

## ANCIENT CULTURE IN POLAND: A MILLENNIUM\*

By

MARIAN PLEZIA

Among the profusion of millennial spectacles which our country celebrated, particularly in the last year, it is certainly strange that the milestone of a thousand years since the appearance of ancient culture in Poland passed by unsung and unremembered<sup>1</sup>. And yet this is a very lofty aspect of the Polish millennium, an aspect that, without exaggeration, can be considered as important as the millennium of the Polish state or of the Polish Church. For it is only from the time that the noble bough of Rome was grafted onto the ancient native trunk of Slavic custom and way of life that national Polish culture as it still exists today began to take form. Just as the golden bough of the Cumaean Sybil opened for Aeneas the way to the underworld where, in the intention of the poet, he would see not only his dead father but the entire many-centuried span of his nation's future, so for us this engrafting into the Latin culture opened the way to higher forms of civilization in which we only then gained a share – for the entire one thousand years which is now reaching its completion.

It is not difficult to comprehend the epochal importance of the breakthrough that took place one thousand years ago. It was only with Latin culture that the use of writing reached us, possibly the greatest writing any civilization has produced until now, since before our very eyes it is spreading across the world as the most suitable for use. Along with a familiarity with the Latin language we gained a means of communicating with other civilized peoples in the cultural circle of western Europe and, more importantly, direct access to the literary riches of Mediterranean culture over many centuries, expressed and in a sense codified in this very language. Only then did we welcome such lofty agents of intellectual progress as books and schools. Only then, a thousand years ago, did we move out

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from the provincialism of northeast Europe into a wide world with old and rich traditions of intellectual life. For although I do not wish to belittle in any way the virtues of our pre-Christian, native civilization (the material side of which we know so much better today thanks to the archaeological studies of recent years), it is not possible to deny that, in the domain of the culture of the intellect (which shapes the future of every nation) at that time we stood much lower than peoples who had come earlier into the cultural heritage of the ancient world.

It was right, therefore, that at this year's reunion of our Association, we decided to remind both ourselves and others of this crucially important aspect of the Polish millennium, given that we, Polish classical philologists are qualified to do so in a very special way: first on account of the topics and interests which unite us in this Association, and then on account of the longstanding tradition of this very task. For from the time that scholarly research into the ancient world began to be practiced among us (this refers to the activities of GRODDECK in Vilnius in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) all the more notable representatives of our branch of learning attempted to delve to a greater or lesser degree into the history of antiquity in Poland. Another point is that to take on such a task within the constraints of one lecture, necessarily limited in time, is quite difficult. Such a lecture should encompass the thousand-year span of historical development dependent on many various factors and not yet completely illuminated in its entirety by specific studies, although, in particular, the studies of the worthy Nestor of our Society, Tadeusz SINKO, have advanced our knowledge in these matters to a great degree. However, taking for granted that these are sufficiently well-known to our hearers, we will attempt in greatly abbreviated form to indicate at the very least the major stages of the process mentioned above against a backdrop of the history of the successive rebirth of ancient culture throughout Europe, since what was happening to some degree among us was always the result of cultural currents of much broader scope.

First, therefore, we must ask in what form did the ancient culture appear among us in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century alongside Christianity? And how did it happen that these two cultural elements arrived among us together and at the same time? We know that at the wane of the ancient world in the 4<sup>th</sup> century there arose, after the three centuries of conflicts and struggles, a peculiar symbiosis of Christianity and the Graeco-Roman culture which constituted the last foundation for the flowering of both these ancient literatures, a flowering which is linked with the names of the great writers of the Church: Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Pope Leo and Prudentius in the West; Basil, the two Gregories and John Chrysostom in the East. These writers and thinkers, categorically rejecting certain ideas which existed under the rule of Roman culture, particularly those which were linked with the polytheism that predominated in the Graeco-Roman world, concluded that many other concepts of the world and human beings characteristic of this culture (especially those developed by certain

Greek philosophers), could without difficulty be reconciled with the teachings of Christianity. More than that, they themselves could not do without the conceptual and linguistic tools which had been developed throughout the many centuries that the Graeco-Roman civilization existed, and by means of which they could try to present, explain and justify the truths of the Gospel. And so they enthusiastically drew from the legacy of pagan culture everything that they considered useful to transform into a new Christian culture. And because all these previously mentioned writers and thinkers were greatly renowned in the Church throughout the centuries that followed, and also because of the outstanding literary excellence of their writings, the synthesis they created quickly took on classical status and became the common property of many generations of Christianity.

In this way, in the history of our cultural circle, was accomplished the first (according to some researchers) Renaissance of Graeco-Roman civilization which for the first time inseminated a new culture that was just being born, imparting its most essential values. Soon after, migrations of various peoples put an end to the existence of the Roman empire in the West, and from that time the fortunes of western and eastern Europe began to develop along different tracks. The Church, however, survived this time of crisis and, along with the faith it proclaimed, it imparted to the young peoples of mediaeval Europe cultural elements it had inherited from antiquity. It could not reject these elements, just as it could not give up Latin in the western part of our continent, for its entire intellectual achievement until then was locked and codified in this language and by these intellectual conventions. Thus the Church, defending this achievement among the generalized downfall of civilization and attempting to pass it on to the next generations, expended unceasing effort to preserve the Latin civilization, impoverished and weakened, but still transcending the intellectual level of the new societies. Two hundred chaotic years later, when the Empire of Charlemagne arose and coalesced in Western Europe, an empire that politically harked back to the traditions of Imperial Rome, the Church eagerly joined in the reconstruction of this civilization and in bringing it out of oblivion, inaugurating in this way the second, Carolingian, Renaissance which was the direct heir to the first one dating back to the time of the great Fathers of the Church.

A century and a half later, the Carolingian order of things was reeling under the blows of new waves of invaders, the Hungarians and the Normans. Because of this, culture in western Europe was undergoing the next period of barbarization and backwardness. It was in this time, in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, that Christianity arrived in Poland. It is highly likely that Mieszko I intended to strengthen the rule of his dynasty and the freshly built state by transforming it into a state according to the Carolingian model, and that this and not any other motive induced him to accept the new faith. This step, however, had much more extensive consequences than even such a far-seeing politician as our first historical ruler could foresee. Among other things, along with Church organization,

Latin culture arrived among us, which Mieszko surely saw primarily as a useful tool for international contacts. From then on, however, Latin culture became one of the factors that deeply influenced and shaped our national character.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, this process was just beginning. The influence of Latin culture was most likely limited to a rather small circle of the more educated clergy, at first primarily of foreign origin, and perhaps only to a few members of the house of Piast. These were, however, tiny islets in a sea of native Slavic culture. In addition, the level of Latin culture at that time was rather low and it was not able to provide more powerful incentives on the ground it had just recently broken. In any case, because of an almost complete lack of sources from these times, it is very difficult to gain a clearer understanding of the earliest contacts between Poland and the legacy of the civilization of the ancient world. Even worse is the destruction of the achievements of the first fifty years of the Polish Church by the so-called pagan reaction in the third decade of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (in reality a reaction against the state of the Piasts and the clergy as its main prop) which, in tandem with attacks from outside Polish borders, did not spare our oldest secular and sacred buildings, schools and collections of books (if any had existed in Poland at that time).

Nevertheless, something did survive from this first “Flood” in our history, even with respect to matters of interest to us here. For even before the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when Casimir the Restorer undertook the rebuilding of the state of his ancestors as well as the organization of the Polish Church and returned to Poland, the oldest Polish chronicle, already begun in the times of Mieszko and Chrobry, as well as the now lost life of St. Adalbert, once known to Gallus Anonymus, returned with him (or perhaps they had endured the difficult times in hiding). These were written in the Latin language using the Latin alphabet and thus accessible only to the clergy. Nevertheless, these documents reinforced the memories of events which were still recent in terms of time, but, after so many upheavals, seemed already distant. They were considered so precious that great care was taken for their preservation and, in the case of the chronicle, their continuation. In this way, the gains of the new civilization, earlier unknown in Poland, were seen as necessary and valuable for the continued well-being of the state, and it was no longer possible to ignore their existence.

Throughout the next two hundred years, approximately from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> to the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, Latin culture spread its roots among us ever more widely and deeply. As it is impossible to discuss these matters in detail, we will try to characterize this process by means of specific examples. Already at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, we encounter a school (a cathedral school, of course) in Cracow and we know the stock of books it had at its disposal from the inventory (compiled at the very beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century) of the treasury of the cathedral. It is striking that in second place, immediately after texts intended for liturgical use, are the works of ancient authors: Terence, Sallust, Ovid, two exemplars

of both Statius' *Thebaid* and Persius. If to these we add such Christian writers from antiquity as Boethius (*De consolatione*), Gregory the Great (*Dialogues*) and Isidore of Seville (who is still entirely grounded in ancient sources) as well as textbooks of grammar and dialectics that are not described any further, we obtain a quite typical image of a small humanistic library of Europe at that time. The 12<sup>th</sup> century sees the first appearance among us of people with a more extensive education, usually described in the sources as "master" (*magister*), which in this case does not represent their function as teachers, but is a type of scholarly title (not a university ranking, as this only appears in the 13<sup>th</sup> century). In the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century, these "masters" were most probably still foreigners, as is attested by their typically Roman names, e.g., Fulbert, Robert and Stephan, but towards the end of this century we meet the first Polish scholar who merited this title: the chronicler Vincent (called Kadłubek), later Bishop of Cracow 1208–1218.

His chronicle, which is written at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is the first national history written by a Pole. If examined on its own, in isolation from its period, it must and often did appear as the height of peculiarity. Ever since some familiarity with the scholarly processes of historiography appeared among us, the stories in this chronicle which portrayed wars waged by Leszek with Alexander the Great or by Popiel with Julius Caesar caused ceaseless wringing of hands. Already in the Middle Ages, there was great dismay that the chronicler devoted so little place in his work to Polish matters while he found a great deal of it for reminiscing about various events from antiquity. However, if we regard the chronicle of Kadłubek as a witness to the penetration of ancient culture into Poland, we will be amazed at how close and how dear antiquity was to the thoughts and the heart of this first Polish intellectual, whose life and work we know quite well. It is not enough that his work is replete with quotations from Justin, Seneca, Cicero, Sallust, Julius Valerius and Macrobius as well as Vergil, Horace, Ovid, Statius, Lucan, Persius, Juvenal and Claudian, but most importantly, the events of antiquity are coalesced with the events of Poland into a viable whole. This can be attested not only in the context of the work, in those wars of Poles of long-ago with Alexander and Caesar and in the numerous references to parallel events in antiquity, but also in the formal presentations of national history in the categories of Roman public institutions, particularly those of Roman law (it has been calculated that Vincent quotes Justinian's legislation over a hundred times, while from contemporary canon law i.e. the Decree of Gracian, he quotes a mere thirty-three times). The chronicler exerts all his effort to present Poland and its history in the manner of the Roman historians, and, at the same time, to build a conviction in the reader that the Polish people are no worse a nation than the great peoples of antiquity.

His actions make him a true child of his time, of this 12<sup>th</sup> century which witnessed the third successive and very ample rebirth of ancient culture in Western Europe, a new flowering of literature in Latin of the sort not seen since the 4<sup>th</sup>

century, the flourishing of schools and libraries, the renewed discovery of Roman law, and a much deeper acquaintance with the whole heritage of ancient Roman writing. But Vincent's work and his admiration for antiquity could not have been an isolated phenomenon even on Polish territory, the sole result of his studies outside the borders of Poland and the interests he brought back home. If that were so, for whom in Poland would he have been writing his chronicle? The periodic devastations of our country, repeated so many times throughout its thousand-year history, have deprived us of the opportunity to track this phenomenon by means of more ample documentary materials. Only the archaeological studies of the last years have permitted us to better evaluate the richness of the Romanesque period in Poland, the period that covers the same time span as the events described here. The number and artistic maturity of architectural artifacts now known to us must have had their analogical counterparts in the level of intellectual culture, and the chronicle of Master Vincent was not some sort of meteorite that, falling from the sky, struck Polish soil. Indeed, at that time there was extant (though lost before our time) a long Latin poem about Peter Włostowicz, composed shortly after the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Wrocław and, contemporary with it, an Arab geography textbook, known as the *Book of Roger*, calls Poland "a land of wisdom and ar-Rum sages" (i.e. those using the Latin language). A more peculiar trace of another form of the popularity of antiquity in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Poland was conserved by old Polish names: at that time, we meet many a Hector, Achilles and Ajax – and this among the knighthood, not the clergy – from which we can draw the conclusion that the names of the heroes of Greek mythology had meaning for secular society as well.

The situation underwent a distinct change from the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, the artistic level of Latin literature among us diminishes as does the interest in antiquity. As an example, it suffices to mention that in two popular lives of St. Stanislaus written about 1253 (the date of his canonization), we do not come across any quotations from ancient authors. This converges with the general lowering of the level of intellectual culture, most probably dependent on difficult political and economic conditions in a period of struggles for the unification of the Kingdom of Poland. Once this main goal was accomplished in 1320 by Władysław Łokietek, the economic-cultural impasse will only slowly be addressed by Łokietek's son and heir, Casimir the Great. There were, however, other, more general causes for this state of affairs: after the Renaissance in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the wane of the Middle Ages causes a shift in the focus of intellectual life from humanistic and literary to philosophical and scientific. In the time of flowering of scholasticism and then its slow decline, the most widely-read authors are no longer the classical authors of Roman literature, but Aristotle and his Arab commentators in slavish, primitive Latin translations, which so impacted the tone of writing in this period that its Latin came to be called "translation Latin". Poetry lost ground in favour of scientific prose which was indifferent to artistic details, or

at best adorned itself in the very primitive effects of schoolboy rhetoric. *Artes* enjoy victory over *auctores*, as in the famous *fabliau* of a poet of that period, Henry d'Andeli. The knowledge of the Latin language spreads considerably, however (both among us and elsewhere), due to the increase in the number of (parish) schools, primarily in the cities, and also the great centres of learnings, such as universities. As usual, this expansion in quantity occurs at the cost of quality and graduates of these schools often used a Latin which over time provoked humanists' satirical reaction immortalized in the *Epistulae obscurorum virorum*.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when, to the south of the Alps, the Italian Renaissance is flowering fully, Poland is still in the throes of a profound medievalism. Humanism clears its path to us slowly and with great difficulty, first through a circle of people close to Bishop Oleśnicki, then later and more effectively through the court of King Casimir Jagiellończyk, where, after his arrival from Italy, Philippus Callimachus (Filippo Buonacorsi) is active. This was a very slow process, which can best be appreciated through the study of the successive stages by which arose the historical work of Jan Długosz. It was most probably Livy's example that gave the Canon from Cracow the scope and courage to spread his wings so widely (he was also the first to bring a manuscript of Livy from Hungary to Poland), but the material from which a great picture of the history of the nation began to arise as well as its original structure were still completely medieval. Only with time did the untiring chronicler (perhaps under the influence of his friendship with Callimachus) adorn his work with borrowings from classical authors. This is still partially visible in his notes, written in his own hand on the extant autograph of the work, and, in the preface, he gave a veritable display of his erudition in this area. Throughout the *Histories*, however, we see the tension between the old and the new and Długosz's grave prose, imitating Livy's periods less than skillfully, never achieves a truly humanistic fluidity.

Affairs at the Cracow University fare much the same. Slowly and by stages it introduces more and more amply the reading of the best writers of Ancient Rome into courses that are obligatory in the faculty of arts. Throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in accord with the medieval order of studies, Aristotle reigned, but the thought of this great Greek philosopher never found an answering spark in us. In Cracow, therefore, study was limited to the repetition of various variations on concepts of scholastic philosophy shaped in the west. It is notable how very little attraction ancient speculative thought ever had for us, nor did it ever stimulate us to independent reflection. A striking example of this is the fact that, up to the present, we have only with difficulty managed to publish translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics* or *Economics* of Aristotle (once at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the second time in our own times). The 17<sup>th</sup> century also saw the publication of the translation of the so-called *Problems*, and the last decade has added to this poor legacy only the *Poetics* and the third book of the *Rhetorics*. Nothing else from the remaining enormous *Corpus Aristotelicum* has

been translated. The humanistic and literary aspects of antiquity, not the speculative, have definitely always held more interest for us.

Let us return, however, to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century which, in the area of the reception of ancient culture in Poland, brought about enormous and fundamental changes. The real Renaissance among us begins only with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, proclaiming a decided return to antiquity in its pure and pagan form, not to the antiquity seen from the Christian perspective of the first renaissance from the times of the Church Fathers, as happened in the Middle Ages. I would not like to underestimate here the value of patristic literary activity shaping the intellectual culture of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, it was only humanism that associated itself consciously with classical culture, bypassing and even rejecting its medieval interpretation. This manifested itself in attempts to bring about the rebirth of classical Latin and in the renewed familiarity with Greek literature in the original Greek. The Hellenic world was not completely unknown to the Middle Ages, but its legacy was accessible only through Latin references and translations since the knowledge of Ancient Greek from the 6<sup>th</sup> until the 14<sup>th</sup> century was extremely rare in Western Europe. Furthermore, while in the Middle Ages any direct access to ancient culture belonged exclusively to the clergy (as the only educated social class of the time), at the time of the Renaissance the cult and knowledge of antiquity spread to the same degree, if not more so, among secular society.

All these phenomena we meet also on Polish soil. True humanistic Latin appears among us only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This can be seen clearly if, for example, one compares the language of diplomatic correspondence from this as well as from the previous century, such as the documents contained in the *Codex diplomaticus saec. XV* on the one hand and in the *Acta Tomiciana* on the other. Comparing the language of successive generations of Polish-Latin poets is no less informative: Paul of Krosno and John of Wiślica with Dantyszek and Janicki, and then with Kochanowski and Szymonowic. The study of the Greek language begins to be offered at the Cracow University only at the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and, at the end of the same century in Zamość, an important (at least in the eyes of the founder of the academy there) centre for the Greek studies arises, which unfortunately dwindles along with the general decline in our school system and culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For approximately one hundred years, however, the direct contact between our enlightened classes and Greek language and literature was alive and very fruitful in results. At the same time, we also have outstanding classical scholars, of whom some, such as the Latinist NIDECKI or the Hellenist BURSKI, were at a truly European level. Finally, among us also, a classical education becomes available to lay people. It is true that not long into the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Górnicki recalled that a gentleman would be ashamed to speak in Latin “because it is a priestly thing”. But soon after anecdote could put into the lips of King Stefan Batory the well-known words: “Disce, puer, Latine, faciam te *mości panem* (gentleman)”, which attests that knowledge



of this language was becoming characteristic of belonging to a certain societal class. Nevertheless, in this golden age of Polish culture and literature, the merchant class was also deeply and actively interested in antiquity (a phenomenon that unfortunately disappeared in the following century), and motifs of classical origin could be found in the earliest artifacts of popular market literature, where they maintained themselves until the 19<sup>th</sup> and perhaps even until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There is no doubt that the richness and standard of our literature and intellectual culture of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in general remains completely proportional to the familiarity of the individual creator with ancient culture. How clearly we see this when we compare, e.g., the admittedly very talented self-educated Rej with the extremely well-educated humanist Kochanowski! The creativity of the latter, as beautiful in Latin as in Polish guise, may serve as a classic example of the ennobling influence of the models of antiquity, drawn (and this is worth stressing) from both Greek and Roman literature, on the literary output in our national tongue. The first Polish drama, *The Dismissal of the Greek Envoys*, spun around mythological themes and realized in the form of a Greek tragedy, but also saturated with our national spirit and Polish political thought, is the most beautiful monument of this Renaissance symbiosis. Without the models and inspiration of antiquity, the works of Kochanowski cannot really be understood, and the same is true of the second greatest poet of those times, Szymon Szymonowic.

It is not only belles-lettres, however, that attests at that time to the close ties of our intellectual elite with the ancient world. The works of political writers with S. Orzechowski and A. Frycz Modrzewski in the lead, are filled with examples of this. Even such concepts as election *viritim* and *liberum veto*, which proved so harmful in the life of our nation at a later date, originate solely from transplanting certain reminiscences of the Roman constitutional system into our native soil. The Polish language of the Renaissance, of which we are rightly proud, reaches its flowering due to a purposeful nurturing and results to a large degree from the imitation of Roman writers of the Golden Age and of their attitude to the Greek language, which was considered as more elevated culturally and whose richness and attributes the Roman writers attempted to consciously assimilate into their native tongue while at the same time preserving its distinct national flavour. The greatest arbiter of the Polish language at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Grzegorz KNAPIUSZ, in his monumental *Thesaurus Polonolatinograecus* applies the same criteria to literary Polish which Cicero and Quintilian used with respect to Latin: being careful to use purely Polish idiom, avoiding of archaisms and vulgarisms and only a sparing use of neologisms.

KNAPIUSZ published the second edition of his *Thesaurus* during the time of Władysław IV, on the eve of the longlasting wars which, in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century not only shook the political and economic structure of the Polish nation, but also had a fatal effect on our culture. Its overall decline also brought

about a loosening of close ties with antiquity. School, however, remained Latin and pupils learned Latin together with their native tongue from the very first steps of reading and writing (this persisted until the 18<sup>th</sup> century), and the goal of education was to enforce that the learner was adept at Latin prose and verse: our literature until the times of Stanislas August was always bilingual and if we examine bibliographies, we see that the same people publish in both Latin and in Polish and that the number of books published in each language is more or less equal. Nonetheless, this contact with antiquity was superficial and unproductive. From the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the teaching of Greek, this infallible indicator of the authenticity of any humanism based on ancient models, disappears for approximately one hundred and fifty years: the belief spreads among the gentry and the clergy that Greek is not a necessary part of a general education. The teaching of Latin is mired in school rhetoric and declamations, and sight is lost of the great artistic and pedagogical values of Roman literature. Shortly after the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there is the demise of scholarly research on antiquity which cannot be replaced by even the still quite numerous translations, and school, now masticating only foreign material, deteriorates.

In the next century, however, with the first attempts at the rebirth of our culture after profound stagnation and decline during the Saxon times, the reformers once more reach for the life-giving sources of antiquity (among others). The school reform of Konarski aims at the reintroduction of serious study of Roman authors in the teaching of Latin, to draw the knowledge of the language from these rather than from a 16<sup>th</sup> century grammar of Alvares. Konarski's battle with verbosity and muddled circumlocution is based on the best traditions of classical Latin stylistics. Konarski even tried to reintroduce Greek into Piarist schools, but in the end this attempt came to nothing. The currents of the Enlightenment soon brought among us the models of French culture, which at that time was based on the conviction of the superiority of *les modernes* over *les anciens*. The National Commission on Education, permeated by these currents hallowed in its enactments the absence of Greek in our secondary schools and directed that Latin be taught simply as a foreign language, still truly indispensable at that time for an educated person because a considerable part of scholarly works was still being written in Latin. Thus the Commission's preference for "practical" authors, such as Columella (who wrote about agriculture) and Pliny the Elder, while simultaneously ignoring the educational and generally cultural merits of antiquity.

When the old Rzeczpospolita disappeared from the map of Europe, it seemed that our traditional links with ancient culture were broken. In 1803, Kołłątaj wrote:

The Latin and Greek tongues, with which our fathers were familiar, from which they drew the purest rules of good taste are today neglected to such a degree that, if for the next few years we do not diligently apply ourselves to Latin and Greek, all the costly treasures of literature enclosed in these two languages will become inaccessible to us.

A new Renaissance, born in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England and Germany and known as neohumanism or neohellenism because it emphasized the Greek aspect of antiquity (viewed from a historical perspective as the “youth” of humankind) brought about a turn for the better. The Polish school system which, in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, enjoyed considerable independence in the Russian zone of the partitioned Poland found itself, to some degree, under the influence of the new ideas. At the University of Wilno (Vilnius), which at that time was flowering, dramatic disputes took place between the Rector, ŚNIADECKI, who represented the ideas of the Enlightenment, and the Professor of Greek Literature, GRODDECK, the ardent supporter of neohellenism. Although ŚNIADECKI towered over GRODDECK in both character and breadth of vision, it is GRODDECK who had as students A. Mickiewicz and J. Lelewel. Moreover, in the schools of the Wilno district which had been reformed in the spirit of neohumanism, J. Słowacki was being educated, and Z. Krasiński was being taught by a graduate from these same schools, J. Korzeniowski. The effects of neohumanism in education were preceded among us at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a prominent interest in the artifacts of Greek art and the first (private) collections are begun at this time in Poland. The theoretical expression of these interests was *Winkelman polski* of J.K. POTOCKI.

We would be completely justified in extending the question that I. CHRZANOWSKI chose as the title for his beautiful study (*What Was Vergil for the Poles after the Loss of Independence?*) and investigating what Graeco-Roman antiquity was for the Poles in these post-partition times. In such a study, we would start by A.J. Czartoryski's *Ode to the Fatherland*, 1796, modelled on Pindar, through Krasiński's *Iridion*, Słowacki's *The Tomb of Agamemnon* and Ujejski's *Marathon* and continue until Wyspiański's *November Night* and *Acropolis*, spinning a yarn about how the greatest minds of our nation during the time of captivity sought the reflection and resemblance of the difficulties and struggles of their own times in the mirror of classical antiquity. Thankfully, today we know these things quite accurately due to the seminal monographs of T. SINKO *Mickiewicz and Antiquity*, *The Hellenism of Słowacki*, *Classical Laurels of Norwid*, and *The Antiquity of Wyspiański*. We can also add the significant fact that the first Polish literary work to win the Nobel prize was Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*, and we have described as concisely as possible the profound identification of our 19<sup>th</sup> century literature with the themes of antiquity. Without the knowledge of these, it is impossible to either understand or experience in full all these greatest accomplishments of our culture.

In fact, in those sad days of captivity, ancient writers accompanied Poles everywhere they went. RYKACZEWSKI was translating Cicero's letters in a Paris under bombardment by the Prussians in 1871, KRASZEWSKI was translating Plautus during his fortunately short-lived incarceration in a German prison in 1883, and PRZYCHOCKI was translating the same Plautus in the trenches in Bukowina in 1916.

Throughout the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the beginning of our century, the foundations of this identification were laid by the secondary school system, which, particularly in the Prussian and Austrian partitioned zones, was based in a great part on the teaching of both ancient languages, in this way giving a large percentage of the Polish intelligentsia the opportunity to familiarize themselves personally with at least some of the masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature. Given, however, that the pedagogical methods were not always correct or skillful, there was also a danger of surfeit and indifference to values which were often rendered extremely unappealing by the school routine. The “cramming of *cum*-s and *ut*-s in a hopeless grind” (according to the words of the poet) often obscured the humanistic values of antiquity for the pupils of such schools. The foundations, however, were solid, and when the political conditions of post-constitutional Galicia permitted it, the development of Polish studies in classical philology was rapid, with centres at two universities (in Cracow and in Lwów) as well as in the Faculty of Letters of the Cracow Academy of Arts and Sciences. Our Association also arose in Galicia at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and began to publish its own important research journal, “Eos”. The growth of the academic personnel was so rapid that, after independence was regained in 1918, it permitted the staffing of positions in the departments of four other Polish universities that had recently come into existence. This progress in the real knowledge of antiquity has taught us to consider the classical world not as an aesthetic ideal or as a period of history when human beings were the closest to a “natural state”, but as the beginning of a historical process from which our present reality is also derived, and to see in it, according to Tadeusz ZIELIŃSKI, “not the norm, but a seed”.

This settled state of affairs which in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seemed long-lived and solidly grounded already began to change in the twenty years between World Wars. This fact has already been brought to our attention by Kazimierz MORAWSKI in the introduction to the *Outline of Roman Literature* (1922). On one hand, the superabundance of schooling unilaterally based on the teaching of classical languages, and on the other the requirements of a new technological civilization combined in order to bring about the gradual diminution of the role of Latin and Greek in the Polish school system. This in itself would not have been harmful, had it not been followed by a turning away from ancient culture as a whole. Its decline in schools continued even further after the Second World War, until today, as we know, we only find a smattering of Latin in secondary schools and, for several years now, a complete disappearance of Greek. The situation described by Kołłątaj a hundred and fifty years ago is repeating itself almost exactly. In this case, however, as so many times in the past, this state of affairs in Poland is not an isolated phenomenon: at present, the withdrawal of classical subjects in schools can be observed throughout Europe.

In our specific Polish realities, is this accompanied by a lack of interest in ancient culture as a whole? Not in the least. This is attested by a strikingly great

number of translations from both ancient languages that appeared in the past twenty years, a number that, given the short space of time, has never been previously equalled among us. Moreover, these translations are selling well and some, e.g. Suetonius' *The Lives of the Caesars*, in the translation by Janina PLISZCZYŃSKA (to name only one) literally fly off the shelves. The same can be said about the little classical volumes of the National Library, of which, e.g., the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* appear every several years in printings of tens of thousands of copies (and again disappear from the booksellers' shelves). The popular yet accurate renderings of selected episodes from ancient history by Aleksander KRAWCZUK are also widely read. Our two monthly philological publications, "Meander" and "Filomata", which is aimed at school age readers, are quickly circulated among our readership. Works of ancient drama are also strikingly often included in the repertoire of our theaters and television.

At the wane of the first millennium of the history of ancient culture in Poland an important question arises: what should be the foundations for its future in our society? Everything seems to point to it still being an integral part of our national culture and to this day it is perceived as such. The above short overview has shown that a more profound knowledge of antiquity has always accompanied times of the flowering of our cultural life: in the period of the Renaissance in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in the period of 16<sup>th</sup> century humanism and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Conversely, the neglect of the legacy of the ancient world has always coincided in time with periods less favourable for Polish culture. We will not be so conceited as to conclude that antiquity has always been a force for development while its neglect a cause for decline. Perhaps the opposite was true: perhaps a general flowering of intellectual life brought with it a heightened interest in antiquity. In any case, the synchronicity of these two phenomena cannot be questioned. The actual and enduring merits of antiquity in the development of any form of humanism in our section of the globe cannot be disputed either. If we do not want to become captives and slaves of our own technical civilization we must at all costs create an equivalent counterbalance in the form of a rich humanistic culture. Moreover, what can be more advantageous to the very necessary rapprochement of European nations and their mutual understanding than an appeal to our common cultural heritage of antiquity? We have to take care of this heritage and nurture it, all the more because, for a thousand years, it has been an integral part of our own national accomplishments. This goal, however, cannot always be achieved by the same means. Surely it is the great task of our generation to find new ways for the transmission of antiquity. Nor should we be disturbed by difficulties. History teaches that, while the values which are so dear to us were at times forgotten with great harm to those who forgot them, these values will always, in a continual series of Renaissances, be once more reborn. *Desinunt ista, non pereunt.*