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Jan Kochanowski in Königsberg¹

While the influence of Italian and even French Humanism on Jan Kochanowski's works has been extensively discussed in numerous publications², researchers interested in this poet seem to neglect the impact of German Humanism (particularly in its Königsberg "form") on both his writing and his life. So far, Kochanowski's connections with Königsberg University (Albertina) and the court of the Prussian prince (in actual fact, duke) Albert von Hohenzollern have been addressed in some detail by two scholars, namely Stanislaw Kot and Janusz Mallek.

To Kot in particular we owe the publication of both the Latin original and the Polish translation of Kochanowski's letter to the prince and the latter's reply³. Janusz Mallek, on the other hand, has verified Kot's intuitional remarks with comprehensive source research in the "Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz" in Berlin; he has also raised some key problems⁴, the main one being the difficulty of gaining detailed insight into the Königsberg Court in the mid-16th century and investigating the works of Königsberg University professors (in particular Georg Sabinus) "with respect to the possible influence on the young Kochanowski"⁵.

In the perspective of a far-reaching analysis of the influence of German Humanism, particularly of its Königsberg variant, on Kochanowski, I will here limit myself to pinpointing some reliable biographical information supported by source material, and providing information about traces of the impact of Prussian (and more broadly – German) culture on certain literary works by Jan of Czarnolas.

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² Barycz 1965; Weintraub 1991: 65-69 and Pelc 2001: 43-62; from the most recent literature see e.g. G. Urban-Godziek 2008.

³ Kot 1928: 423-424 (original) and 393-394 (translation). See also: Wotschke 1917-1918: 54-55 and a recent edition of the letter: Kochanowski 2008: 760-765.

⁴ Mallek 1986: 177-187 and *idem* 1996: 184.

⁵ Mallek 1986: 179.

1. Kochanowski in Königsberg – biographical facts and hypotheses

Biographers unanimously claim that Kochanowski arrived in Königsberg for the first time in summer or autumn 1551 and stayed in the town until the following spring⁶ when he left for Padua to continue his studies. His second visit to the capital of the Duchy of Prussia began in spring or summer of 1555 and lasted at least until the middle of 1556 or, as Mallek suggests, even until the end of that year⁷. Key testimony of Kochanowski's first stay in Königsberg is a copy of Seneca's *Tragedies*, published in Basel in 1541, which the young poet donated to his friend Stanisław Grzepski, a student of Königsberg University in 1551-1552 (or by the beginning of 1553). The copy bears a poetic dedication with an inscription "I. K."⁸. Jan of Czarnolas's second stay in the capital city of Prussia is better documented by Kochanowski's autographed letter to prince Albert Hohenzollern dated 6th April, 1556 and the prince's reply of 15th April, plus an entry in the Prussian court's expense register (*Ausgabe-Bücher*): the register dated 1555 states that Jan Kochanowski ("Johannes Kochanoffski") has been given 50 marks from the fund "for the college [i.e. University] and for the national and foreign scholars" ("Aufs Colegio und gelerte im Land und aus dem Landt")⁹, while the 1556 register confirms that Kochanowski (no first name stated) received 50 marks from Albert's burgrave and that "Hans Kochanowsky" – as a two-horse ("Zwei Rosser") courtier – has been given another 50 marks¹⁰.

With such limited evidence, we can really only attempt to understand the nature of the poet's first stay in Königsberg by analysing the credibility of the hypotheses put forward by other scholars. First, one should agree with the assumption made by Kot, and then by both Mallek and J. Pelc,¹¹ that, at that time, Kochanowski enjoyed close relations with the University, established in 1544, or at least with its intellectual community. The fact that the poet failed to register with the University, unlike his younger brothers Andrzej (in 1554) and Jakub (in 1555), is hardly surprising as it was fairly common practice not to do so in 16th century universities¹² if students were only staying temporarily or perhaps for other reasons. Pelc stresses Kochanowski's passion for travelling the world, as expressed in his dedication to Grzepski, and assumes that the latter reflected the poet's intention to visit Italy¹³. Despite the poet's plans for further education, however, the importance of the Königsberg humanists' influence on his

⁶ Mallek 1986: 177-179; Pelc 2001: 33-36 and Ulewicz 1967-1968: 185-190.

⁷ Mallek 1986: 181-185.

⁸ Pelc 2001: 35.

⁹ Ostpreussische Folianten, Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preussischer Kulturbesitz (= Ostpr. Fol.) 13 472, p. 218v (234v).

¹⁰ Ostpr. Fol. 13 473, p. 28v and 290r.

¹¹ Kot 1928: 393-399; Mallek 1986: 178-180 and Pelc 2001: 33-36.

¹² Mallek 1986: 179.

¹³ Pelc 2001: 36.

life and works should not be underestimated. The author of the monograph mentions possible contacts Kochanowski may have had with Polish representatives of the Protestant Reformation active in Königsberg: Jan Seklucjan, Stanislaw Murzynowski and Jan Sandecki-Malecki¹⁴. Mallek points out the young poet's relations with the first rector of the University, the esteemed neo-Latin poet Georg Sabinus (1508-1560), and with Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586), Sabinus' cousin and the ducal librarian¹⁵, who was soon to become a famous Lutheran theologian.

It is easy to imagine that the young humanist would soon have made the acquaintance of Chemnitz since he certainly had a thirst for knowledge and visited Prince Albert's fast-growing library. In fact, his close relations with Sabinus can be taken for granted and are indirectly testified by the court's 1555 expense register. Here we can see that, apart from Kochanowski, the other beneficiaries of the above mentioned fund for the "Colegium" ("Aufs Colegium und gelerte im Land und aus dem Landt") were: doctor Clemendt Wedermann (p. 219r), masters Wolff Damb (p. 218v) and Johannes Oziverus (p. 219r), and Sabinus himself (p. 217r), listed in first place. It is therefore highly likely that, after returning from Italy, where he had stayed from spring 1552 to spring or summer 1555, Kochanowski soon renewed his contacts with Chemnitz as this would have fostered closer relations with both Albert's court and the prince himself. If the Polish poet effectively enjoyed Sabinus's 'protection', then Jan of Czarnolas must have been in the Duchy of Prussia in the spring of 1555 already, as in April of that year Sabinus accepted the post of advisor to the Prince of Brandenburg Joachim II and the chair of professor in Frankfurt a.d. Oder: he thus left Königsberg soon afterwards¹⁶. On the other hand, we can assume that Kochanowski's contacts with German scholars and students were much wider and that they had started as early as his first stay in Königsberg; he may therefore have been recommended to the prince by someone other than Sabinus, who in fact resigned his position as rector. Kochanowski may have had close contacts with Wedermann, Damb and Oziverus too. We know very little about them, but indirect proof of the young poet's good relations with these Germans may be provided by the fact that he was elected counsellor of the Polish artists at Padua University in 1554: that year, in fact, Poles and Germans were still bound by an alliance for voting (the Polish students actually broke that alliance the very next year)¹⁷. While expressing his surprise at Kochanowski's involvement in university politics, Henryk Barycz wrote:

It is a paradox of history that the future eulogist of the peaceful life and the devoted advocate of the ideal of harmony has become an activist in these hard and dangerous times.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Mallek 1986: 179-180.

¹⁶ Scheible 1995: 28 and Scheible, Ebneith 2005.

¹⁷ Barycz 1965: 244 and 257.

The sparse official sources and documents of the university and its students provide no clue as to the reasons for this surprising decision of a poet otherwise devoted to his studies and to the Muses. Considering the dearth of sources, it is difficult to state today whether he was caught up by the rapidly changing events, the example or persuasions of his friend Paweł Stempowski (advisor to the Polish jurists until 20 June 1554) or the influence of the Polish student community or, maybe, by the desire to join the fray typical of young men of his age¹⁸.

The real reasons for Kochanowski's decision to act as an advisor in these circumstances are indeed difficult to trace. However it seems that Barycz has forgotten about one important hypothesis: as an Albertina student and Protestant Reformation sympathizer¹⁹, as well as a possible protégé of Georg Sabinus, Kochanowski was the ideal candidate to handle negotiations with the German nation: these negotiations were tough, since they were leading to the collapse of the voting alliance. The negotiations terminated with a peaceful agreement that put an end to the alliance with Germany and obtained an independent position for the Poles, with two lectureships for Stanisław Warszewicki and Piotr of Goniądz²⁰: all this demonstrates Kochanowski's diplomatic talents, which might have been of further use to prince Albert Hohenzollern.

Whether the poet performed any diplomatic tasks for the Prussian court is not known. There is proof, however, of the patronage of Prince Albert, who paid Kochanowski 50 marks in 1555 and made him his courtier with the same salary the following year: this certainly concerns the intellectual work of the young poet. Jan of Czarnolas himself mentioned his Prussian protector in the letter of April 6, 1556, calling him "the leader and the protector of my studies" ("studiorum meorum ducem atque fautorem"). The ambiguous noun *studia* also appeared later in the letter to the prince, where the poet mentions his troubling eye problem "as it makes it impossible for me to continue my studies" and "turns me into useless ballast" for the monarch ("tum quod mea studia remoretur, tum quod me facit inutile pondus Illustrissimae Coelsitudini vestrae"). In this sentence Kochanowski seems to distinguish between his *studia* (i.e. scientific or literary work) and his service at the court, where he had to meet the prince regularly: the hypothesis is confirmed by Albert's reply to the poet's letter. He mentioned the pleasure experienced by "the view and the presence" of Kochanowski ("conspectu tuo praesentiaeque libenter fruimur"²¹).

Other considerations need to be made too. The poet himself asserts:

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

¹⁹ Mallek 1986: 180-181.

²⁰ Barycz 1965: 248-249.

²¹ Kot 1928: 395.

if only my mind could be distinguished by its skills, by Hercules, I swear, to use it all to improve the dignity and to fulfil the orders of your Highness²².

However, in April 1556 he was already thinking about travelling to Italy for treatment for his eyes (“*morbus ille oculorum*”) and in his letter he asked the prince for permission to leave and for financial support. Albert paid out 50 marks for that purpose, as is proven both by his letter and by the entry in the court’s expense register, where it was booked separately as proof of the prince’s favour (“*Gnaden*”)²³, i.e. with no connection to a courtier’s salary. Indeed, an analysis of the *Ausgabe-Buch* layout of 1556 confirms that the suggestion by Pelc that Kochanowski only received 50 marks from the ducal treasury in 1556 is wrong²⁴, since we find there two separate notes testifying to this amount having been paid to the poet. On the other hand, it may be assumed that the author of the book *Kochanowski. Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej* was at least partially correct when suggesting that the fact of registering the payment in 4 quarterly instalments may not be false²⁵. It seems possible to assume that Kochanowski did not withdraw the whole amount at the beginning of the year, but that he had not personally received part of the instalments. Proof of this can be found in the record of the previous year’s book, where a note beside the instalment paid on St. Michael’s Day (29th September) reads: “received personally” (“*12 ½ M(ark) – q(ua)r(ta)l Michaelis empfangen er selber*”²⁶). Therefore, since the courtier was not obliged to collect each instalment personally, there is no reason to doubt that Kochanowski traveled to Italy in 1556, as Mallek maintains²⁷.

The final question about Kochanowski’s stay in Königsberg demonstrated by available sources is his status at the ducal court. It seems that Jan of Czarnolas was highly regarded by Albert Hohenzollern, though it is not clear whether he used his “*ingenij dexteritas*” (“the dexterity of mind”, or “nice temper, courtesy”) only for writing poetical works (probably in Latin) for court ceremonies, or for other purposes as well, such as for chancellor’s work at the court or in some diplomatic missions the aims of which remain a mystery. The amount of 150 marks passed to Kochanowski from the ducal treasury in the second half of 1555 and in 1556 – equal to a 3-year salary of the “2-horse courtier” (“*Zwei Rosser*”) –, and 100 marks passed to him in 1556 – an amount usually given to 4- and 6-horse courtiers (“*Sechs und vier Rosser*”) speaks volumes for

²² In the Latin original text: “*utina(m) modo sit aliq(ua) ingenij mei dexteritas, omnem hanc, me Hercle, ego augendae dignitati iussisq(ue) exseque(n)dis Ill(ust)r(issi)mae Coelsit(udinis) v(est)rae impendero*”.

²³ Ostpr. Fol. 13 473, p. 28v.

²⁴ Pelc 2001: 42.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Ostpr. Fol. 13 473, p. 290r.

²⁷ Mallek 1986: 185.

this point of view²⁸. Therefore during his 12- (or at most 18-month) stay in Ducal Prussia, Kochanowski was given a huge amount of money, equal to 7200 *groszes*, which in the unified monetary system in place in the Commonwealth of Poland and its Prussian fief, was three times more than the annual salary earned by the town scribe in Cracow, enough to buy, for example, 8 good horses or a few lans of land²⁹.

On the other hand we have no information about the influence of the young poet's religion on his lofty status (given that he was a foreigner) at court. Mallek assumes that during his stay in Königsberg, Kochanowski may have been Lutheran, because the courtiers of Prince Albert were obliged to swear to the "true Christian religion" (*vera Christi religio*) and Kochanowski's works lacked any Marian themes³⁰. Since the sources on Kochanowski's stay in Königsberg are few and partial and the earliest collection of his poems (*Elegiarum libri duo*) was written as late as 1559-1561, the question of the poet's confession in the first half of the 1550s is important: despite his sympathy with the Reformation, his affiliation with the Lutheran Church may be considered probable, but not certain³¹.

Documents from the Prussian archives and both Jan Kochanowski's letter to prince Albert and the latter's reply provide explicit proof of the Polish poet's links with the ducal court and implicit proof of his relations with Königsberg University and its humanists. It is therefore reasonable to take a look now at the image of Prussia in Kochanowski's works.

2. Prussia and Germany in Kochanowski's poetry

The most important source for the poet's feelings towards Prussia is his work *Proporzec albo Hold pruski*. Its significance lies in the fact that it celebrates the act of homage paid in 1569 to Sigismund Augustus by Albert Frederic (1553-1618), son and successor to Kochanowski's late royal patron. The following verses show how respectfully the latter addressed Prince Albert (v. 25-36):

Przystap, Olbrychcie mlody, zacnych ksiazat plemie,
Który trzymasz w swej władzy piękną pruską ziemię
Z laski cnych królów polskich; uczyn panu swemu
Winną poczciwość a ślub wiarę dzierżeć jemu.
Co tak zięcisz, jeśli spraw ojca cnotliwego
Trzymać się będziesz, z których on u pana swego
Był zawždy w takiej wadze, że nie holdownikiem,
Ale zdał się być jednym państwa uczestnikiem.

²⁸ Cf. Ostpr. Fol. 13 473, p. 284r-286r.

²⁹ Cf. Szwagrzyk 1990: 110-113.

³⁰ Cf. Mallek 1986: 18-181 and 186-187 and *idem* 1996: 184.

³¹ Cf. Pelc 2001: 42 and 50-52.

Jego tedy postęпки mądre uczyniły,
 Jego wiara i cnota, że co srodze były
 Pruskie kraje strapione ustawicznym bojem,
 Wrychle jęły się cieszyć pożądanym pokojem³².

He extols Albert's main virtue: "cnota" (moral courage, lat. *virtus*), and then his "wiara" ("fidelity", lat. *fides*) and "postęпки mądre", ("wisdom", lat. *sapientia*), thereby creating the image of a good monarch. His praise of Albert's virtues acts as a *comparatio a minore ad maius*, since in the following part of the work (v. 165) the poet celebrates the courage of Sigismund Augustus. In Kochanowski's Latin *Elegy* II 7 (v. 37-38), on the contrary, the last king of the Jagiellonian dynasty is told to be "full of grace" and "magnanimity" ("pectore lenis"³³) not only by the poet, but by the Prussian prince and by the whole of Prussia – that "erudite" and "loyal" nation. Both unanimously positive descriptions of Ducal Prussia (*Proporzec*, 26; *El.* II 7, 38), and the praise of Royal Prussia's wealth and the thriftiness of its inhabitants are worth quoting in the following *praeteritio*, taken from *Satyr* (v. 85-90):

O Prusiech wam nic nie chcę powiadać, bo sami,
 Na każdy rok pływacie do Gdańska z traftami,
 Widzicie gęste miasta i zamki budowne,
 Drogi, mosty porządne i brzegi warowne,
 Czego trudno dokonać bez wielkich pieniędzy:
 Znać dobrze, że tam byli gospodarze tędzy.

On the other hand, indirect proof of the poet's admiration for Prussia (and for Germanism as well) – acquired during his stay in Königsberg – may be given by the ironic punch line of *Gallo crocitantī ἀμοιβή* referring to the infamous escape of Henry of Valois (v. 125-129):

Quod si regnandi teneat vos tanta libido,
 Magna suum potius vobis Germania regnum
 Deferat, ut sceptris insignitosque coronis
 Clam fugere in patriam, titulosque referre fugaces
 Ipse quoque aspiciat Rhenus, quod Vistula vidit³⁴.

These words, ironically inviting the French king to look for a German throne rather than for the less prestigious kingdom on the Vistula, are outwardly surprising, since their author wrote an etiologic elegy on Wanda's triumph over the Germans (I

³² The text is quoted from Kochanowski 1953.

³³ For the meaning of *pectore lenis* = "gracious, magnanimous" cf. e.g. Francesco Filelfo, *Odes* I 9, 36-37.

³⁴ <http://neolatina.bj.uj.edu.pl/page/show/id/18030.html> (date of consultation: 10.09.2010).

15) and was at the same time the eulogist of the French poet Ronsard (III 8, 22). They testify, however, to Kochanowski's respect for the Germans, or even to a *sui generis* feeling of affinity with the German nation, an affinity that he presumably acquired during his stay in Königsberg.

Less evident, but nevertheless important, is the fact that Kochanowski's poetry was influenced by German humanists, not only by poets but also by such authors of handbooks of poetics and rhetoric as Philip Melanchthon or Joachim Camerarius. One major figure that appears to have inspired several themes in the literary works of Jan of Czarnolas was Georgius Sabinus. By way of example I refer to the description of the Polish poet's journeys to Italy and France. The Latin written *Elegies* III 4 and III 8 find their parallel in Sabinus' *Hodoeporicon*, mainly for the parts devoted to Italy and France.³⁵ In *De nuptiis Inchyti Regis Poloniae Sigismundi Augusti et Elyssae Caesaris Ferdinandi filiae*³⁶ broad passages are devoted to the first mythical hero-sovereigns of Poland (Lech, Popiel, Krak, Piast) and to the mythical princess Wanda (v. 72-89). The latter is the most important character in Kochanowski's *Elegy* I 15. Moreover, it may be assumed that in his Polish and – especially – Latin poems³⁷ Kochanowski may have been inspired for invention, disposition and elocution by the theoretical treaties of Sabinus *De carminibus ad veterum imitationem artificiose componendis* (published first in Leipzig 1551³⁸) and *Fabularum Ovidii interpretatio tradita in Academia Regiomontana* (ed. pr. Wittenberg 1555)³⁹.

In this paper I have limited myself to describing known sources attesting to Kochanowski's stay in Königsberg (at the university, and mainly at prince Albert's court) and to presenting certain aspects of the poet's views on Prussia and Germany. It is impossible, in the limited space of this paper, to touch upon all the aspects of the influence of German Humanism on the poet of Czarnolas. The facts analyzed, however, show that the short period of two years in total that the young poet spent in the Duchy of Prussia was important for at least three reasons. First: the experiences gained at the court of prince Albert definitely helped the poet in his later career as a courtier of Sigismund Augustus; second: ducal patronage helped Kochanowski in the organization of at least one trip to Italy; third: his readings from books from the ducal library and his acquaint-

³⁵ Cf. *Georgii Sabini Brandeburgensis Hodoeporicon itineris Italici*, [Wittenberg] 1535.

³⁶ Cf. *De nuptiis Inchyti Regis Poloniae Sigismundi Augusti et Elyssae Caesaris Ferdinandi filiae carmen Georgii Sabini*, Frankfurt (Oder) 1543 (Mense Aprilii).

³⁷ Cf. e.g. the *exemplum* of Paul the Hermit in G. Sabinus, *Fabularum Ovidii interpretatio...*, p. [B6]v and J. Kochanowski, *Satyr*, 203-206.

³⁸ Cf. *De carminibus ad veterum imitationem artificiose componendis, praecepta bona et utilia collecta a clarissimo viro Georgio Sabino. Enumeratio eorum quae in docendo praecipue sequenda esse uideantur Graece & Latine exposita a Ioachimo Camerario Pabebergensi*, Valentinus Papa edebat, Leipzig 1551.

³⁹ Cf. G. Sabinus, *Fabularum Ovidii interpretatio tradita in Academia Regiomontana*, excudebant Clemens Schleich & Antonius Schöne, Wittenberg 1572.

ance with Georgius Sabinus certainly influenced Jan of Czarnolas' poetry (especially his Latin poetry). A complete review of Kochanowski's works against the background of the whole spectrum of issues, stimuli, ideas, themes etc. of 16th-century European Renaissance and Humanism call for further research and deeper insight into the poet's heritage in relationship to Italian, French and other Slavic literature, but also a thorough re-examination of the German context.

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Abstract

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Jan Kochanowski in Königsberg

Scholars interested in Jan Kochanowski have paid little attention to the impact of German Humanism – as represented in Königsberg – on both the writing and the life of the poet. Indeed, Kochanowski went to Königsberg for the first time in summer or autumn 1551 and stayed until the following spring. He was there for the second time in spring or summer 1555 and remained at least until mid 1556. Especially the Polish poet's second stay in the Prussian capital is well documented thanks to Kochanowski's autographed letter, written to prince Albert von Hohenzollern on April 6, 1556, and to the prince's reply dated 15 April. Moreover, important information is recorded in the Prussian court's expenditure accounts (*Ausgabe-Bücher*) from 1555 and 1556. These documents give explicit evidence of the Polish poet's links with the Ducal court. They also give implicit proof of his relations with Königsberg University and its humanists.

Of all Kochanowski's works, the most important source for his feelings towards Prussia is his *Proporzec albo Hold pruski*. In it he celebrates the homage paid in 1569 to Sigismund Augustus by Albert Frederic (1553-1618), who was the son of the poet's protector prince Albert, whom Kochanowski introduces as a model of a good monarch: a virtuous, faithful and wise prince (v. 25-36).

Less known is the fact that Kochanowski's poetry was influenced not only by Italian but also by German humanists, by the authors of handbooks of poetics and rhetoric such as Philipp Melanchthon or Joachim Camerarius, and especially by the first rector of the Albertina, Georg Sabinus (1508-1560).