

**Michał Czerenkiewicz**

*Belgijska Sarmacja, staropolska Belgia*

Warszawa: Muzeum Pałac w Wilanowie 2013  
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Relationships between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Netherlands have absorbed Polish researchers for almost a century (Kot 1926) both in terms of politics (Czapliński 1952, 1966), economy (Mączak 1972), and art (Ojrzyński 1978; Hrankowska 1995).<sup>1</sup> In the last few decades a literary movement dominated by Andrzej Borowski – a real *Spiritus Litterarum Neerlandicorum Polonorum* (Kiedroń 2015: 9-23) – and his followers, has come to the forefront. In his book *Iter Polono-Belgo-Ollandicum* published in 2008 Borowski presents cultural relations between humanists and writers from Poland and Seventeen Provinces, with distinction between the Southern Netherlands and the Northern Netherlands. It is a comprehensive work based on a long-term research that extends beyond one discipline. Thus, it might seem that every consecutive attempt to face the issues discussed in *Iter Polono-Belgo-Ollandicum* will turn out to be secondary. Michał Czerenkiewicz's *Belgijska Sarmacja, staropolska Belgia* takes up this challenge.

While Andrzej Borowski included in his work the broadest possible range of relationships between Poland and the Netherlands, Michał Czerenkiewicz focused his attention on literary relations between Poland and the territories which were under Habsburg rule after 1585, namely today's Belgium. The Author narrowed down the chronological frame of his research to the years 1609-1649, which are determined by death dates of Justus Lipsius and Nicolaus de Vernulz, while making remarks about earlier and later periods. The decision, by all means, seems to be well-aimed. It was a time when the division into Catholic South and independent, protestant North, in which opposing cultural models were developing, became established.

The book published by the Wilanów Palace Museum is comprised of three independent, essayistic chapters, which in a certain part constitute the development of texts

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<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to mention in this review all anthologies and dispersed articles describing Polish-Netherlandish relations.

published by the Author on the Museum's website in the *Silva Rerum* series (<http://www.wilanow-palac.pl/silvarerum>).

In the first, rather short, essay, which simultaneously serves as an introduction to further texts, Michał Czerenkiewicz collates early modern definitions of Sarmatia and Belgium. The Author emphasizes that the use of the latter term in the context of the epoch and with reference to the Southern Netherlands only shall be regarded as conventional. This may arouse controversy among historians who, not without reason, consider it to be an anachronism (Duke 2009: 24-40). All the Low Countries and their inhabitants were referred to as Belgium and Belgians, which the Author emphasizes himself. Therefore, a more appropriate solution would be to use the name of the most important province of the Spanish Netherlands at the time, that is Brabant. This would be even more justified since the geographic scope of *Belgijska Sarmacja...* is narrowed down to this particular province, however, the literary concept of the title would then lose a lot.

"In Brabant: Leuven – 'Belgian Athens,' Brussels, Antwerp" is a dominant chapter in reviewed book. It is there where figures of South Netherlandish humanists liaising with the representatives of Polish nobility and clergy are presented, and where the reception of their works in Poland is analysed. Justus Lipsius and his followers, and inheritors of tradition connected with him, Erijk van de Putte and Nicolas de Vernulz, are the leading characters. Unfortunately, in spite of the announcement in the title, the reader will not learn a lot about the literary culture of Brabant cities mentioned there. They serve as the background for deliberations on the creative output of the humanists.

As I have already mentioned, the year 1609 does not constitute a rigid time frame of the text, but it is rather used as a pretext for introducing Polish writers to the scene, from whose occasional writings the image of late Lipsius emerges. Not only does the Author of the discourse draw the attention to his contribution to the development of the University of Leuven and the political thought in Europe, but also to the knowledge about his most significant works in Poland. *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri VI*, whose Polish translation was published in 1595 in Cracow, occupies a special place among them. On account of the significance and popularity of the Commonwealth of Poland in Lipsius's works, the Author discusses this work more broadly by bringing its main assumptions closer. Eventually, he invites brother Fabian Birkowski and brother Wespazjan Kochowski to take the floor. The author depicts the portrait of the Leuven professor on the basis of their elegiac texts.

Erijk van de Putte, in turn, known in the Commonwealth as Erycius Puteanus, is shown in *Belgijska Sarmacja...*, above all, as a headmaster of the *Palestra bonae mentis* rhetoric school. The Author devotes much space to the school's programme and teaching methods, revealing at the same time his own techniques of a classical philologist. The newcomers from Poland from the Daniłowicz, Kostek and Sapięha families were also educated there under the watchful eye of Puteanus, who himself dedicated his treatise *Elementa basilica quibus educatio principis continetur e praelectionibus publicis* to the latter ones. The subject of Czerenkiewicz's analysis is also *res publica litteraria* – the correspondence between the humanist and representatives of Polish and Lithuanian nobility, such as Jakub Rozdrażewski, Jan Potocki, and Stanisław Koniecpolski. *Polonica* connected with

Puteanus are complemented by the letter addressed to Prince Władysław Vasa, who was allegedly present in the Spanish camp during the siege of Breda.

Lipsius's and Puteanus's letters were well known in the Commonwealth of Poland. However, another professor of the Leuven *alma mater* Nicolaus de Vernulz contributed to popularisation of knowledge about Poland. He would eagerly use Polish threads in his works by writing, inter alia, the tragedy *Divus Stanislaus* based on Marcin Kromer's chronicle. He was also familiar with other works concerning Polish history which he had gathered in his library. By the way, the studies on book collections brought about by the Author seem to be extremely prospective for further studies on Polish-Netherlandish relations.

The essential part of *Belgijska Sarmacja...* ends with a short chapter dedicated to the presence of Netherlandish Jesuits on Polish territory and relations between Polish and 'Belgian' provinces of this order.

The reading reveals a truly erudite and valuable text with an interestingly selected and rich iconographic aspect (there is, however, a repeated figure depicting Leuven on pp. 26 and 55 from the Jacques Le Roy's album). The unequal size of the above mentioned chapters of *Belgijska Sarmacja...* makes the enjoyment of reading slightly less pleasant. The use of Latin name (*Asper Collis*) of the basilica of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel (*Aspricollis* on p. 74), and interchangeable use of terms *Netherlandisch* (p. 32) and *Flemish* scholar to describe Justus Lipsius (p. 29, Lipsius was born in a Brabant town Overijse, his father came from Brussels, which was the capital of the province. In this case the term *Flemish* is anachronic) may also raise doubts. Moreover, the Author assigned the town of Halle to the Duchy of Brabant, although it belonged to the County of Hainaut in the modern age (p. 34).

In the course of writing *Belgijska Sarmacja...* Michał Czerenkiewicz used the widest possible source database. While recreating the network of Polish-Netherlandish relations, not only did he reach out to the published writings and correspondence, but also to *alba amicorum* conducted by the travellers from Poland, where aristocrats and humanists from the lands visited, including Low Countries, put their names. In view of the choice of literature and coverage of the subject from the perspective of a classical philologist, Michał Czerenkiewicz's work brings a new quality to Netherlandish studies in Poland.

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