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Greek Culture and Language in the History of Central and Eastern Europe (Germany, Poland, Silesia). Woman in Greek Poetry Written by Silesians in the 17th Century

Latin, Greek and Hebrew were the vehicles that carried the Holy Scripture¹, however it was Greek which played a significant role in the education and moralizing of the new Christian society in the first centuries after Christ. In Italy Christian literature existed in parallel to Roman literature, yet this existence was restrained with the decline of Latin culture. Meanwhile, where this decline was not so evident as in Europe, for instance in northern Africa, and where at the same time the knowledge of Greek was thorough, enabling abstract contemplation, there were works created by Tertulian, Apuleius from Madaurus and other African writers, who were not “pure Romans”². Models of Greek rhetoric influenced the spirit, form and construction of those writers’ creations in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Apuleius from Madaurus wrote fluently both in Greek and Latin, whereas the sentence structures of Tertulian could be understood often only after their translation into Greek³. A great heritage of Greek classic literature was saved then by Byzantine literature. The factors that enabled the preservation for posterity the valuable material of Greek antiquity were the university, established in 863 A.D. by Bardas with the support of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, and the scholarly studies of such personalities as Tzetzes, Eustacius, Tryklinios, Gemistos Pleton, Konstantinos Kefalas, Planudes, Symeon Metafrasta and many

¹ S. Auroux, et al. (Hgg.) (2000/2001). *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaften. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Entwicklung der Sprachforschung von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Erster und zweiter Teilband. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, p. 1164.

² Jan Sajdak. *Pod urokiem literatury patrystycznej i bizantyjskiej*, wstęp i wybór tekstów Ignacy Lewandowski, red. Alicja Pihan-Kijasowa (2009). Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, Poznań, p. 47. [In Polish].

³ F. Skutsch (1912). *Die Lateinische Sprache*, In: *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*. Part. 1. Vol. VIII. Ed. 3. Leipzig-Berlin, p. 547 and next pages.

others. We should also mention here the valuable work of monks from Mount Athos, Jerusalem, Sinai Peninsula, Patmos Island and Meteora Mountains, as well as the libraries endowed by the emperors of Pergamon or Athens and other wealthy families. After the decline of Byzantium, due to the later Turkish occupation and the sale of valuable manuscripts by the monasteries, the *cimelia* of Atos monastery are nowadays residing in the libraries of Saint Petersburg and Moscow as well as the National Library in Paris. The most important and priceless gift of Byzantium to the West was, however, the transfer to Italy at the beginning of the 15th century of many Greek scholars, who took a number of manuscripts which became the beginning of a real explosion of interest in ancient Greece's achievements in Western Europe. Renaissance humanism, which spread over wider and wider social layers of Western Europe, was tightly connected with studies of Greek literature and Hellenic and Hellenistic inheritance. The heritage of Greek culture also reached Central Europe, and since it arrived from various sides, its reception at the meeting of the Roman-Germanic, catholic West and the Slavic-Greek East seems even more interesting.

Humanism as a movement started around 1450 in Italy and spread to other European countries, especially to France and Germany⁴. In the reception of antiquity in Germany Roman law still occupied the foreground: *Corpus iuris civilis* and *Corpus iuris canonici*, which already in the middle of the 15th century became the basis for recognizing the German nation as a successor of the Holy Roman Empire. Meanwhile, Polish law and the social-agrarian political system at that time included traces of Byzantine influences. Justinian's rules in a form adapted to the agrarian system of Southern Russia and Bulgaria were eagerly employed in Poland. Moreover, Polish architecture displayed many connections with Byzantine culture, as demonstrated by the rich painting of the Eastern churches in Poland and the cult icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, which arrived from Byzantium. Polish literature then eagerly took over many apocryphal legends (e.g. about Barlaam and Jozafat) as well as fables and proverbs. Even historical and political events, namely the common Turkish enemy, were conducive to strengthen Byzantine influences in Poland. It is worth mentioning that the death of heroic king Władysław in Warna was mourned by the Poles at the Vistula, the knighthood at the Danube and the monks at Bosfor⁵. However, Hellenistic studies arrived to Poland from the West. They appeared behind the

⁴ S. Auroux, *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaften...*, work cited, p. 1165.

⁵ Jan Sajdak..., work cited, p. 176.

Alps a little later than in Italy, at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. At the University of Heidelberg in 1498 a request was made to set a proper auditorium⁶ for professor of Greek, Dionysius Reuchlin, who was Jahann Reuchlin's brother. Yet, at that time private study of Greek was quite popular among European humanists. It led to editions of the first Greek works or translations. It was Nicolaus Copernicus who learnt Greek privately and undertook the translation of Byzantine Greek texts by poet Teofilakt Symokatta into Latin. He treated his work very seriously and commissioned the eminent Silesian humanist, Laurentius Corvinus, to review and edit his work. Copernicus' translational work was appreciated together with the very Greek work, for Corvinus mentioned 3 themes of Teofil Symokatta's letters: *epistulae morales, rurales et amatoriae* as an instance of thematic and stylistic variety⁷. Ethics, idyll and love – those three different themes (*varios de germine flores*), employed alternately were supposed to provide the reader with the best aesthetic impressions. Among the German humanists and Grecians we need to mention such scholars as Mikołaj Marschalk, Herman Trebelius, Hermann von den Busche and finally the first full professor and Hellenist: Filip Melancton. His greatest contribution to Germany was the reorganization of the educational system and the introduction of the humanistic school, which although still called the "Latin school" (*Lateinschule*), was based largely on Greek studies and became a model for many another European schools, especially in Silesia.

In the Polish Cracow Academy the precursors and propagators of Hellenic studies appeared at the same time as in German universities. Responsible for this were two Italian humanists: Jan Silvius Siculus Amatus and Konstanty Claretti de Cancellieri of Pistoia. The preserved list of Siculus's students reveals that many descendants of wealthy families took up Greek learning, and the first semester of official Greek classes in Poland was the winter term of 1502/04. In 1506, Greek was also taught in Cracow by the Italian Claretii and since then the fame of Greek studies attracted many students, especially from Silesia. The beginning of the 16th century was a climax in the migration of Silesian students to Cracow, many of whom became real enthusiasts of studies in the former capital of Poland, and at the same time were enthusiasts par-

⁶ H. Barycz (1935). *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w epoce humanizmu*, Kraków, p. 68. [In Polish].

⁷ B. Gaj (2010), Gaj Beata, *Ślązaczka. Pomiędzy 'rustica grossa' i 'Pallas Silesiae' – portret kobiety w literaturze łacińskiego Śląska*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego [*Silesian Woman. Between 'Rustica Grossa' and 'Pallas Silesiae' – a Portrait of Woman in the Literature of Latin Silesia*], Opole 2010., p.170 [in Polish].

ticularly of the sciences and Greek literature. Fluent knowledge of Greek was then, using Henryk Barycz's comparison⁸, as prestigious as the study of nuclear physics was in the middle of the 20th century.

Celtis's students, Wincentius Lang (Longinus Eleutherius), Zygmunt Gossinger (Fusilius) and Laurentius Corvinus, as well as another Silesian humanists to some extent, stayed in a circle of proliferating Greek culture. However, the most distinguished in Greek studies was Caspar Ursinus Velius, who acquired Greek so quickly and so well that after two years of learning he himself gave public lectures of Greek at the University of Leipzig, for which he was praised⁹. In the meantime, Walenty Krautwald of Nysa (Valentinus K. Henrici de Nissa), a well-known activist of Silesian reformation, during his studies in Cracow on Greek took actions of great significance for the later reception of Greek. Namely, he collected a significant amount of prints and copies of the compendia and works of Greek classics, which then became the basis of humanistic education for the city of Nysa and the whole of Silesia. Franciscus Faber, known in Leipzig as *insignis poeta*, used this book collections well as the Cracow studies. Another Silesians also contributed to the development of Greek studies in Poland and Silesia: Ambrosius Moiban, who was the first to introduce Greek to Silesian high schools, and Georgius Logus, Joannes Lang, who was a translator of church fathers into Latin and the envoy of king Frederick I. Emphasizing his Silesian roots and separateness (*Silesius, non Polonus*), the first doctor of Cracow, Anzelm Ephorinus, explained Saint Basil on the basis of the Greek original during his lectures. Certainly many another Silesian scholars of that period were familiar with Greek, such as Bartholomeus Sthenus from Brzeg, who was author of the first description of Silesia, or Venzeslaus Coler Anthraceus, a son of collier from a village in Karkonosze Mountains, and finally the well-known doctor from Cracow well acquainted with Greek. One can speak of the multitude of Silesian humanists who became famous especially due to their fondness for Greek language and literature. Maciej Pyrser of Kozuchowo (Freystady) should also be mentioned here, as he was a propagator of Greek in Cracow, where he published Greek prints for the purposes of schools. There are even more scholars who were remarkable for their passion for Greek. These are Franciscus Mymer from Lwówek Śląski, an occasional poet and author of a trilingual Latin-Polish-German dictionary (yet he did not

⁸ H. Barycz (1979). *Śląsk w polskiej kulturze umysłowej*. Ed. 2. Katowice, p. 123. [In Polish]

⁹ H. Barycz, *Śląsk...*, work cited, p. 78.

dare to include a fourth language: Greek), Adam Schroeter from Żytawa, and Andreas Schoneus from Głogów.

The figure of Georgius Libanus (Georgii de Lygnycz) is also interesting. He was taught Greek by his friend, the already mentioned Venceslaus Anthraceus. Meanwhile, Georgius Libanus became known primarily for his lectures on Greek grammar in the winter term of the Cracow Academy in 1520. He was to start his job as a professor of rhetoric with this lecture, yet due to Grzegorz from Szamotuły's objection, based on his view of Greek as a source of heresy, Libanus had to move his activities to the School of Panna Maria in Cracow. He then returned to the university thanks to the initiative of bishop Tomicki in 1528, which demonstrates the strengthening need for Greek studies at that time. His work intensified the interest in Greek. Unfortunately, in Poland a separate department of Greek was not established as was the case in Western universities. Grammar was taught mainly from the manual by Oecolampadius, Clenard and Metzler¹⁰. The animation of Greek studies in Poland took place only at the end of the 16th century thanks to such people as Fabian Birkowski, Adam Burski, and Stanisław Bartholanus. Undertaken by a Silesian (!) Andreas Schoneus, the foundation of a Greek language and culture department at the university in Cracow in 1615 was the last expression of Hellenic passions at that time in Poland. The short-lived Renaissance period of magnificence surrounding classical philology in Poland is associated with the 16th century and the following names: Szymon Marycki, Andrzej Patrycy Nidecki, Sebastian Petrycy, Grzegorz Knapski, who published the trilingual Polish-Latin-Greek dictionary¹¹.

The Silesians were citizens of Central Europe who in a special way were fascinated with the ancient Greek culture and language. Publishing in Greek needed therefore a juxtaposition with Latin translation and such bilingual works were a testimony of the extraordinary fluency of the poets. Works in Greek can be found in almost every second collection of occasional works, which were written in Silesia since the 16th and 17th centuries. They frequently occupy a prominent place in the collection, for instance the work¹² written for the occasion of Daniel Mencilius and Maria Khün's wedding, written by the bride's brother, Jacob Khün:

¹⁰ H. Barycz, *Historia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego...*, work cited, p. 82.

¹¹ Seweryn Hammer (1948). *Historia filologii klasycznej w Polsce*. Kraków, p. 5. [In Polish].

¹² *Nuptiis secundis reverendi et doctissimi Viri Domini Danielis Mencilii verbi divini in Koskav ministri vigilantissimi, sponsi cum virgine lectissima honestissimaeque Maria reverendi, pietate atque doctrina spectatissimi viri domini Jacobi Khün Ecclesiae Bulcolucanae pastoris vigilantissimi filia dilectissima, sponsa. Gratulantur assines et*

Ὡς εὐ δεσμὰ γαμοῖο τὸ ἄρρην καὶ τόγε θῆλυ
 Ποιεῖσθον, συνάγει εἰς ἅ εἰς καὶ ἔρωσ:
 ἄρρην καὶ τόγε θῆλυ δὴ εστὸν, ἐκεῖνα κελεύων
 Ἀλλ' ἐν ἔμθῳ θεὸς εἰς, ἐν κατ' ἔθος συνάγει;
 Τῆ κραδίη καὶ σώματι, τῷ λαχμῶτέ πόνωτ' ἐ,
 Ἐχῆ, καὶ βιοῦ χρήμασι, παῖσι γάμου.
 Οὕτως ἐν νύμφῳ Δανιήλ Μαρίη καὶ ἔσοιθον,
 ὕμῃ ἀρέσουσιν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔργα θεῶ
 Σφῶ ἀρχοῖτε γάμου, ἀπὸ τοῦ δε θεοῖο, ἀρίστου
 Ἀλλήλων ἔχεζον τοὺς Φρένας ευσάθεας.
 Νύμφε, καλῶς πράττεις, γάμου αὐθις ἐπεὶ Ὁ συνάπτεις,
 Ἔργου καὶ θεοῦ οὐκ ἀμελεῖν ἐθελεῖς,
 Ἔργου, ὁ Χριστὸς συναρέσκει ἐν Γαλιλαία
 Πῶ νυμφοῖσι νέοις δῶρα δέδωκε νέα.
 Ἐυχὸν ἔγωγε μονώτης αἴτιος ὄφρα γαμοῖο
 Ζεὺς δῶρη ἀκροτήν σφῶν μέγας ευσέβεια,
 ὕμμε θεὸς δῶση μεσότηντέ τέλος καὶ ἀρίστον,
 ὀλπίζη πάντας τοῦγε βιοῖου χρόνους,
 ὄφρα καὶ ἐκκέη ἐσ στήθος, τοῦ πνεύματος ἄγνου
 Δῶρα μέγιστα, καλοῦ δῶρα βιοῖου καλὰ
 Ἐυχὸν ἔγωγε τελευταῖον θυμῶ, γάμος ἦσ ι
 ὕμμε μάκαρ συνεχῶς ἦσ ι γάνος συνεχῶς ἦσ ι
 ἦσ ι μάκαρ χαίρισιν συνεχῶς Χριστοῦ χαρίεντος
 Ἐἶς ἐν τῶ ε θεῶ ἦσ ι Ἐως καὶ Ἐρῶς .

Marriage bonds combine two worlds, two realities: female and male, and it is created from the beginning of these two realities. Yet it cannot happen without the interaction (which is emphasized by the Greek prefix *συν*) of two supernatural factors having divine names, and also being varied as far as these factors are concerned. The woman's willingness to devote herself and serve as well as the man's thirst for actions motivated by the senses, and for both of them the importance of physical beauty – such a picture of marriage emerges from the Silesian's Greek poem. To achieve happiness in marriage several more of God's gifts are needed: children (*παιδές*), a beautiful life (*καλὸς βίος*) and a dignified death (*τέλος ἀρίστον*), but the grace of Christ remains the most significant since it was him who gave the newlyweds the new gift in Galilee. It is a union and transformation of two contrary realities Eos and Eros in God, and that is what the author prays for for the young couple. The syntax *genetivus absolutus* (*Χριστοῦ χαρίεντος*) employed in the poem

amici ad diem 28 mensis Februarii anno 1612, Lignicii 1612, Biblioteka Śląska w Katowicach, Number 462801. [In Latin and Greek.]

intensifies the message, saying that transformation (and at the same time happiness) in marriage depends on Christ's grace.

Compared to other poetic works written in Greek in Silesia, the oeuvre of the above mentioned Silesian Caspar Ursinus Velius certainly stands out. From among many works I would like to quote an example crucial for the formation of the Silesian *querelle des femmes*, namely a Silesian ideal of woman¹³, included in one of the Greek-Latin poems by Velius:

Ρουφίνου
Κάλλεος ἔχεις Κυπρίδης, Πείθους στώμα καὶ ἄκμῃ
Εἰαρινῶν ὠρῶν, φθέγμα δὲ Καλλιόπης.
Νουν καὶ σωφροσύνην Θέμιδης καὶ χειρὰς Ἀθήνης
Σὺν σοὶ δ' αἱ Χάριτες τέτταρές εἰσι φίλαι

Ad amicam
Forma tibi Veneris, Suadae labra, corporis est flos
Vernans Horarum, vocula Calliopes
Mens et temperies Themidis, palmaeque Minervae
Quattuor adiunctae sunt tibi treis Charites¹⁴.

A portrait of a Silesian woman having Venus's beauty, the goddess of persuasion Peitho – Πείθω's pronunciation, Calliope's maturity, Themis's mind and Minerva's palms presents a different view from the so far accepted depiction of a woman. In this depiction not only is beauty important but also a woman's mind and even her rhetoric abilities, which implies an innovative representation since female gender at that time was not commonly associated with scholarly nor rhetoric aptitudes. Perhaps such perspective paved the way for a real contribution by Silesia for *querelle des femmes*, which was "A catalogue of learned women and girls" by Georgius Martin, among others. It depicts women over a span of history through an innovative criterion of learnedness, as well as later factual biographies of learned women such as Maria Cunitia, a 17th century Silesian astronomer, without whom Kepler would have remained unknown¹⁵.

In this context the Silesian example should be noticed and appreciated even more as the host of Silesian humanists carried their fascina-

¹³ B. Gaj, *Ślązaczka...* [*Silesian Woman...*], work cited, p. 238.

¹⁴ *Caspari Ursini Velii e Germanis Silesii poematum liber quinque*, Basileae 1520. [In Latin and Greek].

¹⁵ J. Rostropowicz, *Cunitz Maria [Cunitia Maria]* In : *Ślązacy od czasów najdawniejszych do współczesności. Schlesier von den frühesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. J. Rostropowicz, Łubowice – Opole, v. 2, p. 48.

tion with Greek culture and language to Poland in particular and also towards the West to Germany (like Ursinus Velius). The interaction was so strong that even in the 20th century, on the eve of the Second World War in Poland, where Latin culture dominated, Greek was still taught in high schools four hours per week for at least two years¹⁶. Its aim was to develop the ability of fluent reading in Greek as well as skills in writing with the Greek alphabet. Students were required to translate (with a dictionary) easier Greek texts and to know the important manifestations of Greek culture on the basis of translations, articles and dissertations, as well as to learn by heart around 50 verses per week. These were chosen fragments of Greek texts, mainly from the New Testament. Moreover, post-war high school continued (and even still does) teaching ancient Greek, although to a narrowed extent. Meanwhile, there appeared interest in modern Greek language and culture, which was certainly influenced by the Greek immigration wave to Poland in 1949, when Poland admitted around 14000 Greeks. It is interesting that the majority of immigrants settled in Silesia (Wrocław, Police, Zgorzelec, Świdnica) and although most of them later left for other Western countries, a part of them started mixed Greek-Polish families. Therefore, nowadays one can speak about thousands of Poles having strong Greek roots while maintaining contacts with the Greek language and their Greek families¹⁷. On 27 April 2007 the Association of Greeks in Poland "Odyssey" was established, and the Municipal Community Centre in Zgorzelec every summer organizes an international festival of Greek song. In conclusion, it can be undoubtedly claimed that Greek culture is connected in a special way with one of the most interesting regions of Central Europe – Silesia.

Abstract (Summary):

The main idea of the paper is the rarely investigated holistic issue of the literary, historical and cultural influence of ancient Greece on the nations of Central and Eastern Europe from the beginnings of their statehood up until modern times. Special attention is paid to three crucial centuries: 15th, 16th and 17th when Greek was taught in Central Europe; works of this era created in this language by the Germans, the Polish and

¹⁶ *Program nauki w liceum ogólnokształcącym. Język grecki (1937)*. Wydział klasyczny (projekt), Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego, Lwów. [In Polish].

¹⁷ An interesting master thesis was written on Greeks In Poland entitled „Cultural identity of Polish youth of Greek roots” Por. <http://grecy.eu.interia.pl/pliki/art4/art4.html>

the Silesians have survived up to the present day as old prints in special collections of many libraries. However, so far not much attention has been paid to them, while some of these works, written especially in Silesia, constitute interesting examples of occasional literature, different from the more common literature found in that region of Europe, New-Latin literature. Special emphasis shall be put particularly on works by Ursinus Velius, who also willingly brought up women's issues, using Greek language to create and pass on to posterity the ideal of Silesian woman having Venus's beauty, the goddess of persuasion Peitho – Πείθο's pronunciation, Calliope's maturity, Themis's mind and Minerva's palms. The Silesian humanists published their works in Latin more often than in Polish and German, and it should be taken into consideration that the fluency and literary knowledge of Greek at that time in Europe was, using Polish historian Henryk Barycz's comparison, as prestigious as the study of nuclear physics was in the middle of the 20th century.

The presented paper also addresses the historical contacts and relations between Greece and the aforementioned part of Europe in modern times, especially after World War II, when a number of Greek people settled in Poland, including Silesia.

Key words:

ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶττα, ancient Greek, history of Central and Eastern Europe, Silesian literature in Greek, women's history at the beginning of modernity.

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