

THE EARLIEST ANCIENT TESTIMONIES OF THE VISTULA*

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It is very rarely that Pomponius Mela's name makes it into scholarly works on Slavic lands in antiquity. While he cannot rival with the major testimonies by Pliny the Elder, Tacitus and Ptolemy, he still deserves an important place among the ancient geographers of what are today Slavic territories, since as the author of a *Chorography* (the *De situ Orbis*) he is the earliest Roman geographer whose work has been preserved whole, and with the loss of Varro, Nepos and Sallust, is the first complete monument of Roman geographic literature (dated to 43/44 AD).

In the *Chorography*, which describes the *oikoumene* in the form of a periplus, Mela entered the northern reaches of Europe twice: first from the south, in his description of the Black Sea in II 1 ff., and second from the north, as he depicted an external periplus of Europe in III 33 ff. In the north he knew Germania, Sarmatia and Scythia, and especially in the case of the latter two, which encompass some of the Slavic lands, he demonstrated much material originating with Herodotus or even Hecataeus of Miletus, i.e. he repeated information from the 5th century BC, or even earlier¹. For Mela, like other Roman geographer authors, was an armchair scholar and a man of letters who complained about the dryness of geographical matter and tried to make his descriptions of northern peoples vivid in a literary sense. Therefore he included in his work, usually without citing his sources, information drawn from various authors and times, so that with small exceptions its origins are not contemporary with him and may reach far into the past. So did most Roman geographers. Thus before evaluating a testimony provided by any ancient geographer, one ought to first determine its source and time of origin, as the age when our author wrote need not dictate the time when

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¹ H. PHILIPP, *Pomponius Mela. Geographie des Erdkreises*, vol. I, Leipzig 1912, p. 63; F. KROHN, *Bursians Jahresb.* CCXVII 1928, p. 97; M.I. ROSTOWCEW, *Skythien und der Bosphorus*, Berlin 1931, pp. 44–46; F. GISINGER, *Geographie, RE Suppl.* IV (1924), col. 674.

a given geographical detail became known; often information preserved in a later author should be traced to the earlier sources he used.

While in this brief essay I intend to reach the earliest ancient testimony to mention the Vistula river, I would also like to draw attention to the passage in Pomponius Mela (III 33) where the Vistula appears directly for the first time in ancient geographical literature. Even though the view is widely accepted that it was already listed by name on Agrippa's map, that piece of information is only available indirectly from Pliny IV 81 (fr. 21, A. KLOTZ, *Die geographischen commentarii des Agrippa*, Klio XXV 1931, p. 421) and from the later writings based on his map, namely *Divisio orbis* 11, 14 and *Dimensuratio provinciarum* 8, 19. However, the first direct mention of the Vistula is to be found in Mela and that is why his testimony deserves special attention. Still, in my opinion both Mela's testimony and the Vistula on Agrippa's map come from earlier sources, and so familiarity with the river's name reaches much further into the past than the preserved direct sources would indicate.

Moving east, in book III Mela presents a northern periplus of Europe. Beginning with the Iberian Peninsula (III 3–15) he crosses Gaul (III 16–24) to reach Germania (III 25), after which there comes a description of Sarmatia (III 33): “Sarmatia intus quam ad mare latior, ab his quae secuntur Vistula² amne discreta, qua retro abit usque ad Histrum flumen inmittitur”. This place in Mela, where the Vistula seems to form Sarmatia's border on its Asian side, has not been adequately explained³. So, in his opinion, Sarmatia extends wider in the interior than along the coast of the Ocean, is separated from the peoples that follow with the Vistula river, and reaches all the way to Danube in the back. Taking into consideration the direction of Mela's description, the Vistula as it is generally known in geography, cannot have separated Sarmatia from its eastern neighbours, since it is on the Vistula as its western border that Sarmatia began in the understanding of the Ancients. Thus at the transition point between the descriptions of Germania and Sarmatia I detect in Mela a collision of data proceeding along two different directions: from the west on the side of Germania and from the south-east and the Black Sea on that of Sarmatia. That is because Germania lay still within the range of western knowledge, whereas information on Sarmatia came along the roads leading off the northern shores of the Black Sea. That corresponds to the routes along which the ancient world approached what would later become

² *Vistula* is a late vulgate reading; in the reading of some of the manuscripts lies hidden the form *Visula*, proper to Mela's earlier source.

³ K.H. TZSCHUCKE, *Pomponii Melae de situ orbis*, vol. II 3, Lipsiae 1806, p. 105; F. NANSEN, *Nebelheim*, vol. I, Leipzig 1911, p. 100; L. NIEDERLE, *Starożytności słowiańskie*, vol. I 1, transl. and ed. K. CHAMIEC, Warszawa 1907, p. 198, n. 2; W. BOGUSŁAWSKI, *Dzieje Słowiańszczyzny północno-zachodniej*, vol. I, Poznań 1887, p. 4; W. DZIEDUSZYCKI, *Wiadomości starożytnych o geografii ziem polskich*, Kraków 1887 (Rozprawy Akademii Umiejętności, Wydział Filologiczny XIX), p. 146; E. MAJEWSKI, *Polska w wyobraźni geografów średniowiecznych...*, Wisła 1905, p. 7.

Slavic lands, and whose traces in ancient literature I looked for in my previous papers⁴. In the passage in question in Pomponius Mela those separate routes find a clear confirmation for if we assume that his description of Sarmatia takes off at the northern coast of the Black Sea and moves west, his information becomes quite clear and corresponds to his contemporary geographical concepts. The Vistula then does form Sarmatia's western border and does separate it from the peoples that follow. Thus in Mela's testimony, our earliest direct testimony of the Vistula, where it is placed in the far north, as though separating the Sarmatians from the Asiatic Scythians, and simultaneously as a frontier of Sarmatia after a manner, there is a trace of the contamination of two different conceptions: an earlier, drawn from Greek and Roman literary sources, and a later, contemporary with Mela and based by him on Agrippa's map.

Since the earliest preserved direct mention of the Vistula came up in Mela's description of Sarmatia, and since the river was placed by him in the far north, it seems likely that the Vistula had a special, organic connection to Sarmatia, that is, any knowledge of that river originated in those regions of the ancient world which provided information regarding Scythia and Sarmatia. There can be no doubt that those regions were the ones on the Black Sea coast. As I pointed out before, the point of contact of our lands with the ancient Mediterranean world determines the value and precise location of the various pieces of geographical data. From Mela's testimony under discussion here it follows that the earliest knowledge of the Vistula came from the vicinity of the Black Sea, the earliest point of contact between the ancient world and the north and the starting point for the oldest routes leading off north and towards the Baltic. So far it has been generally suspected that the rather late information on the Vistula in Roman geographers came from the trade route from Aquileia via the mountain pass of Kłodzko or the Moravian Gate towards Sambia, much used in the early centuries of the Empire. That, however, is only secondary contact with the Vistula, approaching it from the south-west.

For if we investigate the layout of Agrippa's map, and the spatial arrangements of Mela and Pliny, in which the Vistula appears first, we must observe that it always comes up in connection with descriptions of lands on the Black Sea. From book IV of Pliny we may extract fragments of Agrippa, who in his measurements of Germania does not mention the Vistula as its border (Plin. IV 98 = fr. 17 KLOTZ), and only does so in his description of Pontus, as he traces the western borders of Dacia (Plin. IV 81 = fr. 21 KLOTZ), which in his version includes vast expanses across the Carpathian Mountains and reaches as far as the

⁴ B. BILIŃSKI, *Drogi świata starożytnego ku ziemiom polskim i problem Odry u Ptolemeusza*, Eos XLI 1940–1946, fasc. 1, pp. 157 ff.; IDEM, *Drogi świata starożytnego ku ziemiom słowiańskim w świetle starożytnych świadectw literackich*, Archeologia I 1948, pp. 139 ff. (cf. M. RUDNICKI, *Slavia Occidentalis XVIII 1939–1947*, pp. 474 f.).

Ocean, that is, the Baltic. Other than that fragment from Agrippa, Pliny mentions the Vistula twice, and each time in a treatment of the Northern coast of Europe and proceeding from east to west. The periplus in IV 100 even identifies the river with two names, *Visculus sive Vistula*, and in the catalogue of rivers it reaches all the way to the river Meuse, which particular piece of information KLOTZ rightly sees as later (*op. cit.*, p. 415). Then in *HN* IV 97 next to the description of those same shores and islands among whom he lists Scatinavia, Pliny reports that “quidam haec habitari ad Vistulam usque fluvium a Sarmatis, Venedis, Sciris, Hiris tradunt...”. The order in which those peoples are listed strongly indicates east-to-west direction, and since the list opens with the Sarmatians, the information originated on the Black Sea or around it⁵. Referring to his source as *quidam*, Pliny absolutely cannot mean Agrippa; that whole chapter in general is full of information presumably drawn indirectly from Greek authors, of whom Pliny lists Timaeus, Hecataeus of Abdera, Philemon, Xenophon of Lampsacus, and Pytheas. Just as it does in IV 98 (*quidam nostri*), here *quidam* means earlier Roman geographers, and in particular Varro, who was one of Pliny’s primary geographical sources. Pre-Agrippan status of that information in Pliny was already determined by KLOTZ.

Thus Pliny has already provided us with three reports of the Vistula, based on three different sources: IV 97 repeats information drawn from geographers of the Republican era; IV 81 uses Agrippa’s map; and IV 100 reports information later than Agrippa. That also explains why the readings of the river’s name vary within those few chapters⁶, so that in the latest part Pliny notes two forms, *Visculus sive Vistula*. Actually, if we investigate MAYHOFF’s critical apparatus, each place has a different reading. Unifying the readings, as was done by JAN, DETLEFSEN and partly by MAYHOFF, is then profoundly wrong, because it is exactly the variety of readings that confirms Pliny’s use of a number of different sources here. In the earliest occurrence (IV 97), which probably comes from pre-Agrippan geographers, the manuscripts of Pliny unambiguously recommend the reading *Visula: uisilam* A (Leidensis Vossianus, 9th century); *uisulam* D (Vaticanus, 11th c.), F² (Leidensis Lipsii corr., 12th c.), R (Florentinus, 11th c.)

⁵ Also the Scirians, who together with the Bastarnae threatened Olbia in the 3rd century BC, are related to the Black Sea region; cf. E. MINNS, *Scythians and Greeks*, Cambridge 1913, p. 460; V. LATYŠEV, *IPE* I² 16.

⁶ M. RUDNICKI, *Wda i Wisła*, *Slavia Occidentalis* VI 1927, pp. 336 f. (cf. *ibid.* VIII 1929, p. 392); IDEM, *Sur la methode d’étudier la toponymie et l’anthroponymie*, *ibid.* XVII 1939–1947, p. 134; A. BRÜCKNER, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, Kraków 1927, p. 624; T. LEHR-SPLAWIŃSKI, *O pochodzeniu i praojczyźnie Słowian*, Poznań 1946, pp. 72 and 186. After completing this article I have obtained in Wrocław J.M. ROZWADOWSKI, *Wisła i jej dorzecza. Monografia Wisły*, fasc. 2, Warszawa 1921; and it was with pleasure that I was able to learn that my modest comments were in agreement with that outstanding linguist’s findings (cf. E. ŚLUSZKIEWICZ, *Rzut oka na dzieje etymologii nazwy „Słowianie”*, *Przegląd Klasyczny* II 1936, pp. 766 and 774, who gives an excellent overview of the problem from the linguistic perspective).

and E² (Parisinus corr., 12th c.). The other manuscripts have *insulam* (cf. Dicuil 7, 23). The form *Vistlam* was introduced here by SILLIG, followed by MAYHOFF. Barbarus adopted the vulgate *Vistula*. Here I must direct the reader's attention to Mela's manuscript tradition for according to FRICK's edition, in widest use today, III 33 reads *Vistula*. However, his edition is based on a single manuscript (Vaticanus 4929, 10th century), supposedly the archetype (FRICK, p. VIII); thus it does not list variant readings from other manuscripts, but merely emendations made in later hands in the Vatican codex. Even so, if we open TZSCHUCKE's edition (Lipsiae 1806, II 3, p. 105), we shall learn that the name *Vistula* shows many variants in Mela; some of them were listed by A. GRONOVIVS in his editions (1722–1782), while others were added by TZSCHUCKE himself, who found them in the manuscripts and early editions. Now among the many Gronovian variants of names for the Vistula there is the reading *insula*, to support which TZSCHUCKE cites codices and numerous earliest editions. Since I have not been able to personally check either the editions, or the manuscripts, I have to be content with the guess that the transmitted reading *insula* contains in it the form *uisula*, quite clear graphically, which would agree with the manuscript tradition of the earliest Plinian mention in IV 97, where *Visula* is exactly the form forced by codices. At the same time the suspicion arises that the manuscript-based reading *Vistula* in the editions is the later commonly accepted vulgate. Therefore Mela's testimony, and our first, agrees with Pliny and does not come from Agrippa's map. In *HN* IV 81, where the author does draw directly on Agrippa, the codices have F² *d uistiam*, E *uistigia*, and in the remaining manuscripts, including codex A, *uistia*, all three of which irrefutably contain in them the form *Vistla*, displayed on Agrippa's map (cf. *Divisio orbis* 11, 14, and Jordan. *Get.* 5, 17). It is only that form which on Roman ground led through anaptyxis to *Vistula*, which then became to universal vulgate of the ancient world. *Vistula* then is the most recent Latin form of the river's name and can be found in the latest of the relevant Plinian passages, IV 100 (emphatically confirmed by manuscript readings: A *uistila*, F² and E² *uistilia*), and in other, later geographers⁷. In this way linguistic criteria (ROZWADOWSKI, RUDNICKI, and SŁUSZKIEWICZ) find in this modest observation, in an analysis of Pliny's geographical sources, and in an investigation into the manuscripts, the consistent confirmation that the form used for the Vistula by Agrippa was *Vistla*, which gave rise to *Vistula*. There still remains the unclear

⁷ *Dimensuratio provinciarum* 8, 19; Jordan. *Get.* 3, 5; Geogr. Rav. 4, 4; Ptolem. II 11, 2.4.7; III 5, 1.8; VIII 10, 2; Marcian. *Periplus Maris Exteri* II 31 and 35–39; K. MÜLLENHOFF, *Deutsche Altertumskunde*, vol. II, Berlin 1887, p. 208. The parallel form of the name *Visculus* evolved from *Viscla* (Solinus 20), the form the ancient world knew from the Balts (ROZWADOWSKI, *op. cit.* [n. 6], p. 6; RUDNICKI, *Wda i Wisła* [n. 6], p. 336). Pliny took part in the wars against the Germans and even Tacitus in his *Germania* used geographical material contained in his *Bella Germaniae* (E. NORDEN, *Die germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus Germania*, Leipzig–Berlin 1920, pp. 207 ff. and 247 ff.). That is also the explanation behind the variety of names for the Vistula in his *Naturalis historia*.

form *Visula*, widely considered the latest⁸ and something like a Latinisation of the name *Visla*. ROZWADOWSKI is willing to accept it as an independent name for the river. And such is actually the case, as in Pliny the form comes up in the part where he relies on pre-Agrippan geographical sources, as well as being hidden in Mela's earliest testimony, which would indicate its earlier origin.

In the light of the above argument the widespread conviction that the Vistula makes its first appearance on Agrippa's map would seem incorrect: one of Pliny's testimonies points to earlier Roman geographers, and, more importantly, that particular testimony has a different form of the name than Agrippa's map, a form also found in manuscripts of Mela. Although the presumably rich geographical literature of the Republican era is lost, its vast influence on later geographers has been demonstrated in many contributions (ROSTOWCEW, *op. cit.* [n. 1], pp. 41 ff.). We also know that in drawing his map, Agrippa relied on earlier sources, and in outlining the northern regions even adopted some Ionian concepts (M. KIESSLING, *Ῥίπαια ὄρη*, *RE I A*, 1, 1914, coll. 890 ff.). Judging from the information in Pliny, the Vistula on Agrippa's map was at most a cartographic novelty, because in geographical literature it was a detail known previously, as indicated by the three different forms in Pliny. Nor is knowledge of it a discovery of Agrippa's times. While profound and extensive knowledge of the north only became available after his death, he himself spent time on the Black Sea coast in 14 BC, in the autumn of 13 he campaigned in Pannonia, and came back after the news of his approach pacified the Pannonians, to die in March of 12 BC. It is from those times that the inscription comes according to which M. Vinicius was supposed to reach the land of the Cotini, or almost as far as the southern borders of Silesia. Agrippa's map, based on his plans and materials and erected after his death by Augustus, already used the new form of the river's name, *Vistla*, learned by the Romans as they came closer to it from the south-west in their wars and along the trade route from Aquileia to the Baltic Sea (B. SVOBODA, *Čechy a římské Imperium*, Praha 1948, pp. 45 ff.) on which a new and more direct contact with the Vistula took place.

However, Roman pre-Agrippan familiarity with the Vistula and the way geographers, Pliny and Mela, mentioned it in connection with their descriptions of Pontus spatially determine the point of contact, from which the first information about it reached the ancient world. It is from the direction of the Black Sea, during the Mithridatic Wars, that Rome had its first contact with the north on the side of the Slavic lands. Entering the former great Greek colonies through which the Greek world had first learned of the north some centuries before, the historians of the Mithridatic Wars (such as Theophanes) and Roman geographers often indirectly drew on the old Ionian geography, the best source of information

⁸ Einhard, *Vita Caroli Magni* 15 (Ekkehard, *Chronicon Wirziburgense* 6, 163, 6); cf. H. OESTERLEY, *Historisch-geographisches Wörterbuch des deutschen Mittelalters*, Gotha 1883, p. 742.

on those regions. Reporting data which often looked back to the 5th or even 6th century, they created an amalgam of most recent information with Old Ionian concepts of the north (BILIŃSKI, *Archeologia I* 1948, pp. 150 f.).

Ionian geography of the 6th century BC (Anaximander, Hecataeus of Miletus)⁹ which flourished at the time of the great colonisation of Pontus, assumed that the earth was surrounded by the waters of the Ocean, and so naturally took interest in far northern regions, of which long distance trade routes brought news. Trade contacts between the ancient world and Eastern Europe, already present in the 3rd millennium and allowing access from the Black Sea to the Baltic along the rivers Dnieper, Southern Bug and Dniester, are common knowledge (BILIŃSKI, *Archeologia I* 1948, pp. 143 ff.). The amber deposits of the northern shores (of Jutland and Sambia) find their echo in the mythical river Eridanus. We find fragments of that Old Ionian doctrine of the north in Herodotus, who questions his predecessors' certain concepts, rejects the notion of the Ocean flowing all around the earth and doubts the existence of the Rhiphaean Mountains and the amber river Eridanus. In this way his sober and rational mind shows in its concepts of the north some regress when compared to the Ionian geographers, since he assumes an uninhabited land in the north beyond the Neuri. In spite of much opposition, the old Ionian geographical concepts, renewed by Damastes (in the 5th century BC) lived on in the works of Greek 4th century geographers, and an Ionian map was in use in the time of Aristotle and Ephorus¹⁰. Thanks to Pytheas' discoveries, which proved that the north was inhabited, that map was re-confirmed and served as a model for Eratosthenes' mathematical cartography, in which the earth was surrounded by oceans on all sides. Then the Ionian concepts of the north found a new life with the Romans, unsympathetic towards mathematical-astronomical speculations, as the Black Sea lands first charted a northern path for the Roman world. Republican writers (Varro, Nepos and Sallust) devoted much space to descriptions of Pontus; not without Eratosthenes' influence, they adopted the Ionian layout of the earth as surrounded by oceans, and with it, other Ionian notions of the north¹¹. In *De situ Ponti* Sallust used Hecataeus' material. So, too, Agrippa's map, despite certain scientific tendencies sought by SCHNABEL, took into consideration Ionian concepts by introducing the Rhiphaean mountain range and the Hyperboreans, both characteristic of old Ionian geography¹². According to those

⁹ W.A. HEIDEL, *The Frame of Ancient Greek Maps*, American Geographical Society, Research Series XX 1937; cf. JHS LVIII 1938, p. 279; Listy Filologické LXVII 1940, p. 77; H.F. TOZER, *History of Ancient Geography*, Cambridge 1897, pp. 70 f.; E.H. BERGER, *Geschichte der wissenschaftlichen Erdkunde der Griechen*, Berlin 1903, pp. 102 ff.; GISINGER, *op. cit.* (n. 1), coll. 556 ff.

¹⁰ GISINGER, *op. cit.* (n. 1), coll. 557 and 590; KIESSLING, *Πίπται ὄρη*, RE IA, 1 (1914), coll. 876 ff.

¹¹ D. DETLEFSEN, *Vermutungen über Varros Schrift de ora maritima*, Hermes XXI 1886, p. 261; C. Sallusti Crispi *Historiarum reliquiae*, ed. B. MAURENBRECHER, vol. II, Leipzig 1893, pp. 134 ff.

¹² H. DAEBRITZ, *Hyperborei*, RE IX 1 (1914), col. 269; KIESSLING, *op. cit.* (n. 10), col. 890; GISINGER, *op. cit.* (n. 1), col. 646; O. CRUSIUS, *Roschers Mythologisches Lexikon I* (1884), col. 2286.

Ionian notions of the 6th century BC, in the north of Europe and Asia there was supposed to run the enormous Rhiphaean Mountains, beyond which the sun in the night traversed its course from the west to the east (KIESSLING, *op. cit.* [n. 10], coll. 846 ff.). That fiction, originally astronomical, but later identified with various northern mountain ranges, was repeated in a number of Greek geographers (e.g. Damastes, Aristotle or Posidonius) to return on Agrippa's map alongside the Hyperboreans of the north. Both those Ionian elements, regarded as geographical facts, come up in Roman geographical literature in Mela (I 12, 13 and 117; III 33), Pliny (IV 89 ff.; VI 33 and 219) and Solinus (15, 20; 16, 1 and 17, 1); cf. Catull. 115, 6, Verg. *Georg.* III 381 ff. and Avien. 451.

Descriptions of Scythia and Sarmatia in Mela and Pliny contain not only material dating back to the early Ionian times, but also, in their geography of northern Europe and Asia, data whose sources lie in the idealistic utopian depictions of northern peoples¹³. Among the authors of such utopias a prominent place goes to Hecataeus of Abdera, who lived around 300 BC and wrote the famous *Περὶ Ὑπερβορέων* (F. JACOBY, *FGrH* 264)¹⁴. Just as in the *Aegyptiaca*, the author must have presented some chorographic information about those regions too, since we find certain geographical fragments of his work in Pliny (*HN* IV 55 = T 6b; VI 34 = fr. 11; IV 94 = fr. 14), with echoes in Mela (cf. JACOBY'S commentary, III A, pp. 55 f.; DAEBRITZ, *op. cit.* [n. 12], col. 272). Roman geographers used those Hellenistic utopias, whose authors adopted early Ionian conceptions of the north and added to them some new information which had reached the Greek world after the great discoveries of the times of colonisation, when Philip's and Alexander's fighting with the Thracians and Scythians on the lower Danube again drew the attention of the Greeks towards northern peoples.

In that general renaissance of Ionian geography in Roman literature¹⁵, which gained new authors in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, Ammianus Marcelinus' testimony deserves particular consideration (that 4th century historian mentioned the Vistula in XXII 8, 38). For if we take into account the place and circumstances under which it came up, there can be no doubt that it was part of a description of the Black Sea and its surrounding lands. In that description of Thrace and

¹³ A. RIESE, *Die Idealisierung der Naturvölker des Nordens in der griechischen und römischen Literatur*, Progr. Frankfurt a. M. 1875; E. ROHDE, *Der griechische Roman*, Leipzig 1914, pp. 178 ff.; K. TRÜDINGER, *Studien zur Geschichte der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie*, Basel 1918, pp. 133 ff.

¹⁴ T. SINKO, *Literatura grecka*, vol. II 1, Kraków 1947, p. 174; S. WITKOWSKI, *Historjografia grecka i nauki pokrewne*, vol. III, Kraków 1927, p. 126; F. JACOBY, *RE* VII 2 (1912), coll. 2750 ff.

¹⁵ F. LEHMANN-HAUPT, *Griechische Geschichte* (in: A. GERCKE, E. NORDEN [eds.], *Einleitung in die Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. III 1, Leipzig 1912, p. 82), claims that Roman geographers repeat much of Hecataeus' material. The Roman renaissance of Ionian geography is portrayed best by KIESSLING, *op. cit.* (n. 10), coll. 851 ff. Dionysius Periegetes, the *Argonautica* epic (4th century AD), Avienus' *Ora Maritima*, Church Fathers, Procopius and later maps demonstrate many traces of the Ionian teaching (KIESSLING, *RE* I 1, 1894, coll. 863, 873 and 897).

Pontus (XXII 8, 1–49)¹⁶, Ammianus, as he himself admitted, relied on many sources: “adpositum est (ut existimo) tempus [...] super Thraciarum extimis situque Pontici sinus visa vel lecta quaedam perspicua fide monstrare”. It has been demonstrated¹⁷ that besides contemporary reports he used many earlier sources, often poetic. He drew on Timagenes, Sallust, to whom he presumably owed elements of the doctrines of Eratosthenes and Hecataeus, and on the so-called *Chorographia Pliniana*, which would be a common source for him and Solinus. He did preserve some old Ionian geographical information then. It is with the help of Pliny and Solinus that it is possible to reach an explanation of Ammianus’ sources and at the same time get to what was probably the earliest mention of the Vistula in antiquity.

After describing in paragraphs 1–36 the eastern part of the Black Sea, and Maeotis complete with Tanais and Tauris, in paragraph 37 Ammianus moves on to the areas west of Tanais and Tauris and towards the Thracian coast. Then he descends from the utmost north southwards in XXII 8, 38:

Ergo in ipso huius conpagis exordio, ubi Rifaei deficiunt montes habitant Aremfaei, iusti homines placiditateque cogniti, quos amnes Chronius et Visula praeterflunt; iuxtaque Massagetae, Halani et Sargetae, alique plures obscuri, quorum nec vocabula nobis sunt nota nec mores. Interiectu deinde non mediocri, Carcinites panditur sinus [...] dein Borysthenes...

Connecting the Vistula with the Rhiphaei and the Arimphaei indicates an Ionian origin of that piece of information, since the Arimphaei are something like a later name for Herodotus’ Argippaei (IV 23), supposedly inhabiting the southern edges of the Urals and together with the Hyperboreans considered the half-mythical northerners (W.W. How, J. WELLS, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, vol. I, Oxford 1912, p. 310). That later form of their name is only known from Roman authors (Pomp. Mela I 117 and Pliny VI 34), and DAEBRITZ and TOMASCHEK (*RE* II 1, 1895, col. 779) rightly suppose that the Arimphaei of Roman geographers came from Hecataeus of Abdera, who contaminated Herodotus’ account of the Argippaei with the Rhiphaei and with Aristaeas’ story of the Hyperboreans, that is combined diverse old Ionian elements in a new Hellenistic utopia.

One must compare Ammianus’ above testimony with Pliny’s report, where the Scythians are succeeded by a description of the farthest north:

(VI 33 f.) Nunc omnibus quae sunt Asiae interiora dictis Ripaeos montes transcendat animus extraque litore oceani incedat [...] ab extremo aquilone ad initium orientis

¹⁶ That chapter was analysed and commented on in a most enlightening way by J. LELEWEL, *Narody na ziemiach słowiańskich przed powstaniem Polski*, Poznań 1853, pp. 297 ff.

¹⁷ V. GARDTHAUSEN, *Die geographischen Quellen Ammians*, Leipzig 1873, pp. 34 ff.; Th. MOMMSEN, *Ammians Geographica*, Hermes XVI 1881, pp. 618 ff.; MÜLLENHOFF, *op. cit.* (n. 7), vol. III, p. 86 ff.

aestivi Scythae sunt. Extra eos ultraque aquilonis initia Hyperboreos aliqui posuere, pluribus in Europa dictos. Primum inde noscitur promunturium Celticae Lytharmis, fluvius Carambucis, ubi lassata cum siderum vi Ripaeorum montium deficient iuga, Arimphaeos quosdam accepimus, haut dissimilem Hyperboreis gentem... (cf. IV 19);

(cf. Solinus 17, 1: ...altera in Asia gens est ad initium orientis aestivi, ubi deficient Riphaeorum montium iuga. Hyperboreis similes dicunt Arimphaeos...; JACOBY III A, p. 54.)

Undoubtedly the passages from Pliny, Ammianus Marcellinus and Solinus quoted above come from a shared source. In Pliny there even remains a trace of the astronomical function of the Rhiphaei, so characteristic of Ionian geography. Besides, that short passage in Pliny demonstrates obvious similarities with fragments of Hecataeus of Abdera: *promunturium Celticae* resembles fr. 7 ἐν τοῖς ἀντιπέρας τῆς Κελτικῆς, and *fluvius Carambucis* = fr. 11 Καραμβύκκι (JACOBY III A, p. 57 f.)¹⁸. Judging from this comparison, we will be justified in concluding that Hecataeus' utopia about the Hyperboreans (and Pliny cites Hecataeus by name in IV 94 and VI 55) is also Pliny's source for the information in VI 34. Thus when Ammianus Marcellinus repeats this kind of Plinian-Hecataean information about the Rhiphaei and the Arimphaei and mentions the Vistula in connection with them¹⁹, it is very likely that the information, which may well be more complete in Ammianus, in the 4th century AD renaissance of Ionian geography, than in Pliny, has transmitted via Republican geographers a substrate from Hecataeus era of the 4th century BC, when new geographical elements located in the far north were entering utopias about northern peoples. The Rhiphaei and the Arimphaei are not the only Ionian reminiscences in Ammianus Marcellinus. Similar echoes can be found elsewhere in his work, as in his description of Persia, and in the introduction to the geographical digression discussed here

¹⁸ DZIEDUSZYCKI, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 80, sees in the Carambucis the Vistula under a foreign name.

¹⁹ MOMMSEN, *op. cit.* (n. 17), p. 614, traces *Visula* and *Chronius* back to Ptolemy III 5, 1, where both those rivers appear (Οὐιστούλας and Χρόνος). However, the forms of those names are altogether different than in Ptolemy, and what is more, so is their location (MÜLLENHOFF, *op. cit.* [n. 7], vol. II, p. 90). Perhaps the Chronus is somehow related to the concept of Cronus as the ruler of the Isles of the Blessed, which has its roots in Pythagorean-Orphic mysticism of the 6th century BC (M. POHLENZ, *RE* XI 2, 1922, col. 1999). These *Saturnia regna* (ὁ ἐπὶ Κρόνου βίος) express a romantic longing for a realm of happiness, such as that of Hyperboreans in the north (cf. Κρόνιον πέλαγος, Orph. *Argon.* 1085; Plut. *De fac. in orb. lun.* 26 = *Mor.* 941 A). It could be that, conversely, the planet Cronus as a symbol of cold and death in accordance with the doctrine of the climes found its reflection in the north in the river Chronus (cf. νεκρὸν πέλαγος, or *mare mortuum*). Two diametrically opposed images of the north combine here, as blessed and sunny or cold and dark. – KIESSLING (*op. cit.* [n. 10], col. 907) believes that Ammianus had his information about the Vistula from Agrippa's map, which was supposed to extend the name Rhiphaei to the Carpathians, but here, too, both the form of the name and the general feel of the description argue against his supposition. It is not impossible that the extremely interesting testimony of Dionysius Periegetes belongs here too; namely in 314–315 he lists two rivers near the Rhiphaei, the Aldescus and the Panticapes. However, interpreting his testimony lies beyond the modest scope of this essay.

(XXII 8, 9) Hecataeus is mentioned alongside Eratosthenes and Ptolemy as a well known Ionian geographer of the Black Sea region. His material made its way into Ammianus Marcellinus indirectly, via Sallust²⁰, who relied on the Ionian geographer in his description of the Black Sea. This particular passage in Ammianus, where Hecataeus supposedly gave the circumference of Pontus in stadia and described its shape as similar to the Scythian bow, raises certain objections, because that sort of geographical imagery was completely alien to the 6th century Hecataeus (of Miletus; cf. *FGrHist* 1 F 197; H. BERGER, *Die geographischen Fragmente des Eratosthenes*, Leipzig 1880, pp. 332 f.). Rightly, then, did GARDTHAUSEN (*op. cit.* [n. 17], p. 34) refuse Hecataeus the authorship of that information and ascribed it to Eratosthenes alone. Hecataeus' name is in Ammianus Marcellinus a patron authority of the description of Pontus, legitimising the Ionian character of some pieces of his data. Listed after Eratosthenes, it creates the impression that Ammianus also meant the Hellenistic author of the utopian work (i.e., Hecataeus of Abdera), whose fragments are sometimes difficult to tell apart from those of the 6th century Hecataeus (R. HENNIG, *Die Kunde von Britannien im Altertum*, Geographische Zeitschrift XXXIV 1928, p. 98). It is therefore very likely that Ammianus here invoked the authority of both Hecataei, the earlier Ionian and the later Hellenistic, since both were excellent sources for information on northern lands.

Besides the Ionian elements accompanying the Vistula in Ammianus, we should note the form of its name. Codices impose *Bisula* and that form with the initial *B* is unique in all ancient literature. CLARK'S most recent edition (1910) considers that reading a result of late Latin orthography and amends it to *Visula*. It is actually hard to determine the origin of that *B*, since both the *b* of Greek (from around the time of the birth of Christ on) and the *b* of Latin (from the 1st century AD) were in Ammianus' times pronounced *v*. In the Republican period the Greeks transliterated the Latin *v* as *ou*, and that is also the way Ptolemy transmitted the Vistula's name in the 2nd century AD: as Ούιστούλας. It is only in the 2nd century that initial *ou* and *β* began to coexist as the rendering of Latin *v* (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 9th–10th century, has Βίσλας). However, after the disappearance of digamma the Greeks had no adequate character to represent *v* and used *β* instead (P. KRETSCHMER, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache*, Göttingen 1896, p. 195), for instance Σαβάζιος, Βορυσθένης, Βυρεβίστας or Βισοῦργις (cf. the Laconian *β* in place of digamma). While the initial *B* in *Bisula* ultimately decides nothing, it does make one wonder why this particular spelling

²⁰ M. HERTZ, *De Ammiani Marcellini studiis Sallustianis*, Wratislaviae 1874; MÜLLENHOFF, *op. cit.* (n. 7), vol. III, p. 88; GARDTHAUSEN, *op. cit.* (n. 17), pp. 43 ff.; ROSTOWCEW, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 74; G.M. COLUMBA, *Ricerche storiche. La questione soliniana e la letteratura geografica dei Romani*, Palermo 1935, pp. 196 ff. COLUMBA posits a Varronian-Sallustian chorography based on Varro's and Sallust's materials and used as a common source by Mela, Pliny and later Roman geographers.

(*B*, not *V*) in Ammianus Marcellinus, a Greek of Antioch. Since it comes up in a passage containing old Greek doctrine, suspicions of a Greek transcription become all the more likely²¹.

And if we compare Ammianus' form, which could conceal a Greek transcription of the form *Visula*, with the manuscript readings of Pomponius Mela III 33 and Pliny's earliest mention, IV 97, we must conclude that they are in agreement. Thus I add Ammianus' form to Mela's and Pliny's earliest *Visula*, confirming the pre-Agrippan dating of the latter two and adding a new argument for a very early origin of the name in Ammianus.

Moving the Vistula to the far north of Europe and connecting it to the Ionian Rhiphaei and the half-mythical Arimphaei is understandable in the 4th or 3rd century BC. Before Roman times, knowledge of that river was very hazy and sketchy. From the earliest Ionian times, echoes of it could be heard in the Eridanus, the mythical amber river of the north, thus its connection in the eyes of the Greeks with the far north. After the era of Ionic discoveries, the geographical horizon of the Greeks shrank, to abruptly expand again under Alexander the Great. Through the new migrations and through Philip's (339) and Alexander's (335) fighting on the Danube against the Triballi, Getae and Scythians, new northern geographical names entered the Greek world to mix with the old Ionian concepts and penetrate into Hellenistic utopias. Connection between the south and the far north was provided first by Thracian tribes, reaching all the way beyond the Carpathians in the north and from the 4th century on by the Celts, who had conquered lands on both sides of the Carpathians and threatened the Greeks. Those Celts left in what is today Poland distinct traces of their stay and influence proceeding from the direction of the Black Sea, as demonstrated by archaeological monuments, coins and toponymy²². Also the Greek coins minted in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, although extremely rare in Poland, can indicate that the Greek world of those times did penetrate the north to a slight degree, certainly indirectly. Therefore the information of Hecataeus, who came from Abdera, itself in the Greek north, may have some real foundation²³, although it became connected in the old Ionian perspective and manner with the distant and mythical north, all the more so because

²¹ MÜLLENHOFF, *op. cit.* (n. 7), vol. II, p. 375, tries to connect *Bisula* to the enigmatic *Bisigibilia* (Geographus Ravennas 4, 18), assuming a Greek origin of that form (J. SCHNETZ, *Zeitschrift für Namenforschung* XIV 1938, pp. 90 f.).

²² J. ROSEN-PRZEWORSKA, *Zabytki celtyckie na ziemiach Polski*, Warszawa 1939, pp. 49, 132 ff. and 185; L. PIOTROWICZ, *Les trouvailles monnaies celtiques en Pologne*, *Eos* XXXIV 1932–1933, pp. 413 ff.; *idem*, *Ziemia śląska w starożytności*, Cieszyn 1929, pp. 8 f.; Z. ZAKRZEWSKI, *Pierwsza moneta polska*, *Slavia Occidentalis* XVII 1938, pp. 59 ff.

²³ For various attempts at locating Hecataeus' island Helixioia and other reported details, cf. R. HENNIG, *Das vor- und frugeschichtliche Altertum in seinen Kultur- und Handelsbeziehungen*, Leipzig 1942, pp. 144 f.; F. VOIGT, *RE* Suppl. VI (1935), col. 103; DAEBRITZ, *op. cit.* (n. 12), coll. 277 ff.; C. SCHUCHHARDT, *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* II 1910, pp. 292 f.

it was only based on hearsay. Those are the reasons why the earliest mentions of the Vistula are connected to the farthest north in Ammianus Marcellinus and Pomponius Mela III 33 (the first directly transmitted testimony), where it appears to form the border between Sarmatia and the Scythians in the far north. The situation is similar in Pliny IV 97, where the author relied on earlier Roman geographers, and in Solinus 20, 1 the Vistula (under the form *Viscla*) was placed even farther north than the river Guthalus, again confirming the report connecting it to the utmost north. That extreme location originated with Republican geographers (Varro and Sallust), whose material has been transmitted indirectly by Solinus (F. RABENALD, *Quaestionum Solinianarum capita tria*, Halis Saxonum 1909). Then shortly before the birth of Christ the Roman world gained closer acquaintance with the Vistula and Pliny was able to use recent information to correct the Republican version, which is most clearly visible when we compare his version with the periplus preserved in Solinus 20, 1, since in Solinus the Vistula flows “beyond”, that is, to the north of the Guthalus, while in his latest, post-Agrippean mention in IV 100, Pliny places it “after”, that is, to the west of that river. Those two different locations of the Vistula in Pliny and Solinus, so far unexplained, reflect two chronologically and geographically different ways of finding out about it: in Solinus an earlier one, connecting the Vistula to the far north and via the Roman Republican geographers rooted in Hellenistic utopia; in Pliny a later one, when the Vistula was already better known and through correction of earlier information gained its proper place in a periplus of northern Europe.

Based on an analysis of the sources of Roman geographers, I draw up the forms of its name in order and conclude that alongside the form *Vistla* transmitted by Agrippa’s map, the ancients knew the earlier form *Visula*. Already ROZWADOWSKI (*op. cit.* [n. 6]) in his hesitation between *Vistla* and *Visula* as the earliest form would have us solve that problem by looking beyond linguistic considerations to others, historical, ethnographic and geographical. Thus having taken into account the different points of contact of the ancient world with the lands of today’s Poland, separated in time and space, I believe that the first report of the Vistula and its (indirectly transmitted) name reached that world in the 4th century BC from the direction of the Black Sea, probably to be reflected in the Hellenistic ethnographic utopia by Hecataeus of Abdera, who in accordance with the old Ionian conceptions located it in the most distant north near the Rhiphaei and half-mythical peoples. When during the Mithridatic Wars Rome entered the Black Sea region, its Republican geographers such as Varro and Sallust reached for old Ionian descriptions of those lands and in that return to old Ionian geography included the Hellenistic utopia of Hecataeus of Abdera, the traces of which can be detected in Pomponius Mela and Pliny the Elder. Thus pre-Agrippan knowledge of the Vistula used the name *Visula*, dated back to the 4th century BC, went together with descriptions of Pontus and located the river in accordance with old Ionian concepts in the far north, whereas the

second, more exact and more direct Roman contact with the Vistula occurred already in Roman times²⁴ from the south-west along the trade route connecting Aquileia to the Baltic. Reports obtained from this route introduced the Vistula under a new name, *Vistla*, onto Agrippa's map, and allowed to position it more correctly and more realistically on the map of northern Europe, even though a section of a trade route was interpreted as part of the river's course (BILIŃSKI, *Eos* XLI 1940–1946, fasc. 1, p. 194). When later trade contacts clarified the location of the Vistula and shortened the distance between the ancient world and the north, the imaginary data of earlier times was removed and the river's location in the far north corrected. Even so, some of the old information lived on in Mela and Pliny, and against the background of the general renaissance of Ionian geography in Rome, escalating again in the 4th century AD, Ammianus Marcellinus, by using the older form *Bisula*, transmitted a report in which the Vistula was connected to the Rhiphaei, the Arimphaei and the far north, probably rooted (via Republican geographers, most likely Sallust) in the Hecataean utopia *On the Hyperboreans*. And so in our most recent author, the 4th century AD Ammianus, there was preserved information of the Vistula in the far north dating back to the 4th century BC, just as in Avienus' *Ora maritima* there was preserved the Massaliote Periplus from the 6th century BC.

²⁴ Neither Polybius (III 38, 2) nor Strabo (II 107; VII 294 and 306) knew anything of the Vistula or of the northern lands between the Elbe and the Tanais, because they rejected the old Ionian conceptions of the north. Strabo (VII 295) mocked those who accepted the Rhiphaei or the Hyperboreans: ...διὰ δὲ τὴν ἄγνοιαν τῶν τόπων τούτων οἱ τὰ Ριπαῖα ὄρη καὶ τοὺς Ὑπερβορείους μυθοποιούντες λόγου ἠξίωvται. They ignored utopias, but it is there that real echoes of geographical discoveries lay hidden at times.