

Latinitas and Identity Formation in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries). An Introduction

Giovanna Siedina (*University of Verona, Italy*)

The idea of publishing the articles gathered here originated during the congress held in March 2012 in Florence, which was devoted to the influence of the Latin heritage on the formation and the development of identities in the lands of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries. The authors of the articles are some of the major specialists on this topic from Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus and Italy.

The influence of *Latinitas* in a wide and diversified territory as was that of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is a very broad subject, which has many aspects. Only in recent years has it been studied from an areal point of view, and not only anachronistically in a modern ‘national’ key. This same topic was the subject of the thematic block that I organized for the 15th Congress of Slavists held in Minsk (Belarus) from August 20 to August 27, 2013. The considerable interest aroused by the papers read there¹ and the lively discussion that ensued convinced me that the efforts lavished on organizing the congress and the thematic block were not in vain.

The articles published here reflect, at least partly the different approaches and the different degree to which the Latin heritage has been studied in the countries that now occupy the territory of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, that is Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus. Besides the political factors, which have certainly slowed down research in this field since WWII, as well as the formation of good specialists in Classical studies in Ukraine and Belarus’, the number and the level of publications seems to be directly proportional to the importance that *Latinitas* has had in their cultural and historical development. And thus, while in Poland and Lithuania the scholarly discourse on *Latinitas* has been an active field of study, for several decades², in Belarus

¹ They had been previously published as a *Forum* on the 2012 issue of the journal “*Studi Slavistici*”, pp. 199-289, available online at the following website: <http://www.fupress.net/index.php/ss/issue/view/895> (accessed 30th August 2014).

² Cf., besides the many monographic publications on single authors, themes, works, books with a wider scope that approach the theme of *Latinitas* from different points of view. Such are, to name a few, *Łacina w kulturze polskiej* (1998) by A.W. Mikołajczak, *Łacina jako język elit* (2004), J. Axer, ed., the periodical “*Łacina w Polsce*” (1995-), published by the Center for Research on Classical Tradition in Poland and in West-Central Europe (Ośrodek Badań nad Tradycją Antyczną w Polsce i w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej).

and Ukraine it is a less developed area of research and is affected (particularly in the case of Ukraine) by the dearth of specialists with an appropriate level of knowledge. Such a level is necessary to create synergies with other specialists, to pursue multidisciplinary approaches to the theme as well as to achieve the scholarly standards of publication of Latin texts. As regards Belarus, the numerous publications by Žanna Nekraševič-Karotkaja of Minsk University distinguish themselves for the skill with which the best methodologies elaborated by Western critical thought in the last decades have been applied to the study of Latin legacy in the literature of Belarus and more in general of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania³.

The articles collected in this volume, all published in English, range from history to literature and to cultural history and the history of ideas. They analyze the issue of building an identity, either real or imagined, from different points of view. One of the most interesting topics is the classical origins of myths and ideas that have helped build the national identities of those that constituted the ethnic mosaic of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The articles by Žanna Nekraševič-Karotkaja, Jakub Niedźwiedz and Alexandr Osipin in particular are devoted to this topic.

By skillfully combining the historical-comparative method, the theory of reader-response criticism (cf. Hans Robert Jauss), and the main principles of hermeneutic literary studies, Nekraševič-Karotkaja evaluates the role of the genre of epopee in the literary process of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the Renaissance and early Baroque periods. The genre of epopee was considered the genre par excellence in classical poetry, and in the Renaissance it developed mostly in Latin, and not in national languages. The author retraces the epic genre in the aforementioned area, starting with the classical epopees of Virgilian style, such as the historical-dynastic epos *Bellum Prutenum* by Ioannes Visliciensis (1516), the first poetic presentation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which is essentially a panegyric and dynastic epos in honor of the Jagiellonian dynasty. Nekraševič-Karotkaja rightly stresses that the new humanistic understanding of the idea of *herois perfecti* (perfect hero) of the early humanists (especially those from the ‘German cultural space’) extends to the literature of the aforementioned region. According to this new understanding, everything associated with intellectual activity was considered worthy of praise (and thus of being described in the ‘heroic’ meter – the hexameter), just as military feats on the battlefield. This shift, as Nekraševič-Karotkaja demonstrates, is well reflected in the poetry of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (cf. the poems by Nicolaus Hussovianus). At the same time the author also remarks on the difference between the Polish Crown, where in the seventeenth century the number of epic poems written in Polish steadily increased, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Latin preserved its dominant position in the heroic epic. The author rightly points to the expansion of the genre repertoire of epic poetry in the transition

³ Cf. in particular, her monographs *Belaruskaja lacinamoŭnaja paëzija: ranni Rènesans*, Minsk 2009; *Belaruskaja lacinamoŭnaja paëma: pozni Rènesans i rannjajae Baroka*, Minsk 2011.

period between the Renaissance and the Baroque, to include *epinicion*, panegyric poems, poem-*hodoeporicon*, *carmen heroicum*. This expansion is paralleled, in the poetry of many Central and Eastern European countries of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, by the appearance of epic elements, formally marked by the predominance of the hexameter as the poetic meter. The hexameter was used not only in *carmina heroica*, but also in hymns, odes, eclogues, *epithalamia*, panegyrics, even in scientific treatises (in verse)⁴.

Quite aptly, Nekraševič-Karotkaja applies to the epic literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania the four stages that Averincev identified in the history of ancient epos: *thesis – antithesis – synthesis (the second classic) – removal*. This allows her to see the literary works she illustrates here in the relevant literary line, up to the period of parody, when heroic epos was replaced by mock-heroic epos: first in Latin, and then in the national languages. As to the evolution of epic poetry in the literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as the author states, it can be described with the help of the pattern suggested by H. R. Jauss: the Renaissance poems as a positive model, then the renewal stage during the early Baroque period, gradual automatization in the late Baroque and the Age of Enlightenment and, finally, the period of parody. At the same time, some specific features of the multilingual literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania make it ‘unsuitable’ for inclusion in the framework of any evolutionary conception. Latin poetry, concludes the author, offered two ways of achieving the goal of creating the image of a national hero, that is the military and Christian ideal *herois perfecti*. It was Latin epos that allowed many, mostly Slavic authors, to determine their identity and creative originality while poets of Western Europe created heroic poems in their national languages. Such a conclusion seems to be well illustrated by the next article, by Jakub Niedźwiedz.

Indeed, Niedźwiedz investigates the influence of Virgil’s poetry, and especially of his *Aeneid*, on Lithuanian early modern ‘national’ identity, which was also triggered by the humanistic ways of reading Virgil’s texts and the sixteenth-century imitative procedures. In order to verify his hypothesis, the author analyzes eight epic poems published in Polish and Latin between 1516 and 1592. Several topics used in these poems are examined. They are: Lithuania’s location in Europe and its geography, Lithuanian history, its inhabitants’ sense of identity and the definition of homeland. These passages read together evoke a coherent image of the sixteenth-century Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the conclusions the author argues that the *Aeneid* provided Polish and Lithuanian poets with a language they could use for creating and expressing Lithuanian identity. When taken together, the poems analyzed, each as though it contained a fragment of the

⁴ Although the author does not make mention of it, the expansion of the epic element in the poetry of many Central and East European countries is probably connected with the blurring of the boundaries between epics and the poetry of praise that had its roots in the Renaissance didactic theory of art. See O.B. Hardison, *The Enduring Monument: A Study of the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice*, Chapel Hill, NC, 1962, esp. pp. 43-67 and 71-72.

history of Lithuania, present five stories that can be read as myth-like narratives. They are the ethnogenetic myth, the legendary foundation of the capital city, the change in the religious order, the legendary victory and finally the tale about a contemporary hero who links this ancient history to the poet's present time.

In this context, the sixteenth-century poems on the subject of Lithuania can be treated as an attempt, in several distinct voices, to build an epic story about Lithuanian identity similar to the official interpretation of Romanity in the days of Augustus as redefined in the *Aeneid*.

The article by A. Osipian, for its part, focuses on the invention, by a pre-modern society, of a prestigious lineage in the construction of group genealogies at the micro-level of one city, one book, one author.

And thus, Osipian's article investigates the invention of prestigious ancestors and the construction of collective genealogy for Lviv's/Lemberg's urban patriciate in J.-B. Zimorowicz's *Leopolis triplex* (1650s-1670s). The author examines how Zimorowicz portrayed his contemporary patriciate as having the necessary virtues to govern the city as well as being ennobled by using quotations from Tacitus' *Germania*. The case study of a single quotation from Tacitus' *Annales* demonstrates early modern perceptions about virtues considered innate for a given ethnos and inherited by its members through many generations. The article exploits the interconnectedness of the social and ethnic in forming an image of an urban community, in particular when presenting social conflict as ethnic strife (between the Catholic patriciate and Armenian merchants). It analyzes how Zimorowicz tried to legitimate accelerations or delays in the social mobility of different groups of the city's population in his opus. This analysis also contributes to a better understanding of how the nobility's model – Sarmatism – influenced the urban patriciate's views of its prestigious past. In fact, the way in which Zimorowicz constructed ethnically divided genealogies of socially different strata in the contemporary Lemberg community followed the early modern model of the Sarmatian myth, according to which Polish noblemen were descendants of the belligerent Sarmatian nomads. In synthesis, the article contributes to research into the seventeenth-century urban elites' worldview, including their understanding of how the past was reshaped for present purposes.

The articles by Aleksandr Wojciech Mikołajczak and Piotr Urbański examine Polish-Latin poetry and its role, as a conveyor of *Latinitas*, in the development of national identities. Mikołajczak's aim is to suggest how the coexistence and later the synthesis of Christian and Antique themes shaped the fundamental trend of Renaissance and Baroque poetry in Latin Poland. Through a succinct overview of the reception of single motifs, themes and ideas of Latin writers by Polish-Latin poets, the author also delineates the growth of the influence of *Latinitas* in Polish literature and culture. Such growth can be briefly described as a passage from *imitatio antiquorum* to *aemulatio antiquorum*: the latter to be understood as the poet's play between the topic and the convention or between the topic and the language, a sort of creative dialogue with his ancient model. This evolution in the reception of *Latinitas* is evident in Polish-Latin poetry starting with Kochanowski, and received a peculiar development in the works of Maciej

Kazimierz Sarbiewski: they are the expression of a new epoch, characterized by a specific synthesis of the Greek-Roman heritage, biblical tradition, the influence of Counter-Reformation ideas and Baroque stylistics. At the same time, Sarbiewski's works are the expression of a new vision of Christian Horatianism in which the fundamental issues of human existence played the most important part. By using *topoi* and themes taken from Horace, Sarbiewski expressed the drama of men searching for existential choices in an individual dialogue with God. Regrettably, Sarbiewski's followers did not match his talent. Finally, Mikołajczak briefly outlines how Polish *Latinitas* was influenced by the ideology of *Sarmatism*. This ideology, popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and strictly linked to the culture of the gentry, aptly exploited Latin and Roman *topoi* as a source for both political argumentation and literary concept and play.

Centered around Sarbiewski's *oeuvre* and especially delving into the issue of Sarbiewski's real or supposed Sarmatism is Urbański's article. The author's central question is whether Sarbiewski thought of his poetry as an instrument with which to construct either a national or a universal, that is a European identity. In order to clarify this central issue, the author on the one hand reconstructs Jesuit ideology, while on the other investigates the different role and purpose of Latin poetry in the Renaissance *vis-à-vis* the Baroque period. At the same time, Urbański also examines statements made by Polish and Lithuanian scholars about Sarbiewski's Sarmatism and discusses the situation of Neo-Latin poetry in the seventeenth century, and its translations into vernacular languages (in Sarbiewski's case into English) as evidence of its reception and understanding. From his analysis of all the above-mentioned aspects, Urbański deduces that in the case of Sarbiewski's poetry, the only community and/or identity that he wanted to extol and develop was European, rooted in the Horatian or rather Roman set of values, perceived through the poet's Christian understanding of the world. As the author cogently proves, both his contemporaries and later generations considered Sarbiewski as *Horatius Christianus* rather than *Horatius Sarmaticus* (this appellative was first used only in 1721). The former term indicated his poetry as a new, Christian incarnation of the poetry of Horace, and placed it within the international community of the *Respublica literaria*. The cultural, literary and philosophical traditions that characterized his *Lycorum libri* constituted a common language of values which constructed a universal, European identity. It is not by accident that he was much more popular abroad, which seems to be indicated, among other, by the very limited number of Polish translations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by the numerous English translations, imitations, emulations, and paraphrases⁵, as well as by the history of the editions of his *Lycorum libri*.

Sarbiewski's Latin legacy had a prominent place in Ukrainian Neo-Latin poetry, which is what emerges in my article devoted to one aspect of the recep-

⁵ Cf. K. Fordoński, P. Urbański, *Casimir Britannicus: English Translations, Paraphrases, and Emulations of the Poetry of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski*, revised and expanded edition, London 2010.

tion of Horace in the Kyiv-Mohylanian poetics⁶, namely the use of Horace's poetry in the teaching of metrics provided by these manuals. I show how Latin poetry was used as a didactic tool to support the education of devout men and loyal citizens. Besides the 'simple' quotation of Horace's lyrics, the other modes of Horatian imitation in the Mohylanian poetics entail his Christianization. The latter took different forms: particularly favored by Mohylanian teachers were parodies, following the masterful example of M. K. Sarbiewski, the transformation of Horace's lyric in a Christian key, and the use of Horatian meters to compose poems on Christian topics (particularly appreciated were paraphrases of the Psalms by the Scottish poet George Buchanan).

These three modes were in line with the Christian interpretation/imitation of Horace that had begun in Western Europe in the first centuries after Christ and continued in different guises well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, for Jesuit pedagogy, to which education at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy harked back, poetry was a veritable 'spiritual exercise', a sort of poetic theology⁷. Horace's poetry for its metrical virtuosity and its brilliant verbal craftsmanship provided an excellent model for the introduction of Christian contents. On the other hand, I observe that many motifs of Horace's poetry could easily be made to coincide with the ethical and religious tenets of education at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy: for instance, reflections on the brevity of human life, the impossibility of achieving complete happiness, the avoidance of excesses, contentment with little, love of virtue and the like. In conclusion I assert that the Christianization and moralization of Horace's poetry, next to denying the legitimacy of the pagan pantheon, to which a Christian one was opposed, was a way for Mohylanian cultural élite to implicitly assert their own worth and distinct cultural identity, which in early-modern Ukraine, as elsewhere, in great part passed through schooling and literature.

The article by Valentyna Myronova contains an analysis of the chancellery Latin language, which was used in legal proceedings and record keeping in the Galician Rus' of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. Myronova based her research on the analysis of the books of records of the *Grodskyyi* and *Zemskyyi* courts of Galician Rus', each of which had a brief preface, and name and geographic indexes. A characteristic feature of the Latin language of this period (despite its sacredness) was the fact that it was being used by bilingual readers, and the degree of individual mastery of Latin at that time was determined both by the talent of each author and by specific circumstances. As the author observes, due to the parallel usage of Latin and Ukrainian words, the vocabulary structures inevitably interacted, and therefore the Latin used in this period in the territory

⁶ With the term Kyiv-Mohylanian poetics I refer to the poetics courses taught at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy from its foundation (1631-1632) to approximately the middle of the eighteenth century. Most of them are still in manuscript form and are kept in the manuscript section (*Instytut Rukopysu*, IR) of the National Library of Ukraine in Kyiv (*Nacional'na Biblioteka Ukraïny*, NBU).

⁷ Cf. A. Li Vigni, *Poeta quasi creator. Estetica e poesia in Mathias Casimir Sarbiewski*, Palermo 2005, p. 28 ff.

of the Galician Rus' underwent modifications by absorbing a number of lexical, morphological and syntactic features of the Ukrainian language.

A few more words concerning the study of Latin heritage in Ukraine. A good part of the Latin literary texts (school manuals of different subjects, poems of different genres, prose orations, Church sermons and the like) still have to be studied and published. Some progress has been made in the publication and commentary of Latin texts in the last few decades⁸, but a comprehensive assessment of the place of Ukrainian Neo-Latin literature (and of poetry in particular) with regard to the literature written in Polish, Church Slavonic and old-Ukrainian in the sixteenth-eighteenth century still remains a task for the future.

Sigitas Narbutas's article specifically assesses the development of *Latinitas* in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the perspective of Latin books. The scholar identifies the three periods that saw the emergence, the establishment and the independent development of Latin literature in Lithuania: although they were of different lengths, their significance was similar. The first period (emergence) spans from the rule of Mindaugas (1253-1263) to that of Alexander Jagiellon (1460-1506). The second period lasts from the rule of Sigismund I the Old (1467-1548) to that of Sigismund I August (1520-1572). The third period encompasses the time from the reign of Stephen I Báthory (1533-1586) to the rule of Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732-1798) and the Third partition of the Commonwealth in 1795⁹.

As Narbutas argues, the number of Latin books published in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by Lithuanian authors rose from 3 in the fifteenth century to reach the quite impressive number of 1,790 by the eighteenth century. As to the topics of these books, Narbutas also assesses the qualitative factor, dividing

⁸ It is not possible in this limited space to give all pertinent bibliographical references. I will just mention, among others, my recent monograph *Joasaf Krokovs'kyj nella poesia neolatina dei suoi contemporanei*, Bologna 2012, 224 pp., and my article *Il concetto di virtù nella celebrazione epico-panegirica nella letteratura neolatina ucraina (fine del XVII-inizio del XVIII secolo)*, "Studi Slavistici", IX, 2012, pp. 243-271 (available at: <http://www.fupress.net/index.php/ss/article/view/12241/11605>; accessed 30th August 2014). For the main bibliographical references concerning the Kyiv-Mohylanian poetics, cf. G. Siedina, *The Poetic Laboratory of the Kyiv-Mohylan Poetics. Some Practical Illustrations*, "Studi Slavistici", VIII, 2011, pp. 41-60 (available online at the website: <http://www.fupress.net/index.php/ss/article/view/10518/9905>; accessed 30th August 2014), footnote 1. Worthy of particular mention are the articles by N. Yakovenko on the Latin poems *De bello Ostrogiano* (1600) by Simones Pecalides and Camoenae Borysthenides (1620) by Ioannes Dąbrowski in her book *Paralelnyj svit. Doslidžennja z istorii ujavljen' ta idej v Ukraini XVI-XVII st.*, Kyiv 2002. Recently O. Cyhanok has published a book entitled *Funeral'ne pysmenstvo v ukrajins'kyx poetykax ta rytorykax XVII-XVIII st.: teorija ta vzirci*, Kyiv 2014. A quite general overview of Ukrainian Neo-Latin literature is contained in the monograph by L. Ševčenko-Savčyns'ka, *Latynomovna Ukrajins'ka literatura. Zahal'nyj ohljad*, Kyiv 2013.

⁹ As Narbutas avers, these dates do not denote the end of *Latinitas* in Lithuania or Poland, both of which lost their independence, but they only refer to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

the book production of the analyzed period into: 1) belles-lettres (works of poetry, rhetorical prose and dramaturgy); 2) religious books, also for the needs of the Lithuanian Catholic and Protestant Churches; 3) publications of humanities (*artes liberales*) and different schoolbooks.

Interestingly enough, as the author asserts, most of the works published in Latin in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries was represented by panegyric publications, followed by salutatory, epithalamic and funerary texts. It seems to me that this realization is quite significant, in that it confirms, from the quantitative point of view, the predominance of the epic-panegyric element in the literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, of which Nekraševič-Karotkaja speaks so extensively. In turn, this predominance itself reveals the fundamental role of *Latinitas* in the elaboration and celebration of the history of the peoples constituting the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and thus in the formation of their identity.

Lastly, Pociute's article is devoted to the Lithuanian Reformation pioneer Abraomas Kulvietis (Abraham Culvensis, ca. 1510-1545), of whom she reconstructs the humanistic background and his relations with the Italian philo-Protestant context in the first half of the sixteenth century. Besides reconstructing Kulvietis' biography, Pociute dwells at length on his *Confessio fidei*, written in 1543 and considered to be the first evangelical *confessio fidei* in Poland and Lithuania as well as the first recorded Protestant text in Lithuania. The article illustrates in detail the early Lithuanian Protestant ideas declared in Kulvietis' Latin *Confessio fidei* and suggests that the pioneer of the Lithuanian Reformation was inspired by the work of the famous Italian dissident Bernardino Ochino, who fled Siena in the same year (1542) and wrote the first Italian Protestant manifesto *Epistola di Bernardino Ochino alli molto magnifici signori, li signori di Balia della città di Siena*. As Pociute concludes, both texts have much in common in terms of their ideas and rhetoric.

The articles presented in this volume only cover a small number of all the issues that *Latinitas* brought about in the cultural development of the area analyzed. Because of the significance of *Latinitas* for both common European cultural traditions and the national cultures, literatures and languages of Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine, it is to be hoped that the subject will continue to attract a good level of attention in the future. Since all the above-mentioned states either had their origins in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or were closely related to it, *Latinitas* in this area can be considered a perspective topic for future research. Moreover, given its importance, it would be good to make it the topic of a research project with a European dimension, which would also involve specialists in Neo-Latin literatures of other European countries. Therefore, I hope that this volume can serve as the initial step towards a wider research project.