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A Few Observations on the Cultural Aspects of 19th Century Polish Archaeology

ABSTRACT

The article identifies and discusses several examples of specific perceptions of archeology developing in the 19th century in constructing and sustaining national identity, especially in the face of the loss of the political subjectivity of the state, which sometimes even resulted in outlining an opposition of discovering, collecting and studying artifacts of native “antiquity” against the dynamically developing Mediterranean archeology (ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome) in Western Europe.

KEYWORDS: history of culture (aspects), archaeology, Polish science in 19th century, collecting of antiquities

STRESZCZENIE

Kilka uwag na temat aspektów kulturowych archeologii polskiej XIX wieku

Artykuł wskazuje i omawia kilka przykładów specyficznego postrzegania roli rozwijającej się w XIX wieku archeologii w konstruowaniu oraz podtrzymywaniu narodowej tożsamości, zwłaszcza w obliczu utraty politycznej podmiotowości państwa, co skutkowało niekiedy nawet definiowaniem opozycji odkrywania, kolekcjonowania oraz badania artefaktów rodzimej „starożytności” wobec dynamicznie rozwijającej się w zachodniej Europie archeologii śródziemnomorskiej (starożytny Egipt, Grecja, Rzym).

SŁOWA KLUCZE: historia kultury, archeologia, nauka polska XIX wieku, kolekcjonerstwo

This article is not a synthesis (even a brief one) of the history of Polish archeology in the 19th century, but I would like to point out some typical, in my opinion, historical and cultural aspects of the perception and practice of archeology in Poland at the time, differentiating it from Western

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Europe. For while the various strands of archaeological interest developed in Poland in roughly the same manner and in contact with other countries (see e.g. Abramowicz, 1974) – in the case of Mediterranean archeology it was often somewhat in opposition thereto. Let us assume here, of course, in a great simplification, that interests in the ancient “national” past have everywhere had a key theme of discovering (confirming) identity, historical continuity, and especially in the 19th century, they were sometimes an instrument of political-nationalist identification (Trigger, 1994; Trigger, 2006; Díaz-Andreu, 2007), while Mediterranean archeology (the study of the material heritage of ancient civilizations: Greece, Rome, and Mesopotamia, Egypt, etc.) was seen much more as a synthesis of “unbiased” scientific work of collecting and study, aesthetic reflection on classical and oriental antiquity, moreover, with an aspect of passionate discovery and travel-detective, exotic adventure. Naturally, it was most desirable to discover, study and display spectacular and materially valuable objects in private or public collections.

The history of Polish archeology in the broadest sense (not only in the meaning of the development of the scientific discipline, but also the collection of ancient artifacts: cf. Wrońska-Kowalska, 1999) was dealt with by many authors; among others, Stanisław Jan Gąsiorowski, but above all, Andrzej Abramowicz (Abramowicz, 1983; 1987; 1992), Jerzy Gąsowski (Gąsowski, 1981) and Adrianna Szczerba (Szczerba, 2018). We should also mention the former historical and geographical conditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: scientists from Lithuania and Ukraine, for example, Sarunas Milisauskas, Aldona Snitkuvienė, Sandra Veprauskienė or Mykola Tarasenko.

Archeology derived from collecting and antiquarianism, with a strong aspect of art history, anthropology, as well as sub-disciplines that are today included in the auxiliary sciences of history (numismatics, sphragistics), linked, moreover, to geology, mineralogy and paleontology, and, on the other hand, to philology, existed practically from the beginning of modern science, although rather as curiosities. Earlier definitions of archeology, especially classical archeology – albeit the ancient East was also seen as part of the ancient world, additionally with a strong biblical context – indicated its place essentially among the sciences of antiquity (Germ.: *Altertumswissenschaft*). Although we can point to various manifestations of interest in the remains of ancient material culture even as far back as antiquity (Thucydides), until the first decades of the 19th century, discoveries were generally incidental. It was even sometimes thought that small artifacts found in the ground: vessels or flint tools were of natural origin (sic!). This, for example, was firmly asserted by 15th century Polish chronicler Jan Długosz (Longinus in Latin): *Joannis Dlugosii Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, Lib. I, modern ed.;

Warsaw 1964, p. 116) followed by Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia universalis* (Colonia 1575, lib. IV, p. 954).

Here I shall mention additionally that already in the 16th century a large Egyptological collection almost reached the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as the wealthy aristocrat Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł (Lithuanian: Mikalojus Radvila Našlaitėlis) nicknamed “the Orphan”, during his travel (pilgrimage) to the Holy Land and Egypt (1582–1584), collected several chests of ancient Egyptian antiquities (Schneider, 1990) and planned to exhibit them. Unfortunately, the collection was lost during the return voyage across the Mediterranean. Also before the 19th century, Greek and Roman artifacts (statues, vases) were collected, but also small Egyptian relics; here, for example, the aristocratic Potocki family stood out (Dobrowolski, 2007; Majewska, 2015).

It is often believed that in a pan-European perspective, two important impulses leading to the separation of archeology from the various other strands of historical inquiry were the discovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii (in 1748) and the publication of Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s work, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, Dresden 1764. Interestingly, the Polish translation, or rather author’s alteration, was made by Stanisław Kostka Potocki: *O sztuce u dawnych czyli Winckelman Polski* [*On the Art of the Ancients, or Polish Winckelmann*], Warsaw 1815, which he supplemented with his own musings about ancient Egypt, no doubt inspired by the huge wave of European interest in the country after Napoleon Bonaparte’s expedition (1798–1801).

“Domestic antiquities” did not arouse much interest in Poland until the late 18th century. Of course, it should be recalled here that the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lay outside the *Limes Imperii Romani*, hence local excavations did not yield spectacular results. A peculiar appreciation of the former heritage of these areas was made by Johann Gottfried von Herder in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Riga–Leipzig 1784–1791, particularly IV.16.4: *Slawische Völker*: see e.g. Szczerba, 2018, pp. 356–357). At the end of the 18th century, ambitious ideas for managing the legacy of “national antiquity” were born, and philosopher and historian Michał Mniszech planned to establish the *Musaeum Polonicum*. His article, *Mysli względem założenia Musaeum Polonicum* [Thoughts on establishing the *Musaeum Polonicum*], was published in 1775 by the *Zabawy Przyjemne i Pożyteczne* (‘Pleasant and Positive Activities’, vol. 11/2, pp. 211–226; Powidzki 1955) magazine. The collection was intended to be a kind of library, image collection, document archive, and at the same time a display of various artifacts of natural history, numismatics and “domestic antiquitates”. Back in the days of the first partition of the Commonwealth in the 1770s, concerns about the

endurance of identity (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist as a European political entity in the 19th century) were conducive to stimulating interest directed toward “national antiquities”. Probably the first verbalization of the clear opposition of the how domestic archeology was perceived against Mediterranean archaeology were the words noted down by the Polish historian and poet, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, who stated in his *Podróże historyczne po ziemiach polskich między rokiem 1811 a 1828 odbytych* [*Historical Travels in Poland between 1811 and 1828*], printed in Paris-Petersburg 1858, pp. 125–126): “We snoop around the Italian countryside, and we trample the less beautiful, but more concerning to us antiquities of Poland ...”. This dichotomy would take on a special, one might even say emotional, character in the Polish nineteenth-century reality, resulting in much less interest in, and sometimes even disregard for, the research area of Mediterranean archeology, so rapidly developing in Western Europe at the time.

Another important date for Polish “romantic archeology” was 1818 and the publication of Zorian Dołęga Chodakowski’s (Adam Czarnocki’s) *O Słowiańszczyźnie przed chrześcijaństwem* [*About Slavic People before Christianity*]. In the “national antiquities” there was a search for evidence of the richness of ancient Slavic culture as a source of national identity, an attempt to find traces of a complex, colorful mythology, sophisticated art, even literature, the remnants of which were not only folk songs (the ethnographic theme), but also “runic inscriptions” (Boroń, 2012). A major event was the discovery of a stone statue of the “proto-Slavic deity Svantevit” (1848) and its exhibition in Krakow (1851). The statue most likely dates back to the 11th century, although its authenticity is sometimes questioned (Komar and Chamajko, 2013; Łuczyński, 2015). At the same time, the scope of “antiquity” (archeology) included objects of historical or sentimental value from much less distant times: mementos of Polish rulers, distinguished persons, etc.

The first decades of the 19th century, however, showed promise in terms of the possibility of a harmonious development of domestic and Mediterranean archeology. Here one should point to Vilnius University, where classical and oriental studies were intensively pursued. It is interesting to note the work by an astronomer of this university, Marcin Poczubutt-Odlanicki, *O dawności Zodyaka Egipskiego w Denderah (Tintyris)* [*On the Antiquity of the Egyptian Zodyak in Denderah (Tintyris)*], published simultaneously in French: *Essais sur l'époque de l'antiquité du zodiaque de Denderah*, Vilna 1803, where he discussed Louvre’s artifact inv. D 38 which might have been one of the first egyptological paper in Europe. Vilnius historian Joachim Lelewel (Baár, 2010, pp. 19–24) considering the methodology of historical research (1820s) introduced an unambiguously separate

“archeology” into the history researcher’s toolbox, differentiating but also pointing out the similarities of the concepts of *antiquitates* and *archeology*: “and although different writers have interchanged these terms: some have called it *archaeologia*, which others have called *antiquitates*, the sciences of one should be diligently distinguished from the other”, he wrote in 1826 in a treatise *O historii, jej rozgałęzieniu i naukach zwiqzkek z niq majqcych* [*About history, its branches, and the sciences related to it*], Lelewel 1964, pp. 434–435). At the same time, he stressed that the value of an archaeological artifact should not be equated with its aesthetic value, admitting that “artifacts, i.e. Egyptian, Greek, Roman antiquities, have this higher advantage above other arts, happen to be almost exclusive to archeology.” Interestingly, Lelewel advocated a separate department of auxiliary sciences of history (at the same time of philology) dedicated to the study of ancient Egypt and calling it “hieroglyphica”. Thus, it would probably be a pioneer separate academic discipline in the world: Egyptology! Another important Vilnius event was a three-year research trip undertaken by Lelewel’s disciple, Józef Julian Sękowski, to Middle Eastern countries, including Egypt (1819–1821). The trip was meant to be a kind of scholarship, promoting an exceptionally talented young man, and preparing him to head the university chair in Vilnius. At the age of thirty, however, Sękowski consciously shunned Polishness and chose a career in Russian science and culture.

In the first half of the 19th century, museums and scientific associations specifically dedicated to archeology were established in Poland, but almost exclusively domestic, and sporadic with the first specialized periodicals (see e.g. Zinkow, 2010). As early as 1823, the Musaeum Lubomirscianum with a large archaeological exhibition was founded in Lviv, and in Krakow in 1848 the Archaeological Branch was established by the Krakow Scientific Society, which had existed since 1816 (Rederowa, 1998), and soon (1850) a public museum was established, collecting and displaying exhibits from excavations in the vicinity of Krakow – including, for example, a collection of Roman coins. The exhibition was soon visited by an unusually large number of interested parties for the time: more than 16,000 people. In the early second half of the 19th century Krakow became the most vibrant center for archaeological research. Founded in 1841, the scholarly journal *Biblioteka Warszawská* [*The Warsaw Library*] published nearly 150 dissertations related to archeology in the broadest sense by the end of the 19th century (Wrońska, 1989, pp. 108–109, Zinkow, 2010), mostly domestic, discussing both various accidental finds and planned studies of archaeological sites. However, it is worth mentioning that articles and notes commenting on the progress of Mediterranean archeology were also published. The institutionalization and professionalization of research progressed (Baár, 2010, 75 ff.). The first university chair of archeology in

Poland was established under the direction of Józef Łepkowski at the Jagiellonian University in 1867. Also in Krakow, Izydor Kopernicki issued the magazine *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Krajowej* [*Collection of News for National Anthropology*]. The magazine reliably reported on various scientific archaeological expeditions and the results of these studies regularly enriched the Archaeological Museum's collection. In addition, Kopernicki was the founder of the Department of Anthropology at Jagiellonian University (from 1886), which preceded the establishment of the Department of Classical Archeology (1897). Warsaw's scientific activity, on the other hand, in view of the limited possibility of developing academic life and scientific societies, was centered around periodicals (Wrońska, 1989, p. 7) and private collecting (Kowalczyk, 1981).

In the following decades of the 19th century, the demarcation of interests directed toward ancient civilizations (Greece, Rome, also the ancient East) and toward "domestic" or more broadly "Slavic" archeology became increasingly clear. *Encyklopedia Powszechna S. Orgelbranda* [*S. Orgelbrand's Universal Encyclopedia*] (see also Wrońska, 1989) provides separate entries for *Archeology*, *Biblical archeology* and *Polish archeology* (vol. 2, 1860, pp. 85–90; c.f. Wrońska-Kowalska, 1999). However, attempts have been made to bridge gaps between these areas. Already during the Renaissance, it was realized that even though the area of Poland was outside the Roman Empire in ancient history, Roman artifacts, mainly coins, could also be found in our country. Accidental finds, moreover, forgeries or so-called sham finds, were sometimes overinterpreted, becoming a source of sophistic theories, even suggesting deep interdependence of ancient Slavs or Balts and ancient Mediterranean cultures (Kolendo, 1980; Nowakowski, 2005). Such an apparent find, for example, were Egyptian figurines, undoubtedly authentic, "discovered" in 1852 in the Lithuanian town of Szweksznie/Švėkšna, by amateur archeology enthusiast Adam Plater. His contemporaries (Teodor Narbutt, Adam Honory Kirkor, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski) were inclined to describe these artifacts as unequivocal "archeological" evidence of contacts with the ancient Egyptians (the intermediation of the Phoenicians was also speculated). In all likelihood, the figurines were objects dropped off at the research site by Stefan Plater, the father of the young archeology enthusiast (probably purchased in advance at some European antique store), who wanted to fuel his son's passion for research (Śliwa, 1994).

In Egypt itself, Aleksander Branicki, Adam Potocki, Michał Tyszkiewicz (many spectacular relics from his collection are held, for example, by the Musée du Louvre) and Mikołaj Wisłocki, among others, conducted excavation research in Egypt, amassing larger or smaller collections (Śliwa, 2021). Michał Tyszkiewicz (Lithuanian: Tiškevičius; see his *Notes*

et souvenirs d'un vieux collectionneur, Paris 1898), one of the most important European collectors of the time, however, did not choose to deposit his vast and priceless collection of classical and Egyptian antiquities at his family estate Birże/Biržai or in Vilnius. Perhaps his decision to sell the collection in Western Europe (Tyszkiewicz's artifacts are nowadays, in addition to the Louvre, in museums in London, Rome, Berlin, Boston and Copenhagen, among others) was influenced by the fate of the Vilnius Museum of Antiquities, founded by his cousin, Eustachy Tyszkiewicz, also an archeology enthusiast, which was liquidated in 1865 after only a few years of operation and looted for the benefit of various scientific institutions in Russia (Ilgiewicz, 2005).

Another Polish collector of the 19th century, Prince Władysław Czartoryski, amassed collections of Egyptian, Greek, Etrurian and Roman antiquities. Particularly in Egypt, his trusted agent Stefan Maruszyński (or Marusieński) had extensive contacts in archaeological and antiquarian circles, and after all, in those days, with large financial resources, one could amass a truly impressive collection (Gorzelań, 2015). However, when Czartoryski donated valuable Greek and Roman artifacts to the archaeological office of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the *Rocznik dla Archeologów, Numizmatyków i Bibliografów Polskich* [*Yearbook for Polish Archaeologists, Numismatists and Bibliographers*] commented on this gift as if with disappointment, as “a foreign collection ... to serve for comparisons” (*Yearbook [...] for the year 1871*, Kraków 1874, p. 235). A decade later (1883), another archeological collector; Konstanty Schmidt-Ciążyński donated “... Egyptian excavations ... Babylonian, Assyrian gemstones and seals, Babylonian and Phoenician cylinders, Greek and Roman relief inscriptions, Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan amulets and scarabs ...” to Krakow museums (J. Grzegorzewski, *Rzeźba w klejnotach i Konstanty Szmidt (Ciążyński), założyciel pierwszej publicznej daktyloteki w Polsce*, “*Ateneum. Pismo Naukowe i Literackie*” II/5, 1884, p. 339). A small part of the collection was shown on public display only once, and then went into storage for a century.

Despite the imbalance in the development of domestic and Mediterranean archeology, no doubt caused primarily by giving the former the rank of an important instrument of identity politics in the situation of Poland's political non-existence, it can be argued that sometimes the neglect of the development of Mediterranean archeology, so dynamically developing in Western Europe, was noticed. In a popular weekly magazine of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, *Wędrowiec* [*The Wanderer*], it was commented with bitter irony on the little interest in the study of Mediterranean antiquity in domestic science:

...were we going to bring forth from our bosom some Champollions, Niebuhrs, Grottes, Schliemanns, Rawlinsons, and the like in a grand style of enthusiasts who would rummage through graves and sip corpse air to exhale it later in immortal discoveries, read Egyptian hieroglyphs, Assyrian wedges, rebuild Mycenae, Troy, etc., and infect the state of knowledge with all this? (K. Kaszowski, *Wędrowiec* XL: 1902, 4, p. 63).

Epilogue

In 1905, a graduate of history of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Tadeusz Smoleński, traveled to Egypt, where he began his studies under the direction of the most prominent specialist of the time, Gaston Maspero. He was soon entrusted with excavating his own archaeological sites (it should be added here that Smoleński was formally a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as Poland regained sovereignty only in 1918) and the prestigious position of secretary of the organizing committee of the International Congress of Archaeologists in Cairo in 1909. The Krakow university community saw prospects for developing Egyptological research in Poland at a European level in these endeavors. Sadly, Smoleński died in 1909, at the age of just 25. In the interwar period between 1918 and 1939, the now independent Poland undertook (in cooperation with French scientists) ambitious archaeological initiatives in the Middle East. However, as a result of World War II, Poland remained in the Soviet sphere of influence, behind the Iron Curtain. The irony of history is that in those days, especially in the 1940s–60s, the 19th century pattern was repeated in some aspects. “Domestic” archeology was promoted by the communist authorities as an ideological propaganda tool, while Mediterranean archeology was seen as “bourgeois” and “capitalist” (Zinkow, 2018). The situation changed only after the 1960s, and archeology in Poland has been able to develop harmoniously in both areas.

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