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“Don’t Look Back in Anger”

The Classics, Early Modern Authors, and Making the
Polish-Lithuanian Origin Accounts

Introduction

“O Poles, how can you lay a claim to antiquity?”, wondered János Vitéz (John Vitez of Sredna), bishop of Esztergom and prominent fifteenth-century humanist¹. “I have not found any evidence about your ancient history in the writings of any of the ancient authors”, he added. His interlocutor, Polish humanist and future archbishop of Lviv, Grzegorz of Sanok (1406–1477), failed to find a plausible answer to this question. “I have not found [any evidence] either, and although I was researching these issues thoroughly, I can recall nothing certain”, Grzegorz responded, and then continued: “Likewise, I do not trust our native authors; those who claim that they highlight to us our ancient history, only darken those times wishing in vain to create the appearance of antiquity.”

This discussion, according to the Italian humanist Filippo Buonaccorsi, often referred to as Callimachus (1437–1496)², took place in the mid or late 1440s in Vi-

Acknowledgment: I am grateful to Tomasz Grusiecki for his suggestions and encouragement to finish this article. My deepest gratitude, however, is addressed to the brave people of Ukraine: to those who continue to work, study, research, fight, teach, rescue, donate, and volunteer to defend our homeland from Russian aggression.

1 See a recent monograph about János Vitéz: Tomislav Matić, *Bishop John Vitez and Early Renaissance Central Europe. The Humanist Kingmaker*, Amsterdam, 2022 (*Beyond Medieval Europe*), esp. pp. 7–16, 91–124.

2 Philippi Callimachi Vita et mores Gregorii Sanocei, ed. Irmina Lichońska, Warszawa 1963 (*Bibliotheca Latina medii et recentioris aevi* 12), p. 36: “Ex quo factum est, quod cum aliquando episcopus pro facultate sua dicendique copia memoriter et ornate recensisset varietatem fortunae utriusque Pannoniae et qui mortales diversis temporibus eas terras tenuissent, interrogaret Gregorium, quidnam de Polonorum antiquitate sentiret, cuius mentionem nusquam apud veteres scriptores legisset. Ad quem Gregorius: Neque ego, quamvis diligens ea in re fuerim, quod pro certo asseverem, comperisse memini ... Sic, qui nobis antiquitatem nostram explicare profitetur, maxime eam occultavit vanitate affectatae vetustatis; dum enim nimis longe omnia repetere vult, nihil certum aut verisimile affert.”. Translations in the article, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

téz's humanist circle in Árad (today Oradea in Romania) while Grzegorz stayed at Vitéz's court after the Battle of Varna (1444)³. Callimachus was not there and noted this story for the first time in his *Vita et mores Gregorii Sanocei* (*Life and Manners of Grzegorz of Sanok*), completed around 1476⁴. With Renaissance trends spreading to the lands of East-Central Europe, the question of local antiquity became particularly crucial, considering the reputation of the region as a semi-barbaric backwater among other humanists of the era. A prominent example of such an attitude is the Sienese Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405–1464), later Pope Pius II (r. 1458–1464). In his *De Europa*, completed around 1458, Piccolomini presented the history of diverse regions and people within Christendom, offering his vision of their past and present that was largely based on Livy, Ptolemy, Strabo, Tacitus, Pomponius Mela, and other ancient authors⁵. In his accounts of the origins of East-Central European nations, neither the Poles, nor the Lithuanians acquired distinguished ancient genealogies. Piccolomini was not even able to reference any classical authors who addressed Polish or Lithuanian ancestors, in a marked contrast to their neighbours, the Wallachians, imagined as descendants of the Romans, or the Ruthenians, as the offspring of the Roxolanians⁶.

Thus, when positioning his people in a European context, Grzegorz of Sanok could not find any evidence of their ancient origins in trustworthy classical sources, and neither could he rely on the accounts of Polish history written by his compatriots⁷. His anger towards the ancient authors was justified. The Poles and Lithuanians, inhabiting the lands of a shared political union under the Jagiellonian rule, indeed were not mentioned under their contemporary proper names by any of the Greco-Roman authors. The way to overcome this obstacle was to point to progenitors in the classical past with whom these people, predominantly the early modern erudites, could associate themselves.

In this article, I approach this search for classical progenitors from two inter-related perspectives. First, I scrutinize the cross-pollination between classical humanist study and early modern historical knowledge in Poland through the lens of Polish and Lithuanian origin myths. Greco-Roman accounts belonged to the cele-

3 Matić, Bishop John Vitez, pp. 102, 110–112.

4 Callimachi *Vita et mores Gregorii*, p. 8; Harold B. Segel, *Renaissance Culture in Poland. The Rise of Humanism, 1470–1543*, Ithaca/London 1989, p. 59; Przemysław Chudzik, “*Vita et mores Gregorii Sanocei*” von Callimachus – eine anekdotische Biografie aus der Renaissancezeit, in: *Folia Toruniensia* 19 (2019), pp. 9–19, here p. 10.

5 Aeneas S. Piccolomini, *Europe* (c. 1400–1458), ed. Nancy Bisaha, Washington 2013.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 138–147.

7 Callimachi *Vita et mores Gregorii*, p. 36: “Ea enim, quae Vincentius in historiis scripsit de origine nostra, non fabulas modo, sed portenta redolent”.

brated and accepted versions of the past among the Renaissance writers, yet they seemingly ignored the region of East-Central Europe⁸. I examine several examples of creative engagement with the classics to determine editorial practices and the circulation of classical knowledge and ideas of origins in early modern Poland-Lithuania. Second, I outline the strategies of dealing with scant references to East-Central Europe and its population in classical sources by focusing on three humanists based in the region who were working within the span of one century. Each of them had a distinct story to tell concerning the origin myths, diverse intellectual background, and all three works that were not designed as traditional chronicles nevertheless became particularly influential for the early modern historical scholarship. Finally, I briefly describe two ways of reception of the origin narratives by nobility and the Kings in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The already mentioned Callimachus inserted versions of Polish and Lithuanian descent in his *Vita et mores Gregorii Sanocei* (*Life and Manners of Grzegorz of Sanok*), and *Vita et mores Sbignei Cardinalis* (*Life and Manners of Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki*)⁹. Maciej Miechowita (Matthias de Miechow, 1457–1523), another author addressed here, was an eight-times rector of the Kraków University, historian, and polymath who in his *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis* (*Treatise on the Two Sarmatias*, 1517) incorporated the classical knowledge and presented the region, largely based on Ptolemy's account, to a European readership¹⁰. Miechowita's treatise sold out so quickly that it was reprinted in 1518 and 1521 and soon was translated into German, Italian, and Polish¹¹. While Callimachus's and Miechowita's works were written in Latin, the third account under my analysis is an epic poem with some components in prose, written in Polish but never published during the lifetime of its author, Maciej Strykowski (Matthias Strycovius, c. 1547–1593). Around 1578, he compiled a large poetic work titled *On the Beginnings, Accounts, Virtues, Military, and Domestic Affairs of the Famous Nations of Lithuania, Samogi-*

⁸ See a recent collection of the key sources on the topic in Francis Young (Ed.), *Pagans in the Early Modern Baltic. Sixteenth-Century Ethnographic Accounts of Baltic Paganism*, Amsterdam 2022 (Foundations – ARC).

⁹ Callimachi *Vita et mores Gregorii*, p. 36; Philippi Callimachi *Vita et mores Sbignei Cardinalis*, ed. Irmína Lichońska, Warszawa 1962 (*Bibliotheca Latina medii et recentioris aevi* 7).

¹⁰ Maciej Miechowita, *Tractatus de Duabus Sarmatiis Asiana et Europiana et de contentis in eis*, Kraków 1517.

¹¹ Maciej Miechowita, *Opis Sarmacji Azjatyckiej i Europejskiej*, ed. Tadeusz Bieńkowski, Wrocław 1972 (*Zróżła do dziejów nauki i techniki* 14), p. 5. The first German translation of the *Tractatus* was made in 1518, Polish in 1535, Italian in 1561. Katharina N. Piechocki, *Cartographic Humanism. The Making of Early Modern Europe*, Chicago/London 2019, p. 90.

*tia, and Ruthenia*¹². By accepting Virgil's and Lucan's heroic style as he described the heroic deeds of ancient Lithuanians, Strykowski supported their Roman descent and provided six different versions of their possible exodus from Italy, drawing his arguments primarily from the ancient Roman authors to add credibility to his argument¹³. Put together, these works present three distinct examples of engagement with classical Greco-Roman tradition that offer a glimpse into humanist editorial practices regarding genealogy of the early modern peoples in East-Central Europe.

I Italian Vision of the Polish-Lithuanian Genealogy: Filippo Buonaccorsi

Who else if not a celebrated Italian humanist and poet like Filippo Buonaccorsi could appreciate the importance of the Classics for his texts¹⁴? He put the grievance of the neglect of ancient mentions about Poland in the speech of his patron Gregory of Sanok¹⁵. In the abovementioned discussion on the genealogy of the Poles, Gregory claimed that he could not identify any mentions of ancient Polish history among the ancient authors. He referred to the ancient historians in the plural, without giving specific names, but besides that, Gregory dispelled the arguments of thirteenth-century Polish chronicler Magister Wincenty Kadłubek (c. 1150–1223) as untrustworthy. Gregory posited that the latter's stories about Scythian or Vandalian origins of the Poles and the foundation of Kraków by Gracchus that emphasized the phonetic interplay between Gracchus, Krakus, and Kraków did not stand any criticism¹⁶.

Gregory's suggestion was to refer to something more tangible and enduring than merely mentions by the classical authors: *mores et instituta*. He deemed

12 Maciej Strykowski, *O Początkach, Wywodach, Dzielnosciach, Sprawach Rycerskich I Domo- wych Sławnego Narodu Litewskiego, żemojdzkiego I Ruskiego, Przedtym Nigdy Od żadnego Ani Kuszone, Ani Opisane, Z Natchnienia Bożego a Uprzejmie Pilnego Doświadczenia*, ed. Julia Radziszewska, Warszawa 1978.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 12–15.

14 This expression is inspired by Harold Segel's introduction to the biography of Conrad Celtius. The cultural impact done by Callimachus and Celtius in Kraków circles and at the University were undoubtedly tremendous and reflected in the correspondence of several professors and graduates of the Academy. See Segel, *Renaissance Culture*, p. 83; see also Segel's biography of Callimachus, *ibid.*, pp. 36–82.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 46f.

16 Callimachi *Vita et mores Gregorii*, p. 36.

the customs and character of the Poles and their ancestors more long-lasting than the name of the tribe or their capital. As the imagined progenitors of the Poles, he supported the candidacy of the Veneti (*a Venetorum gente*), who lived between the Peucini and the Sarmatians on the shores of the Black Sea¹⁷. The similarities between Poles living in his time and ancient Veneti included, among others, resemblance of their bravery and valour, similar laws, and frequent bathing¹⁸. Last but not least, Veneti and Poles were typically drunkards, and their diet consisted mainly of meat of wild animals and milk¹⁹.

Through Gregory’s speech, Callimachus most probably was drawing on Jordanes, who described the ways of life of the Veneti in the same way²⁰. Yet, Gregory’s brief overview of the origins of the Poles did not directly mention Jordanes or any other ancient author explicitly, since referring to the customs and features of the Poles that could be observed or known by his contemporaries (especially considering close ties between the Poles and the Hungarians prior to the Battle of Varna) offered a sufficient buttress to his argument: the chance to compare. Callimachus used comparison, for instance, regarding the languages and referred to similarities between the Slavic languages from the Adriatic Sea, where—as he argues—the branch of the Veneti settled after continuous migrations to Dacia, Moesia, Dalmatia, and Illyria²¹.

While Callimachus’s account of the Polish origins was succinctly outlined only in two sections in the middle of Gregory’s biography, he did not undermine the Sarmatian concept of Polish origins which was formed around the same time by Polish historian Jan Długosz (1415–1480)²². This concept, referring to the evidence of Ptolemy, Pliny the Elder, Pomponius Mela, and Strabo claimed that the Poles are the posteriors of a militant Sarmatian tribe that inhabited the steppes of East-Central Europe and Black seashore around 3rd century BC to 3rd century AD. Callimachus employed the Sarmatian topos several times along the text, and most importantly, he placed it in the very beginning of Gregory’s biography where he underlined his Sarmatian origins: “He was born in Sarmatia, not far

17 Ibid., p. 36.

18 Ibid., pp. 36–40, in particular chapter XVIII.

19 Ibid., p. 38: “Eadem utrobique potandi licentia ebrietatisque impunitas.”

20 The Gothic History of Jordanes, ed. Charles C. Mierow, Princeton 1915, pp. 85, 113.

21 Callimachi Vita et mores Gregorii, p. 38.

22 Jan Długosz, Jana Długosza Roczniki czyli Kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego. vol. 1, ed. Wanda Semkowicz-Zarembina/Krystyna Pieradzka/Bożena Modelska-Strzelecka, Warszawa 2009, pp. 97, 101, 137.

from the source of Wisłok, in an obscure village where he spent his childhood”²³. However, Callimachus clearly was not satisfied with the quantity and the quality of sources on ancient Polish history from which he could draw his evidence. The same statement was valid for another text he authored that delved into the genealogy of the Poles and Lithuanians more deeply, engaging with other authors and arguments from a broader perspective.

Around 1480–1481, Callimachus finished a biography of Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki, the first Polish cardinal (tenure 1449–1455)²⁴. This work, dedicated to a nephew of Oleśnicki (also Zbigniew), at the time archbishop of Gniezno, was more profound in the discussion of the origins of the Poles²⁵. Here, Callimachus also offered his vision of the Lithuanian origins and delved into the mythical past of the Poles more systematically.

Callimachus continued to complain about the absence of ancient sources on Polish history in this work by arguing that the place of the origins of Polish migration to Sarmatia is unclear²⁶. Yet, what differed in the *Life of Zbigniew* compared to the *Life of Gregory* was the list of possible origins as argued by ancient and contemporary historians. Callimachus employed four dominant versions of Polish origins based on the evidence from the classical texts. The first one, heavily criticized by him for its futile attempt to create an image of ancient lineage of the Poles (resembling his words in the *Life of Gregory*), traced the descent of the Poles from Asia or the son of Cyclop Polypheme and Galatea Illyrius²⁷. The second version, less disputed by Callimachus, claimed Polish genealogy from the tribe of Veneti, mingling the Roxolians-Ruthenians and the Poles²⁸. Callimachus dispelled the third one, a brief story about seven brothers whose names became the names of peoples in diverse regions, based on appropriation merely by those, who were ignorant about their real descent²⁹. Finally, the fourth version defined the lands of Dalmatia as the homeland of the Poles³⁰. However, Callimachus surmised that it was problematic to reach a definite answer because of numerous origin accounts, none of which are trustworthy. Among the four possible variants of Polish descent, only the first one (about Polypheme and Galatea) received a confirmation

23 Callimachi Vita et mores Gregorii, p. 16: “Natus est in Sarmatia, non procul a fonte Istulae, in pago ignobili, in quo infantiam exegit”.

24 Callimachi Vita et mores Sbignei, p. 8.

25 Ibid., p. 10; Segel, *Renaissance Culture*, p. 55.

26 Callimachi Vita et mores Sbignei, pp. 10, 12.

27 Ibid., pp. 10–12.

28 Ibid., pp. 12–14.

29 Ibid., p. 14.

30 Ibid.

in the ancient sources, chiefly Appian, Strabo, Livy, and Justin whereas in the other theories he did not explicitly refer to any ancient author to attempt to link ancient evidence and the early modern reality³¹.

In the *Life of Zbigniew*, Callimachus had a different agenda compared to the *Life of Gregory*: to highlight the link between Oleśnicki's coat of arms (Dębno) and an imagined ancient lawgiver of the Poles, Deombrotus, a semi-mythical figure invented by Callimachus. Deombrotus played the same role for the Poles as Solon for ancient Athens or Lycurgus for Sparta. Similarly to ancient legislators, he was profound in divine and human law, yet Callimachus could not conclude whether Deombrotus arrived in the lands of ancient Poles with an army, or he heard about "the growing potency" of the new people (*gens*) and decided to join them³². The Poles eventually offered Deombrotus the royal crown, yet he refused, claiming that free people need to be governed by law rather than by the ruler, and thus he granted them the laws soon³³. This narrative about a dignified ruler who refused the crown was not original and found its traces in antiquity, especially in Plutarch³⁴.

Callimachus ought to be creative in his writing to link his account both with barely testified history of ancient Poles and to connect the names with those found in Poland of his era. Through the posteriors of Deombrotus, namely his sons (Pausanias and Octomasdes), one might trace the genealogy of the Dębno family, as a corrupted version of Deombrotus' name became the family name, although another version claimed that the actual name derived from the name of the oak-tree – *dqb* in Polish³⁵. Callimachus blamed Herodotus, Strabo, and Plutarch for providing incorrect information about the life and customs of Scythians that seem to be "a fiction" rather than reality³⁶. In this passage, he used the Scythians not as the predecessors of the Poles but rather as a comparative example for highlighting the misrepresentations of the customs of ancient Poles and Scythians. Likewise, the origins of the Wallachians (today's Romanians), according to Callimachus and some other Renaissance authors, go back to antiquity and Roman colonization of the region³⁷.

³¹ See the footnotes at *ibid.*, pp. 12f.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Plutarch, *Caes.*, 61.

³⁵ Callimachi *Vita et mores Sbignei*, p. 20f.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18: "Nam eam quae Herodotus et ceteri Graeci scriptores tradunt de vita et moribus Scytharum, videntur potius excogitata ad augendam apud ceteras nationes famam feritatis bellicosissimae gentis".

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 28; Piccolomini, *Europe*, pp. 65–67.

Callimachus' treatment of the classical authors regarding Lithuanian origins was even more noteworthy, sparking humanist debates in the early modern period. The problem with the imagined Lithuanian origins from Italy, Gaul, or Bosphorus was that the ancient sources testified of no evidence of the Lithuanian past. Compared to the frequency and attention paid to the Sarmatians—even if limited compared to the Gauls or Germans—there was no possible path to directly identify any predecessors of the Lithuanians in the Greco-Roman works³⁸. Callimachus did not accept the Italian version of Lithuanian origins on the basis that there is no significant evidence in support of that claim³⁹. For an Italian humanist, the differences between the Lithuanian and Italian languages and religious customs asserted rather Gallic than ancient Roman origins. While Callimachus did not find (or did not aim to find) any references in ancient sources in support of the exodus from ancient Italy, he referred to Caesar, Valerius Maximus, and Strabo as an argument for the Lithuanian-Gallic genealogy⁴⁰. His knowledge of Italian and encounters with the Lithuanians after spending ten years in Kraków and Poland were additional buttresses to his stance.

To identify the name of a legendary founder of Lithuania, Callimachus used Tacitus, who in his *Germania* mentioned the duke Lemonius (*dux Lemonius*), a leader of the Celts who migrated to the northern parts of Europe. Lemonius was leading a group of the Gauls who did not follow their compatriots migrating to Italy. Instead, they together “with their children and wives (...) occupied the borders of Europe”⁴¹. Livonia, a region that encompassed the lands of modern Latvia and Estonia, thus received its corrupted name from Lemonius. Interestingly, Callimachus' text employs very similar narrative tools to the later Lithuanian Chronicles (c. the 1520s) which mention that a Roman aristocrat (*княжа*, *knyazha*, or duke in literary translation) called Palemon gathered with the other men, children, and wives and sailed “through the Northern Ocean” (the North Sea) to the Baltic shore⁴². Similarly to Callimachus' previous practices of denouncing the Greek authors, the *Life of Zbigniew* blamed the Greeks for corrupting the name of the Lithuanians who, being “ignorant about the real origins of the Lithuanians, gave them

38 Callimachus' epitaph described how the Sarmatian land “came to behold a man in full flower”, cf. Segel, *Renaissance Culture*, pp. 65 f.

39 Callimachi *Vita et mores Sbignei*, p. 38.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 40.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 38 (see also below n. 40).

42 *Ibid.*: “... quamvis a Graecis minime ignaris verae originis composito vocabulo ex nominibus antiquae ac novae patriae Celtoscythae pridem dicerentur”.

the name of the Celto-Scythians (*Celtoscythae*)” which was a merged version of the name of the tribe and the land they inhabited⁴³.

Unlike the Gallic version, the Bosporan origins of the Lithuanians did not rely on classical sources. Among the arguments Callimachus brought up were mainly the similarities in house planning, customs, cuisine, clothing, law, religion, and gods. The notion of coincidence in venerating the groves, stones, lakes, and snakes between the Lithuanians and the Bosporans became another sign of genealogical kinship between the peoples⁴⁴. While Callimachus was drawing his argumentation based on the ancient authors in the description of the Bosporan customs, he did not criticize the classical authors: first, because there was enough evidence for Callimachus to establish a connection between the Bosporans and the Lithuanians, and second, because they did not provide any direct elaboration of Bosporan origins and history, leaving space for Callimachus’ imagination. This was the only way for him to remain in agreement with the Classics on the matter of the origins of the Poles and the Lithuanians and to avoid sharp critique on falsified reports or misrepresentations.

II Disillusionment with the Classics: Maciej Miechowita

The humanist shift in the attitude to the Classics regarding genealogical knowledge did not happen abruptly since in this process the humanists rejected and adapted the classical accounts to construct their own genealogical stories. In the Renaissance, the authority of the accounts of Greco-Roman geographers became a most common point of reference in numerous treatises. Maciej Miechowita, in his *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis* expressed his continuous disillusionment about the classical authors who neglected to provide information about the region, claiming that

Some ancient historians argue that some citizens of Italy left their homeland due to the disagreements existing among the Romans, [and they] arrived in the Lithuanian lands and gave them the name of their fatherland – *Italia*, and people who already lived there they called

⁴³ Ibid.: “Nam quo tempore Celtarum pars in Italiam transcendit, partem etiam duce Lemonio cum liberis atque uxoribus in Boreum Oceanum profectam dicunt extrema Europae occupasse eamque regionem primo tenuisse. Quae mox Livonia corrupto vocabulo a Lemonio duce, ut credi par est, nominata.”

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

Italians. And their descendants added one letter at the beginning of the word and started calling the country *L'Italia*, and the people *Litali*⁴⁵.

Miechowita's attitude towards the Classics, however, became more prominent not in the text of the treatise, permeated with references to Ptolemy, but in a dedication letter to the bishop of Olomouc Stanislav Thurzo. The "pressure of the authority of ancient writers", Miechowita argued, became a reason for the mistakes of contemporary historians who mystified the history of modern Sarmatia and its people, "expressed themselves unclearly and were rambling in the darkness"⁴⁶. By denouncing an uncritical attitude towards Greek-Roman authors by contemporary historians, Miechowita rather criticized unverified borrowings from Greco-Roman texts in a twofold way. First, towards the omissions and fabrications of Ptolemy who did not check his sources for East-Central Europe, and second, towards those authors who took classical accounts at face value: "In those descriptions, they [ancient authors] included plenty of invented stories and fables about the things that completely do not exist"⁴⁷. To debunk the geographical and genealogical stereotypes existing about Poland, Lithuania, Ruthenia, and Muscovy, Miechowita aimed not only to counter the classics but rather to correct their accounts which he found to be untrue⁴⁸.

His correspondence with Johannes Magnus, archbishop of Uppsala, from 1518, included in the 1521 Kraków edition, explicitly demonstrates predominant practices and debates regarding the ancient evidence about lesser-known peoples of Europe – namely, the Goths and the Sarmatians⁴⁹. Johannes Magnus, who later authored the *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus* (1554), took a critical stance towards Miechowita's treatment of the ancient past of the Goths and in a couple of letters expressed disagreement with Miechowita's claims about their descent. Magnus noted that plenty of ancient historians knew about the Goths and argued that

45 Miechowita, Tractatus II,1, 2, fol. [25r]: "Aiunt autem vetustiores et antiquitatum relatores, quod quidam Italici, propter Romanorum dissensiones deserentes Italiam, ingressi sunt terras Lithuanie et nomen patrie Italia, genti vero Itali, indiderunt; quae per posteros terra Litalia et gens Litali l. littera praeposita coepit nuncupari." (Page count is my own).

46 Ibid., [epistola dedicatoria], fol. [1v]: "Plures scriptorum orbem terrarum lucubrationibus suis et elucidationibus exararunt, Sarmatias vero, tanquam incognitas, pretervecti dimiserunt. Qui autem aliquicquam de ipsis posteris scriptis carminibusve relinquere curarunt, indistincte et antiquitate praemente, tanquam in media nocte, obscure dixerunt."

47 Ibid.: "Et quod intollerabilius est, multa ficta et fabulas inextricabiles nusquam adaptandas super addiderunt."

48 Piechocki, Cartographic Humanism, pp. 97f.

49 Maciej Miechowita, Descriptio Sarmatiarum Asianae et Europianae et eorum quae in eis cotinentur, Kraków 1521.

they deduced from Sweden. Furthermore, he doubted that even Miechowita’s knowledge and talent would not allow him to refute the lasting claims that the Goths derived from Sweden, given the authority of the ancient authors⁵⁰.

Responding to Magnus, Miechowita argued that “likewise, your ancient historians, whom you trust so much, never knew the northern lands, especially those old and new Spanish chronicles that I read claim that the Goths descended from the Scandius island and by moving straight they arrived in Italy, Gallia, and Spain”⁵¹. Magnus’s anger, Miechowita continued, should thus be directed against those historians and not against him as they falsified the past of the Swedes and other European nations. He continued that it is more reasonable to trust those authors who have first-hand experience and, as Miechowita boasted with exaggeration, “never left for a step from their own fatherland”⁵². Meanwhile, Miechowita spent several years in Italy and never travelled to the lands of Lithuania or Ruthenia, instead he received information from local travellers and merchants and used Ruthenian chronicles widely⁵³.

Despite the caution towards the Classics, for Miechowita the historical and genealogical evidence of the ancient authors remained a basis to draw on. Even despite incorrect information deriving from Ptolemy, his treatise began with a reference to the ancient authors (chiefly Ptolemy) who divided Sarmatia into two parts, European and Asian, creating the starting point for his narration and providing a title for his treatise. Furthermore, while there were several other, both ancient and medieval authors, who described the world without mentioning the two Sarmatias, the classical authors described it with limited knowledge available to them whereas Miechowita’s Sarmatia was a broader geographic entity than in the late medieval representation by for example Jan Długosz⁵⁴. Thus, the Classics should be criticized and respected and cited with caution if the advance of ‘local’ knowledge allows to clarify some uncertainties existing about the region. Both ‘old’ and ‘new’ authors engaged in creating new myths, hence Miechowita’s goal was to provide a ‘local’ perspective and to outline the ‘real’ geography and history of the region by debunking such myths.

50 Ibid., fol. 2r–3v.

51 Ibid., fol. 3r: “Tui ergo antiquiores historici quibus confidis septentrionalia nunquam cognoscentes presertim Hispanorum chronicae quas legi veteres et novas affirmant Gotthos ex Scandia insula procreatos et recta via Italiam, Gallias et Hispanias adeuntes turbasse.”

52 Ibid.: “Neque hunc errorem amplectaris nisi magis scriptori qui e patria sua pedem non extulit”.

53 Henryk Barycz, Maciej z Miechowa 1457–1523. Historyk, geograf, lekarz, organizator nauki, Wrocław/Warszawa 1960 (Monografie z dziejów nauki i techniki 15), pp. 26 f., 30 f.

54 Moreno Bonda, *History of Lithuanian Historiography. Didactical Guidelines*, Kaunas 2013, p. 93.

III Reconciling the Classics and the Origins: Maciej Strykowski

Six decades later, Polish author Maciej Strykowski finished his poetic *On the Beginnings, Accounts of the Famous Nations of Lithuania, Samogitia, and Ruthenia* (1578). Although his chronicle was not printed until 1978, it circulated in several handwritten manuscripts⁵⁵. His interests, however, prompted him to create his later mixed prosaic and poetic *Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia and all of Ruthenia*, printed in 1582 in Königsberg (Kaliningrad), which became one of the most popular readings in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the following decades⁵⁶.

Strykowski, unlike Callimachus and Miechowita, employed the scarcely available classical evidence to strengthen his argument and attempted to reconcile existing origin theories instead of criticizing them. Hence, he opined that all genealogical theories may be reconciled or, at least, mentioned if the source is trusted. Among the authors whose historical chronicles became the most influential in the sixteenth century, Strykowski employed the broadest range of classical authors in his text. This is even more extraordinary since he, unlike Callimachus or Miechowita, had not received a classical university education⁵⁷. Nevertheless, Strykowski used the aristocratic Renaissance libraries of his patrons—the Chodkiewicz and Olelkovich families—and referred not only to the more familiar Ptolemy, Pomponius Mela, Virgil, Pliny, Ovid, and Livy, but also to Diogenes Laërtius, Marcus Justinus Frontinus, Gaius Solinus, and Florus⁵⁸.

Compared to Miechowita, Strykowski did not blame the ancient authors for their inability to provide more information related to the origins of the Poles and Lithuanians. In his dedication to Prince Jerzy III Olelkowicz, Strykowski claimed that he undertook the enterprise of writing his Chronicle since no one endeavored before him⁵⁹. Therefore, it was not the fault of the Classics who did not

55 Strykowski, *O Początkach*, pp. 8, 18.

56 Albina Semianczuk, Maciej Strykowski i jego wpływ na historiografię Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w XVII Wieku, in: *Senoji Lietuvos Literatūra* 27 (2009), pp. 243–271, here pp. 244–247, 265–267; Jakub Niedźwiedz, *Kultura literacka Wilna (1323–1655). Retoryczna organizacja miasta*, Kraków 2012 (Biblioteka Literatury Pogranicza 20), p. 377.

57 Several historians argued that Strykowski studied in Kraków, but neither did he enroll to Kraków Academy, nor did he anywhere mention his studies. Besides schooling in his hometown, Strykowski was a self-made scholar. See Julia Radziszewka, Maciej Strykowski, historyk-poeta z epoki Odrodzenia, Katowice 1978 (*Prace naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach* 208), p. 18.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 130–139; Strykowski, *O Początkach*, p. 10.

59 Strykowski, *O Początkach*, pp. 33 f.

devote enough attention to Lithuania but rather of the *local scholars*. Strykowski particularly criticized the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ruthenian Chronicles because of their imperfect style and incorrect evidence, although he borrowed a lot from them⁶⁰. Later, however, God provided him with more authors, whom Strykowski called 'ancient', although their list included predominantly late medieval and humanist authors – Piccolomini, Erasmus Stella, Sebastian Münster, Długosz, Kadłubek, Olaus Magnus, Bernard Wapowski, and Miechowita. As the genealogy of the Lithuanians comprised only a brief part of his narration about medieval and early modern deeds of the Lithuanians, the relevance of ancient authors for Strykowski's purpose was reduced and thus, he only employed their accounts where he deemed it valid.

The co-existence of two diverse chronologies of Palemon's exodus caused some historical confusion. For instance, Strykowski in his work produced six diverse plots, when the exodus could have happened, namely the famine in Rome, the period of Nero's tyranny, Attila's campaign in Italy, Pompey's defeat in the war with Caesar, the honourable expulsion of a Roman noble and, finally, the Roman conquest of the Lithuanian lands. Strykowski tried to justify the historical accuracy of Palemon's travel by a detailed account of his route, evaluating his way, possible stopovers, and even himself repeating a fragment of Palemon's way through Livonia.

For Strykowski, the evidence of Ptolemy was a point of departure in his narration about the origins of the Lithuanians. To reconcile the evidence of Ptolemy who did not directly mention the Poles and the Lithuanians and to prove the Lithuanian descent from the Romans, Strykowski used a chronological argument. While Ptolemy enlisted different tribes in the Lithuanian lands, there was no sign of their existence in the time of Strykowski, mainly because "they mixed between each other, and with the flow of time they changed their location and languages"⁶¹. Mixed origins and languages allowed to artificially *create* new people on the imagined map of Europe: the tribe of the Alans (*Alani*) became a precursor of the Lithuanians (*Litalani*) and the name derived from duke *Litalanus*⁶². Thus, a chronological gap in several centuries between the arrival of the Romans and the first mentions of the Lithuanian dukes was covered by a process of ethnic and linguistic amalgamation that took place in the Baltics. In another passage, while disputing with Jodocus Ludovicus Decius, Strykowski claimed that he trust-

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 56: "Tych dziś nie masz ni znaku, bowiem się zmieszali, A za czasem i miesca, i mowę zmieniali."

⁶² Ibid., p. 79.

ed Ptolemy “who painted the whole world as on the table”⁶³. Once more Strykowski emphasized the importance of Ptolemy as the main contributor to the knowledge of Central-Eastern Europe when polemizing with Piccolomini who placed the Massagetae, another little-known ancient people, east of the Prussian lands, arguing that Ptolemy did not put them at that location⁶⁴.

Strykowski applied several other tools to prove the credibility of his accounts of Lithuanian descent, including writing brief marginalia to summarize the stories or to refer to ancient authors⁶⁵. The other way to reconcile his narration of Palemon’s flee from Italy was to put a fictional story within a recognizable historical context. When outlining the second version of Palemon’s exodus from Rome during the reign of Nero, Strykowski included well-known stories from Suetonius about the cruelty of Nero, who killed his mother to see the womb where he was conceived, killed Seneca in the bath, and ordered to burn Rome⁶⁶. Lithuanian chronicles also placed Palemon’s exodus in the timeframe of Nero’s atrocities, yet Strykowski was more eloquent in this matter.

For Strykowski, the Classics became an inspiration and a mould to shape his genealogy of the Lithuanians via poetry. His introduction to *On the Beginnings* was an imitation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where Palemon played the role of Aeneas:

I am resurrecting the wars and the men,
Who sailed from the Ausonian seashore in the sailing ships,
by the God’s providence, sailed through tightness, Danish straits,
up to the Samogitian seaport, where they pitched their tents⁶⁷.

According to Strykowski, one of the forebears of the Lithuanians were the Cimbri, who settled in the lands between Bug, Dnipro, and Nieman and were described by Florus and Plutarch⁶⁸. Compared to Callimachus or Miechowita, Strykowski’s references to the Classics about the Cimbri and their wars with the Romans emphasized the great contribution of ancient authors to the knowledge about the ancestors of the Lithuanians: “this way, you, Lithuanians, Prussians, Swedes, and Danes,

⁶³ Ibid., p. 75: “Ponieważ Ptolomeus, który wszystkie świat jako na tablicy wymalował”.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 41: “Wojny i mężów wskrzeszam, którzy z auzońskiego / Brzegu w żaglistych nawach z przejrzenia boskiego / Przypłynęli przez ciasności, duński Sundzie, twoje / Nad port żmłodzki, rozbili gdzie namioty swoje.” Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 1–6.

⁶⁸ Strykowski, *O Początkach*, pp. 45, 48f.

have here a history of an array of your ancestors"⁶⁹. Consequently, it was not the guilt of the Greco-Roman authors who did not describe the ancient deeds of the Lithuanians, but it was the fault of the Polish, Lithuanian, and Ruthenian authors who did not find a way to connect the predecessors of their nations with the classical accounts. For Strykowski, this chance derived from Homeric hymns and Virgil's rhythms that allowed him to narrate a coherent story of Palemon's arrival to Lithuania⁷⁰.

Florus' account of civil wars in Rome between Pompey and Caesar became a framework for the fourth version of Palemon's arrival to Lithuania⁷¹. Florus mentioned Publis Libo, whose Lithuanized version became Palemon (sometimes written as Polemon), Pompey's general, who after his commander's death left the Mediterranean Sea to hide as far as possible, arriving in the lands of Samogitia, Prussia, Lithuania, and Livonia, whose name derives from his name (Libo – Livonia)⁷². Yet not only thanks to Florus: since Virgil and Roman satirist Aulus Persius Flaccus mentioned a person called Publius Libo, this allowed Strykowski to justify the existence of Palemon from two ancient sources as a Roman governor in the Baltics⁷³. Strykowski's approach towards the Classics was divergent from earlier humanist practices: the Classics in fact wrote about the Lithuanians, but one had to decipher their evidence and establish trustworthy genealogical continuity.

These shifts in the authors' attitude towards the Classics, as argued above, were not accidental. Arguing against the ancient authors and their lack of knowledge did not prove to be fruitful in a humanist world where antiquity formed a basic frame of reference. Moreover, for the geographical knowledge in the West, Ptolemy, Pliny, and Strabo remained primary authorities whose reputation was unshaken. Use of Ptolemy in university curriculums in Kraków and enlarging private professorial libraries with his *Geographia* was likewise justified – not only because of his scarce accounts of Eastern Europe but since lacking references to antiquity would not add credibility to any treatise⁷⁴. Moreover, referring to Ptolemy and an-

69 Ibid., p. 54: "Tak, Litwinie, Prusaku, Szwedzie i Duńczyku, Macie tu historiją o przodków swych szyku."

70 Ibid., pp. 56 f.

71 Ibid., pp. 69 f.

72 Ibid., p. 71.

73 Ibid., p. 88.

74 On Ptolemy and geography at the Kraków Academy see Paul Knoll, "A Pearl of Powerful Learning". The University of Cracow in the Fifteenth Century, Boston 2016 (Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 52), pp. 373–401, 586 f.; Krzysztof Ożóg, The Role of Poland in the Intellectual Development of Europe in the Middle Ages, Kraków 2009 (Krakow Historical Monographs 1); and Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, Polska myśl historyczna a humanistyczna historia narodowa (1500–1700), Kraków 2011 (Polonica Leguntur 12), p. 117.

cient authors allowed to integrate local knowledge about Central-Eastern Europe into an understandable framework of knowledge production.

The change took place as more interest in Central-Eastern Europe emerged in the West. Humanist authors, writing their biographies, chronicles, and treatises on Poland, Lithuania, and Ruthenia had a different attitude towards the information about the region provided by ancient historians and geographers that ranged from aggressive refusal to pointing out the main misconceptions existing about Poland, Lithuania, and Ruthenia and in the meantime correcting them. This allowed them to follow their own agenda maintaining a traditional humanist approach of referring to the Classics. Relations between Central-Eastern European production of knowledge in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth century differed from the transitional period outlined in my article. In a single treatise, the attitude might shift from condemnation to debunking and use as a verified source. Especially prominent this became in Strykowski's *On the Beginnings* which was less biased towards the accounts of the Classics compared to Miechowita's treatise.

IV Reception of the Origin Theories: the Nobility

The discussion about the Lithuanian and Polish origins and their sources did not go unnoticed by the local nobility which promptly picked up genealogical theories that raised their own prestige in the eyes of their fellow nobles. Sarmatian theory of origins experienced a visible afterlife in material and textual culture. Lithuanian, Polish, and Ruthenian nobles transformed the origin idea of Sarmatia into a distinctive tradition of lifestyle, costumes, and portrait representation⁷⁵. In the early seventeenth century, the so-called *Sarmatian* portrait (a disputed but accepted term in art history) became predominant for depicting the Kings and aristocrats in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, reaching its peak in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century and enduring in popular culture until nowadays⁷⁶. Likewise, Lithuanian, Polish, and Ruthenian *szlachta* (nobility) frequently

⁷⁵ Adam Jasienski, A Savage Magnificence. Ottomanizing Fashion and the Politics of Display in Early Modern East-Central Europe, in: Muqarnas 31 (2014), pp. 173–205, here pp. 186–191.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 175–178; Ewa Zawadzka (Ed.), Portret typu sarmackiego w wieku XVII w Polsce, Czechach, na Słowacji i na Węgrzech, Kraków 1985 (Seminaria Niedzickie 2); Adam Malkiewicz, Co to jest “portret sarmacki”? Kilka uwag na temat terminologii, in: Zawadzka (Ed.), Portret, pp. 43–50; Emilia Kłoda/Adam Szeląg, “Ribald Man with a Cranky Look”. The Sarmatian Portrait as the Pop-Cultural Symbol of the Baroque in Poland, in: Journal of Art Historiography 15 (2016), pp. 1–27; and Tomasz Grusiecki, Going Global? An Attempt to Challenge the Peripheral Position

emphasized their Sarmatian customs via pompous funerals, banquets, and fashion⁷⁷. Noble Orientalizing self-fashioning, especially by the embassies and envoys, such as Jerzy Ossoliński’s embassy to Rome in 1633, became a token of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility together with seventeenth-century poetry about united Polish, Lithuanian, and Ruthenian military successes against the Turks⁷⁸.

Furthermore, the notion of the Sarmatian origins manifested itself in the descriptions of the last Jagiellonian Kings, Sigismund I and Sigismund II Augustus, as well as of their later successors on the throne of the Commonwealth. Early modern poets and humanist frequently emphasized royal militancy and valor through the Sarmatian topos⁷⁹. Geographical knowledge and representing Polish Kings as the Kings of entire Sarmatia played a crucial role in it: to be the King of Poland-Lithuania now meant to be the ruler of *Sarmatia Europea*. For instance, *Carmina De memorabili cede scismaticorum Moscoviorum*, published in 1515 in Rome, included *Sarmatia Europea* to the list of territories reigned by Sigismund I to praise the victory of the united Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian army over the Muscovites at the Battle of Orsha in 1514⁸⁰. The tradition of associating the Kings of the Commonwealth with the rulers of Sarmatia, and thus, the Sarmatians persisted in the later decades⁸¹.

The case of the Roman origin theory slightly differed from the fate of the Sarmatian one. If the Romans arrived in Lithuania and established their state there,

of Early Modern Polish-Lithuanian Painting in the Historiography of Art, in: *The Polish Review* 57 (2012), pp. 3–26.

77 Juliusz A. Chrościcki, *Pompa Funebris: z Dziejów Kultury Staropolskiej*, Warsaw 1974 (Idee I Sztuka), pp. 67–70; Jasienski, *A Savage Magnificence: Roman Krzywy, Ideologia sarmacka wobec tradycji antycznej i renesansowego humanizmu (wprowadzenie do zagadnienia)*, in: Marek Prejs (Ed.) *Humanistyczne modele kultury nowożytnej wobec dziedzictwa starożytnego*, Warszawa 2010 (Humanizm. Syntezy 5), pp. 184–187.

78 Jasienski, *A Savage Magnificence*, p. 186. However, to some extent this fashion became also popular in Hungary and Bohemia. On poetry see: Renarda Ociecek, “Sarmacka frazeologia” w “Wojnie chocimskiej” Wacława Potockiego, in: Ead./Mariola Jarczykowa (Eds.), *Sarmackie Theatrum*, vol. 4: *Studia o literaturze i książce dawnej*, Katowice 2009, pp. 145–154; Marian Kaczmarek, *Sarmacka perspektywa sławy. Nad “Wojną chocimską” Wacława Potockiego*, Wrocław 1982.

79 Jakub Niedźwiedź, *Jagiellonian Epithalamia and New Geographical Knowledge*, in: *ZfslPh* 76 (2020), pp. 339–370.

80 *Carmina De memorabili cede scismaticorum Moscoviorum p[er] Serenis. ac Invictis. D. Sigismundu[m] Rege[m] Polonie magnum Ducem Lituanie, Russie, Prussie Sarmatiaque Europae dominu[m] et heredem apud aras Alexandri magni peracta*, Krakow 1515.

81 One of the finest examples is Stanisław Orzechowski’s *Fidelis subditus*, written in 1543 (second edition in 1548): Stanisław Orzechowski, *Fidelis subditus sive de institutione regia ad Sigismundum Augustum libri du*, in: “*Fidelis subditus*” w redakcji 2-iej z r. 1548, ed. Grzegorz Saenger, Warszawa 1908 (Biblioteka zapomnianych poetów i prozaików polskich XVI–XVIII w. 25).

they should have a kinship that remained in Italy. The topos of closeness between Vilnius and Rome and the citizens of Vilnius with the dwellers of Rome particularly manifested itself in the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century “to point to the continuity of the state established by Palemonas and Gediminas”, although this idea remained permanent in the eighteenth-century literature too⁸². In the 1600s and 1610s, the Lithuanian aristocratic family Pac (Pacai) attempted to establish a linkage with the Florentine Pazzi family referring to the link through Palemon and five hundred noble families that left Italy together with him⁸³. Although it was believed that four major Roman aristocratic families left Italy, there were no Pacai among them and thus for corroborating the link, seventeenth-century Lithuanian authors also used archaeological evidence, deducing Pacai (and even Palemon) from Etruria⁸⁴. The Pacai-Pazzi bondage was further strengthened by religious symbolism when Lithuanian Pacai praised the cult of St. Maria Magdalene de’ Pazzi and honoured her with a chapel in Pažaislis⁸⁵. The legend of Pacai-Pazzi kinship became particularly enduring and survived until the nineteenth century, once more underlining the durability of such origin myths and their impact on noble self-fashioning in Eastern Europe⁸⁶.

Historians frequently argue that Sarmatian and Roman origin theories in the course of the 18th century transformed into distinct cultural traditions that defined the style of life, customs, culture, and behaviour of Polish, Lithuanian, and Ruthenian nobility⁸⁷. However, this was valid not for all nobles and not in all spheres of life: for instance, architecture did not experience its own Sarmatian style; likewise, the Cossack tradition in Ukraine prevailed over the Sarmatian one in the late

⁸² Vilniaus pasveikinimas. XVI–XVIII amžiaus tekstų rinkinys / Gratulatio Vilnae. Textus electi XVI–XVIII saeculi, ed. Eugenija Ulčinaitė, Vilnius 2001 (Senoji Lietuvos literatūra 10), quote from p. 47, see also pp. 37, 45–47, 59.

⁸³ Aušra Baniulytė, The Pazzi Family in Lithuania. Myth and Politics in the European Court Society of the Early Modern Age, in: *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 58 (2009), pp. 41–57, here pp. 51f.; id., Italian Intrigue in the Baltic. Myth, Faith, and Politics in the Age of Baroque, in: *JEMH* 16 (2012), pp. 23–52, here p. 34.

⁸⁴ For the names of the aristocratic families who fled Italy, see Strykowski, *O Początkach*, pp. 63, 88–89; and Baniulytė, *Italian Intrigue*, pp. 35f.

⁸⁵ Baniulytė, *Italian Intrigue*, pp. 50f.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸⁷ Janusz Tazbir, *Sarmatyzm a barok*, in: *Kwartalnik historyczny* 76 (1969), pp. 815–830, here pp. 818–820; Maria Bogucka, *The Lost World of the ‘Sarmatians’. Custom as the Regulator of Polish Social Life in Early Modern Times*, Warsaw 1996, pp. 19–51, 90–110; and Tomasz Grusiecki, *Connoisseurship from Below. Art Collecting and Participatory Politics in Poland-Lithuania, 1587–1648*, in: *Journal of the History of Collections* 29 (2017), pp. 209–226, here p. 213.

seventeenth century⁸⁸. Compared to the example of the Pacai-Pazzi family, emphasizing Sarmatian origins in the public space, such as processions, embassies, portraits was more fashionable because of its imagined 'oriental' character⁸⁹. Cultural traditions that follow the wider acceptance of the origin myths demonstrate, as many scholars argued, that the same idea may function diversely in different periods: as an origin myth, as a political program, or as a historiographical relict⁹⁰.

Resume

Neither of the works explored in this article aimed to be a complete scientific treatise on the genealogy of the Central-Eastern European peoples⁹¹. It would not be possible because of the formats their authors chose: a biography, ethnographical treatise, and mixed poetic-prosaic imitation of Virgil. Genealogical tables in early modern Poland and Lithuania predominantly focused on the ruling dynasty (like Decius' *De Jagiellonum familia*) rather than on the entire 'nation' or an aristocratic family, though with an advancement of the culture of Sarmatism they became popular among Lithuanian, Polish, and Ruthenian nobility in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Several patterns of attitude towards the classical authors prevailed among the historians in early modern Poland and Lithuania as the ancient authors failed to present the origins of the Poles and Lithuanians. The early modern knowledge-creators could either reject the classical evidence, draw on scattered mentions that allowed them to identify ancient tribes with contemporary peoples, or attempt to reconcile the classical tradition with the evidence from their times and medieval

⁸⁸ Jakub Niedźwiedź, Sarmatyzm, czyli tradycja wynaleziona, in: *Teksty Drugie. Teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja* 151 (2015), pp. 46–62.

⁸⁹ However, one should not surmise that Sarmatian 'culture', as it is often called, was unequivocally internalized by szlachta. Janusz Maciejewski, Sarmatyzm jako formacja kulturowa. Geneza i główne cechy wyodrębniające, in: *Teksty: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja* 4 (1974), pp. 13–42, here p. 34.

⁹⁰ Tazbir, Sarmatyzm, p. 827; Stanisław Cynarski, The Shape of Sarmatian Ideology in Poland, in: *Acta Poloniae Historica* 19 (1968), pp. 5–17; Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, Sarmatismus – Zur Begriffsgeschichte und den Chancen und Grenzen als forschungsleitender Begriff, in: *JGO* 57 (2009), pp. 402–408.

⁹¹ Although Miechowita's treatise was written in a scholarly manner compared to the other two works analyzed, he primarily envisioned its role as a correction to several misconceptions existing about the region to shed light on some neglected aspects and falsified accounts. The task of embedding the history of the Poles in a broader picture of European history was conducted in Marcin Kromer, *De Origine et Rebus Gestis Polonorum libri XXX*, Basel 1555.

chronicles. While for many Renaissance authors classical knowledge was the main source of inspiration, the Classics created a specific ambivalence for the authors outlining the Polish and Lithuanian origins in their attitude and prompted a need to balance between the classical knowledge and their own aims. Moreover, for making the origin accounts and genealogy of their people, geography mattered as much as history, and in a way, *geography* became the *history* of those people in “an attempt to substitute cartographic for genealogic thinking”⁹².

The role early modern genealogy played for national identity of ethnopolitical communities across Europe cannot be underestimated. In a symbolical manner, the genealogical idea that links the early modern Lithuanians with ancient Romans manifests itself even in contemporary era. The frescoes in one of the halls of the *Domus Philologiae* at Vilnius University, painted in the 1980s by Petras Repšys, depict the most important lines that formed the basis of Lithuanian identity throughout history. One of the most picturesque parts of the wall is dedicated to Motiejus Kazimieras Sarbievijus (Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius, 1595–1640) whose words from Ode 35 *Ad Paulum Coslovium* four centuries later still resonate in the minds of the Lithuanians, echoing the early modern origin myth:

Illinc picta procul quae radiantibus
Fulgent fana tholis et geminam super
Despectabimus arcem.
Magni regna Palaemonis.
Et qua conspicuis se Gediminia
Iactant saxa iugis, et Capitolium,
Et quae tecta superbis
Intrant nubila turribus⁹³.

From thence, farre off, the Temples wee'l behold,
And radiant Scutcheons all adorn'd with gold;
Then wee'l looke o're that double towre,
Th'extent of great Palaemon's pow're...
Where Gediminian Rocks themselves extoll
With their plaine tops, and then the Capitol,
Those buildings, whose proud turrets stretch
Themselves to th'Cloudes, and stars doe reach⁹⁴.

The myth-creators of the Polish and Lithuanian early modern origin stories used the classical references not merely as a tribute to the Renaissance history-writing traditions. They rather contradicted, blamed, and criticized ancient historians for their fabrications and lack of attention to validate the new origin accounts. Reception of Sarmatian and Roman origins in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when from an intellectual origin narration these stories transformed into a separate cultural tradition, deserves a separate mention. Starting with the end of the sixteenth century, the horizons of *Sarmatism* and the *universe of Palemon* began

⁹² Bonda, *History*, p. 86; the quotation can be found in Piechocki, *Cartographic Humanism*, p. 86.

⁹³ Maciej K. Sarbiewski et al., *Matthiae Casimiri Sarbievii Lyricorum libri tres, Epigrammatum liber vnus*, Kalisz 1681, pp. 227–229.

⁹⁴ Maciej K. Sarbiewski, *The Odes of Casimire* (The Augustan Reprint Society. Publication 44), Los Angeles 1953, pp. 101–103.



Fig. 1: *Domus Philologiae*, Vilnius University. Painting by Petras Repšys. Photo by Oleksii Rudenko, May 2022.

to expand. Instead of a relatively limited circle of historians, humanists, cartographers, and poets in the sixteenth century, affiliation with one of the (sometimes

even both) origin narratives became far more widespread in poetry, prefaces, laudations, and costumes in the seventeenth century, reemerging in the Romantic literature in the nineteenth century⁹⁵.

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95 Niedzwiedź, Sarmatyzm, p. 54.

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