lettow unexpectedly joined the Venetian army in the war for Gradisca, also known as the war with Uskoks (*guerra di Gradisca, guerra degli Uscochi*). Gradisca d'Isonzo near the city of Gorizia was a fortress then belonging to the Austrian county of Graz. On the other hand, the Uskoks – a Christian, Slavic people living in Croatia from the 16th century on the Austrian-Turkish border and formally subject to Austria – can be compared to the Cossacks. Just as they, they were well organized and militarized, they entered into alliances with their neighbors and were used by them for local military actions on land and especially at sea. At the beginning of the 17th century, the Uskoks were on the side of Austria and engaged in piracy against Venice, which considered the Adriatic Sea as its *mare clausum* and inhibited the trade of Austrian Trieste and Rijeka (Fiume). The losses of the Venetian fleet due to the Uskoks piracy were significant, and the situation was aggravated by a macabre incident. In May of 1613 the Uskoks attacked the Carlopago fortress, murdered the crew and ate the heart of its commander.³ This act prompted Serenissima to begin military preparations. In March 1614 the Genoese condotier Pompeo Giustiniani arrived in Venice, taking command of the armies of the Republic. In few months, offensive actions took place in Friuli and Gorizia region. The open war began on August the 16th in 1615. *La guerra di Gradisca* (1615–1617) is considered by some researchers to be a prelude to the Thirty Years' War, because for example Albrecht von Wallenstein gained his experience there as a unit commander of hundreds of soldiers (Tenetti, 1967, pp. 3–15; Gierowski, 2003, pp. 238–239; Birely 2020, pp. 105–107).

Against the backdrop of monumental history, the figure of the Padua medical student looks quite dim. Maciej spent “a few months” (p. 51), probably during summer and in September, in the Palma fortress on the border with Austria. The military service, the course of which he wrote nothing about, appealed to the young man (“I would stay even longer”, p. 51), but he was recalled from it by the university for another task that was vividly interesting for Evangelicals studying in Antenor's city.

The matter was connected to the process of doctoral promotion. After passing the exams, Catholics used to stay in the promotional hall, located near the cathedral church, where they had previously sworn allegiance to the Roman Catholic faith with the bishop of Padua. Doctoral promotion was preceded by confession and accession to the Sacrament of the Altar. Until 1614, Protestants were granted a privilege that allowed them to bypass confession, communion in the Catholic Church and the oath

3 “They had been the gangsters of the Illirian seas, never attaining the dignity of genuine corsairs” (Tenetti, 1967, p. 17).

of confession – such a student was promoted by the imperial governor in Padua (usually this function was fulfilled by university professors nominated by Vienna), not publicly but in his private apartment. Many promoted Evangelicals declared under oath that they could not pay the fee due to poverty, and that they would do so later, after returning to their country and getting rich. Practice has proved that very few kept this oath for various reasons. Therefore Catholics maliciously called Padua's Evangelical doctors promoted "*sub camino* or *bullatos*" (p. 52) ["promoted near the chimney or by privilege"]. The rank of such a title was therefore low and the bad fame of *bullatos* reached the north of the Alps, where they were treated as inferior to doctors from German universities.

Evangelicals studying in Padua, with the support of the city and university authorities, especially Giovanni Battista Foscharini, decided to change this situation. The time was favorable. The earlier tensions between Venice and Rome, which resulted in the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1606 and the ban on their stay in the Republic, were paired with a conflict with the Empire, namely with the army of Count of Graz, Archduke Ferdinand (from 1618 Emperor Ferdinand II). In the atmosphere of widespread aversion to Austria, the Venetian Senate canceled the powers of the imperial governor in Padua. However, it was necessary to develop new rules for the promotion of Evangelicals.

Lettow, who in 1613 proved to be an outstanding representative for the university authorities and his colleagues, gained another advantage as a volunteer in the war with Austria that began in the following year. Together with two other colleagues of the German nation, representatives of law students, he went to Venice where he presented the senators with proposal of the reform. Of course Evangelicals studying in Padua wanted to remove the oath of allegiance to Catholicism from the promotion, but the excuse for changing the formula of promotion was the issue of Protestant's poverty: why require an oath which is unenforceable?

As a result of the negotiations, the already withdrawn right of imperial governors to promote Evangelicals was replaced with a new one. The Senate of the Republic and the Doge Marco Antonio Memo enacted new rules for non-Catholics. Any oaths during the ceremony were waived, removing both the oath of faith and the obligation to future payment. From then on, the promotion was to take place inside the university, with the academy's authorities and an official of the Venetian Republic. The new law did not change the existing rules for Catholics in any way – apart from the old rite of promotion, a new one was introduced, which did not conflict with the former one. In the new law applicable to non-Catholics, one can see the influence of the Lutheran doctrine of the secular and spiritual regiment, or, going deeper, the medieval doctrine of

the “two swords” symbolized by a secular and spiritual sword. It is worth adding that the new rules of promotion for non-Catholics widely opened the doors of the University of Padua – not only to Protestants, but also to Jews, many of whom later studied medicine there (Ćwikliński, 1922, p. 36).

The successfully completed negotiations gave Lettow more titles to glory. On October the 8th of 1614 he was honored by Doge Memo with the title of Knight of St. Mark. Lettow meticulously described the ceremony which took place in the Doge’s palace, not forgetting to add that during the oath of allegiance to the Venetian Republic, the Catholic confession was not mentioned (pp. 57–61). In Padua Maciej was welcomed by an orchestra and a big applause from the students.

This is not all. Two months later (on December the 16th), Lettow received his doctorate in medicine and philosophy, already according to the new order. The hardworking and modest young man was aware, however, that his doctorate was a kind of an exaggeration, thanks to his organizational merits. Therefore he kept on studying medicine for the next year and a half. However, he studied in Bologna. It can be assumed that the reason for this unexpected move was the reluctance of the cavalier of St. Mark to participate in the regular Venetian-Austrian war that broke out in 1615. He left Padua, warmly bid farewell by the councilors and guardians of the German nation, richly gifted and with a congratulatory diploma. Bologna was the last step in Vorbeck’s *peregrinatio academica* which in general seems unusual: “while it began in the north, which was a common travel goal for a Protestant (Germany, Switzerland), it was concentrated in centers more customary by that time for Catholics (Paris, Louvain, Padua)” (Frick, 2013, p. 155).

The famous maxim of Jan Zamoyski, *Patavia virum me fecit*, speaks of the civic and ideological formation that the later Chancellor of the Commonwealth owed to his studies in Padua (Łempicki, 1980, pp. 353–380). Maciej Vorbek-Lettow, who extensively described his stay in this city, without writing a single word about Bologna, thought no differently about his studies in Padua. The years spent in Antenor’s city taught him, in addition to the basics of medicine, loyalty to the state, organizational skills, and tactful behaviour towards people of different nations and confessions. The university reform carried out with his participation made the *Alma mater* in Padua a rare example of religious tolerance in the 17th century universities.

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