

## Cantacuzene – "The Wolf" or Matthias Strykowski's Recollection of Byzantium

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It seems that Polish chroniclers from the 16th century do not share Dlugossius' (John Długosz) lament on the fall of Constantinople, so conspicuous in his text composed in the 15th century. Matthias of Miechow (Miechowita) and Martin Cromer, who based their accounts on Dlugossius, removed some essential details while narrating the story of the Turkish conquest of Byzantium. Matthias Strykowski, who worked on the history of Lithuania united with Poland from 1385, derived his information from the three texts mentioned above. His own version of history includes a chapter on the fall of Constantinople; its length exceeds Dlugossius' relation considerably. The text resulted from the author's experience during his visit to Constantinople in the years: 1574-1575. Interesting though it seemed, especially from Byzantinist's point of view, the text was published only in 1978 by J. RADZISZEWSKA.<sup>1</sup>

In Polish-Lithuanian State the readings of national history, both Polish and Lithuanian, were in great demand. Miechowita and Cromer were able to profit by the invention of print quite skillfully. Basing their insights on Dlugossius and competing with him at the same time,<sup>2</sup> the two authors attempted to present their own vision of history. According to them the fall of Constantinople was a historical event, already remote. Miechowita, who had his text published in 1519, shortened Dlugossius' account referring to 1453. In the fragment about the fall of the City he mentioned the death of Constantine XI, the last Emperor of Byzantium. The plight of women who were victims of violence and rape was dismissed in one sentence. Finally he went on to say that the cross had served as a target for the enemy arrows. As for Pera, the Genoese district of Constantinople, it surrendered to the Turks.<sup>3</sup> Martin Cromer, who had his text published in 1555, wrote that the Sultan had not kept the promise given to the Byzantine Emperor. As a result of his decision a fortress on the straits (Rumeli Hisar)

<sup>1</sup> M. Strykowski, *O wzięciu Konstantynopola albo Carogroda, najstawniejszego miasta stołecznego cesarzów greckich i patryjarchy, przez Mahometa Wtórego, carza tureckiego, roku Pańskiego 1453, a według rachunku ruskiego od stworzenia świata 6961, za króla polskiego Kazimirza Jagiełłowicza, wielkiego księcia litewskiego*, in: idem, *O początkach, wywodach, dzielnościach, sprawach rycerskich i domowych sławnego narodu litewskiego, zemiędzkiego i ruskiego, przedtem nigdy od żadnego ani kuszone, ani opisane, z natchnienia Bożego a uprzejmego doświadczenia* (On the Seizure of Constantinople or Carogrod, the Most Renowned Capital of Greek Emperors and Patriarch by Mehmed II the Turkish Sultan, A. D. 1453 and by the Ruthenian Order in 6961 since the Creation of the World, in the Reign of Polish King Casimir, Jagiello's Son, the Great Prince of Lithuania, in: *The Origins and Exploits of Famous Lithuanian, Samogitian and Ruthenian Nation hitherto Neglected, Described, on Divine Inspiration and Own Experience*, ed. J. RADZISZEWSKA, Warszawa 1978, 459-477.

<sup>2</sup> H. BARYCZ, *Dwie syntezy dziejów narodowych przed sądem potomności. Losy "Historii" Jana Długosza i Marcina Kromera w XVI w. i w pierwszej połowie XVII w.* (Two Syntheses of National History in the Face of Posterity. The Story of Accounts by Dlugossius and Cromer in the 16th Century and in the First Half of the 17th Century), *Pamiętnik Literacki* 43 (1952) 208.

<sup>3</sup> Maciej z Miechowa (Miechowita), *Chronica Polonorum*, Kraków 1986, CCCXXIX.

was constructed. It was meant to prevent the Greeks from sailing the sea freely. Cromer also mentioned the mission of metropolitan Isidore who had been dispatched abroad to seek help for Byzantium. Still, the besieged City fell a prey to Mehmed II, because of the betrayal committed by a Greek called Gierluka (Kyr Lukas – i.e. Lukas Notaras). Cromer says that Emperor Palaiologos was killed but death also fell to the lot of the traitor.<sup>4</sup>

The above data were derived from Dlugossius' chronicle.<sup>5</sup> The author was known to base his account on Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini.<sup>6</sup> Both Miechowita and Cromer thought it necessary to comment on the fall of Constantinople as an essential event in their vision of history. Their texts however lack the vividness that is so striking in Dlugossius' account. Unlike their predecessor, they comment on the year 1453 briefly and with detachment. They do not share Dlugossius' pain over the loss suffered by Christendom which was deprived of "one eye and one arm".<sup>7</sup> In contrast, we can find a very emotional description of the fall of Constantinople in the text by Strykowski, who was influenced by the impressions from his journey to the East, and therefore was more sensitive to Dlugossius. Besides he also drew on "Janissery's Memoirs" and on Ruthenian chronicles (*letopisy*).<sup>8</sup> Strykowski's account became much more than just a chapter of chronicle; it is in fact an independent text.

Matthias Strykowski was born in Stryków near Łódź in 1547. In his youth he was hit by a church-bell, which caused him to stammer through the rest of his life.<sup>9</sup> His writerly commitments atoned for the handicap. He wrote profusely in Polish. In 1565 he went to Lithuania, where he enrolled in the army. He may have learnt to make plans and drawings of castles and fortresses at that time.<sup>10</sup> In 1572-1574 he often stayed in the Polish Realm, especially in Cracow. He was attached to powerful noble families.<sup>11</sup> He witnessed changes on the Polish political scene. In 1570 Sigismund August, the last of Jagiellons, died. The next king succeeded to the throne due to election. The first ruler was Henry of Valois, the future King of France, Henry III. His reign in Poland was short-lived; he preferred his legacy in France to the experience of gentry democracy. After his escape, a period of interregnum set in. It ended when Stephen Batory, Prince of Transylvania, was elected the King of Poland at the end of 1575.

Matthias Strykowski described Henry of Valois' arrival in Cracow and his

<sup>4</sup> Marcin Kromer, *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum libri XXX = Kronika polska*, vol. II, Sanok 1857, 1033.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Długosz (*Joannis Dlugossius*), *Historia Polonica, lib. XII*, vol. V, ed. A. PRZEŹDZIECKI, Cracoviae 1878, 142-145. Dlugossius was only published in the 18th century. Strykowski and other chroniclers knew him from manuscripts. Cf: W. SWOBODA, *Bizancjum w przekazach Jana Długosza* (Byzantium in the Accounts of Dlugossius), *Balkanica Posnaniensia IV* (1989) 48-51.

<sup>6</sup> W. SWOBODA, *op. cit.*, 52-53. Cf: I. ZARĘBSKI, *Stosunki Eneasza Sylwiusza z Polską i Polakami* (Relations between Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Poland and Poles), Kraków 1939, 150.

<sup>7</sup> J. Dlugossius, *op. cit.*, 145.

<sup>8</sup> *Pamiętniki Janczara czyli Kronika turecka Konstantego z Ostrowicy* (Janissery's Memoirs or the Turkish Chronicle by Constantine of Ostrowica), ed. J. ŁOŚ, Kraków 1912, 70-76.

<sup>9</sup> Z. WOJTKOWIAK, *Maciej Strykowski, dziejopis Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego* (Matthias Strykowski - Historiographer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), Poznań 1990, 55; J. RADZISZEWSKA, *Maciej Strykowski - historyk - poeta z epoki Odrodzenia* (Matthias Strykowski - Historian and Poet from Renaissance Epoch), Katowice 1978, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Z. WOJTKOWIAK, *op. cit.*, 61.

<sup>11</sup> He dedicated his work "The Origins" to his protector in Lithuania George Olelkowicz.

coronation. Supposedly this poetic text as well as other works account for his promotion to the rank of a delegate in Andrew Taranowski's embassy to Stambul in 1574. He went there as a secretary and military illustrator, possibly also as a secret agent.<sup>12</sup> The awareness of the Turkish threat had already been conspicuous in Poland. One of the first experts was an Italian Philip Buonacorsi called Kallimach. Having left Rome he stayed on the isles of the Aegean Sea and in Constantinople in 1459. Then he put on appearance at the court of Jagiello's son Casimir, where he profited by the information gained in the East.<sup>13</sup> After the defeat of Hungary at Mohaç in 1526, Poland faced the immediate danger of Turkish invasion. Therefore, Polish diplomacy aimed at preserving correct relations with Turkey; at the same time it tried to probe the Turkish attitude in many political questions like their opinion on the succession to the throne in Poland. Italian was instrumental in the exchange of diplomatic correspondence. The original Turkish document was provided with Italian translation so that both sides could communicate. The court of the last Jagiellons saw the need of educating diplomatic staff that would specialize in Turkish and Arabic, the latter being the language of Sultan's chancellery. The visits of young people to Stambul were meant to serve the purpose. On their arrival they could easily find guides speaking their language as there were quite a few Turkicized Poles over the Bosphoros.<sup>14</sup> There were also representatives of other nations who started their new life in the East after they had gone through the experience of Turkish captivity.

The defeat of Turks at Lepanto in 1571 was widely echoed in Europe, but Poland did not stop being alert to the moves of the Muslim partner. After Valois' escape from Poland in 1574, Stambul warned Poland not to elect a ruler who would be unfriendly towards the Turks.<sup>15</sup> Andrew Taranowski's embassy who arrived in Stambul in winter 1574 was to probe the Turkish attitude to the problem. Murad III explicitly voiced his expectations; in their light the Polish throne should go to one of the Polish noble men, Swedish Prince or the Prince of Transylvania.<sup>16</sup> As a result, Turkey supported Batory and threatened Poland with war in case of electing Maximilian II the King.<sup>17</sup> Turkey feared the Habsburgs and wanted to avoid their rapprochement with Poland.

Andrew Taranowski, a skillful diplomat, set out on 29 September 1574 and returned after Easter of the following year, i.e. after 3 April 1575.<sup>18</sup> He was to consolidate the alliance between Sultan and the Polish Realm as well as explain the reasons for Valois' departure.<sup>19</sup> It was not his first visit to Stambul. His first stay took

<sup>12</sup> In the introduction to "The Origins" the author says that he explored Greece with "Ulysses' skill". Cf. *M. Strykowski, op. cit.*, 35. *J. RADZISZEWSKA, op. cit.*, 21; *Z. WOJTKOWIAK, op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>13</sup> *T. SINKO, Polscy podróżnicy w Grecji i Troi (Polish Travellers in Greece and Troy)*, Kraków 1925, 5.

<sup>14</sup> *B. BARANOWSKI, Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce do XVIII w. (The Knowledge of the East in Former Poland till the 18th Century)*, Łódź 1950, 55.

<sup>15</sup> *H. WISNER, Dyplomacja polska w latach 1572-1648* in: *Historia dyplomacji polskiej (Polish Diplomacy in 1572-1648, in: History of Polish Diplomacy)* vol. II; 1572-1795, ed. *Z. WÓJCIK*, Warszawa 1982, 15; *M. SERWAŃSKI, Henryk III Walezy w Polsce (Henry III of Valois in Poland)*, Kraków 1976, 241.

<sup>16</sup> *J. PAJEWSKI, Turcja wobec elekcji Batorego (Turkish Attitude Towards Batory's Election)*, Kraków 1935, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *K. DOPIERAŁA, Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski z Turcją za Stefana Batorego (Diplomatic Relations between Poland and Turkey in the Reign of Stephen Batory)*, Warszawa 1986, 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Z. WOJTKOWIAK, op. cit.*, 74.

<sup>19</sup> *M. SERWAŃSKI, op. cit.*, 233.

place at the end of Sigismund August's rule. It is preserved in an account which omits the description of diplomatic routine but contains comments on the arsenal in Galata, Sultan's palaces and zoo.<sup>20</sup> Taranowski gleaned his information as a secret agent; he may have given the same role to Strykowski when the latter went with him to Constantinople in 1574. Strykowski was known for his drawing skill. Apparently he had good guides in Stambul. In his text he mentions the exiled bishop of Nicaea, Basil, "a good Greek, Italian and Latin" from whom he gained the data on the history of Constantinople.<sup>21</sup> Strykowski stayed in his company in Galata. Nothing else is known. It seems that the terms: Italian and Latin referred to the skills in both languages that they probably used. The essential fact is that Basil ushered Strykowski into the history of Byzantium which yielded to the Turks. The second cicerone to the Polish envoy was Murad, a Turkicized Hungarian ex-monk who initiated the Pole into Turkish chronicles.<sup>22</sup> The acquaintance was probably made due to Christopher Dzierżek, who was Strykowski's first guide in Stambul. At the age of 16 Dzierżek was dispatched to Constantinople at the cost of Sigismund August in 1569-1570. His task was to learn Arabic and Turkish so as to be qualified for the diplomatic service.<sup>23</sup> Dzierżek was an unofficial informer for the Polish court during the first and second interregnum, which means that he informed Polish authorities about Turkish intentions.<sup>24</sup> The three figures influenced Matthias' view of the City and his interpretation of Byzantine history. He got to know it from the Greek perspective via Basil as well as the Turkish one via Murad. Also, he may have exchanged opinions with Dzierżek. As a representative of a country that was menaced by Turkish expansion, he deeply sympathized with Greeks' plight. His text opens with the comment that it has been 124 years since Constantinople was captured by the Turks.<sup>25</sup> He voices his admiration for the ancient walls which were not strong enough to resist the invasion. His text is meant as a warning and a didactic message for other nations. The author is guided by his fear of the prophecy which said that in 1600 the Turks would rule in Germany and Italy.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the correct relations between Turkey and Poland, Strykowski makes the reader aware of the Turkish danger. Apparently the defeat at Lepanto did not alleviate fear. "If we do not want fall into captivity like Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians and Serbs, we have to work on our future today", such is Strykowski's warning.<sup>27</sup> He stresses the fact that Europe, religiously divided and lost in internal conflicts, provides an excellent background for the Turkish invasion.

Delving into the origins of Byzantium, which he got to know due to Basil, Strykowski starts his account with the narrative of Greek-Persian wars to focus later on Constantine the Great and the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire on to the Bosphoros.<sup>28</sup> He stresses the fact that Constantine propagated Roman building

<sup>20</sup> B. BARANOWSKI, *op. cit.*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 462. I did not manage to find more precise data on Basil. I would like to thank Prof. D. Apostolopoulos from Athens for his kind assistance in this question.

<sup>22</sup> B. BARANOWSKI, *op. cit.*, 37.

<sup>23</sup> *ibidem*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> This may be the basis for dating a manuscript written in 1577.

<sup>26</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 461.

<sup>27</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibidem*, 463. J. RADZISZEWSKA does not interpret the text from the Byzantinist's point of view. Cf. J. RADZISZEWSKA, *Opowieść Macieja Strykowskiego 'O wzięciu Konstantynopola albo*

technique in Constantinople and he complains about the Turkish accretions to this architecture. His comment seems to transmit Basil's nostalgia for the Byzantine history of the City. Strykowski is greatly impressed by the éclat of Constantinople which is called "the most famous city of the Greek Emperors and Patriarch".<sup>29</sup> He admires buildings made of costly marble and alabaster. He goes on to mention numerous columns, some of which were destroyed. He gives the Turks some credit for strengthening other columns with metal bands to prevent further ruin.<sup>30</sup> He appreciates Constantine for having about 200 churches erected all over the city and he notes that the most magnificent one, Hagia Sophia, has been converted into a mosque.<sup>31</sup> Strykowski ignores the fact that the actual creator of Hagia Sophia's magnificence was Justinian the Great. He makes it obvious that Constantine made Constantinople not equal to but even greater than Rome. The Patriarch of Constantinople "multiplied Christian faith with the Roman Pope".<sup>32</sup> The account makes it evident that Basil's influence on the interpretation was substantial. Even though the fragment concerns history of the Church before the Eastern Schism, it does not occur to Strykowski to act as a spokesman of the Latin attitude towards the Orthodox Church which repealed the union with Rome in 1484. In fact, Strykowski seems to have come to Constantinople with a favourable opinion on the Orthodox Church, which resulted from the fact that he mixed with the Orthodox milieu of his noble Lithuanian protector George Olelkowicz.<sup>33</sup> In his narrative Matthias appears to identify with the Orthodox point of view. At the same time he speaks as a Roman-Catholic who tries to justify the intervention of the West in the guise of the Fourth Crusade. According to him, the military operation conducted by Frenchmen and Venetians was caused by numerous murders, mutilations and banishments at the Byzantine court.<sup>34</sup> Correct, though brief, the author presents accessions to the throne in chronological order, Baldwin I, Henry I, Peter of Courtenay and Robert I, omitting only Baldwin II. Next he presents the rule of Palaiologoi and here his interpretation invites further comments. According to Strykowski, the cruelty of Michael VIII Palaiologos made the people refuse to bury him after his death.<sup>35</sup> If this vision of history springs from Basil's inspiration, it may be suggested that the collective memory did not preserve the reason for Michael VIII's cruel conduct or left it open to speculation. Attempting to secure Byzantine independence, the Emperor decided on the Union with Rome, and was ready to punish its opponents severely. As a follower of the Union he was denied the right to an Orthodox burial.<sup>36</sup> His public image that lingered on in Greeks' memory in the second half of the 16th century presented him as

*Carogrodu*" (Matthias Strykowski's Story "On the Seizure of Constantinople or Carograd"), *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego*, No 72, Prace Historyczne IV, Katowice 1975, 27-46.

<sup>29</sup> The names that Strykowski uses with reference to the Byzantine Empire deserve our attention: e.g. Constantinopolitan Empire (466), Greek Empire, Greek State (*l. cit.*), Christian Empire (472).

<sup>30</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 464.

<sup>31</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Z. WOJTKOWIAK, *op. cit.*, 132-134.

<sup>34</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 465.

<sup>35</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> D. J. GEANAKOPOLOS, *Emperor Michael Palaeologos and the West 1258-1282. A Study in Byzantine-Latin Relations*, Cambridge 1959, 370.

a cruel ruler and the causes of such conduct were thought irrelevant. Strykowski goes on to say that when on his death-bed Andronikos III (called Andronikos II by mistake) entrusted John Cantacuzene with his son John V giving a "lamb to a wolf", because Cantacuzene seized power for himself.<sup>37</sup> Strykowski stresses the fact that the Byzantine people sided with John V as a legal heir. Lacking support, Cantacuzene turned to the Turks for help. The chronicler incorrectly mentions the name of Murad, Orchan's son; it is well known that the alliance with Orchan himself was the case.<sup>38</sup> The author points out that Cantacuzene made way for the Turkish expansion when he brought the enemy to Gallipoli Peninsula. John VI Cantacuzene is an antiparagon for the Polish chronicler. He is a villain whose egoistic politics incurred misfortunes for Byzantium. Strykowski's narrative denounces the practice of flirting with the Turks. Again, the attitude seems to echo the talks with Basil rather than with Murad the Turkicized Hungarian. It can be inferred that the Greek public opinion in the 16th century perpetuated the image of Cantacuzene as guilty of the State's fall. Modern Byzantinists' works were needed to see Cantacuzene in a different light and show him as an outstanding statesman. In his chronicle Strykowski prolongs Cantacuzene's rule implying that all the Turkish conquests took place in his reign, the transfer of the Turkish capital being one of them.<sup>39</sup> The author states that Cantacuzene ruled thanks to the Turks, without Byzantine support, and after his death the Empire was finally taken over by John V. The ample comment on Cantacuzene may have been provoked by the fact that Strykowski saw Cantacuzene's palace in Constantinople. He recollects the descendant of John VI, David Cantacuzene, who was a merchant attached to the Sultan's court and went by the name "Saitan Ogli", Satan's son.<sup>40</sup> Strykowski thinks the term appropriate because the Cantacuzenes "shamelessly sold Greece and other states to the Turks".<sup>41</sup> The story about terrible Cantacuzene sets off the brighter vision of Palaiologoi, the defenders of the Empire. Here the author mentions only Emperor Manuel II and John the Elder, i.e. John VIII who "visited Eugenios the Pope in Rome".<sup>42</sup> It seems that Matthias got his information about the Union from the undertones. He does not say a word about the Union of Florence signed by John VIII in 1439. Assumption arises that the descendants of former Byzantines, for whom Basil played his role of porte-parole, erased all the traces of negotiations between Constantinople and Rome. The version may have been influenced by the Muscovite Orthodoxy which never recognized the Union in Florence. Strykowski goes on to mention the last of Palaiologoi, Constantine XI, who was replaced by Mehmed II after the fall of Constantinople. The conquest was easier due to disputes and internal conflicts in the Christian camp. Again, the author conveys a discreet message to the Polish reader of Byzantine history. It is a warning against feuds which weaken the resistance to the enemy. Strykowski admits that Mehmed was an outstanding ruler and

<sup>37</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 465.

<sup>38</sup> Z. OKNIŃSKI, *Jan Kantakuzen, cesarz wschodniorzymski* (John Cantacuzene, Eastern-Roman Emperor) off-print from: *Księga ku czci Oskara Haleckiego* wydanej w XXV-lecie jego pracy naukowej, Warszawa 1935, 10.

<sup>39</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 466.

<sup>40</sup> *I. cit.* In fact, the nickname refers to Michael Cantacuzene, whom Strykowski mistakenly calls David. Cf: *Megale Ellenike Enkyklopaideia*, vol. XIII, Athenai, undated, 713.

<sup>41</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 466.

<sup>42</sup> *I. cit.*

calls him a "man of great heart who always wanted to achieve something new".<sup>43</sup> He adds that the Sultan captured many territories not only through violence but also through craftiness and ingenious stratagems.<sup>44</sup> The admiration for the Conqueror seems to be a trace of the opinions spread by the Turkish chronicles which were presented to Strykowski by Murad the Hungarian.

Describing the fall of Constantinople which was the actual subject of Strykowski's text (as its title proves), the author pays attention to the alliance between Greeks and Turks broken by Mehmed.<sup>45</sup> Following the message of earlier Polish chroniclers, he stresses that Mehmed slyly justified the construction of Rumeli Hisar persuading the Greeks that it was also to their advantage. In fact, the fortress proved treacherous for the Byzantines and their allies. Commenting on the fall of Constantinople, Strykowski glorifies Greek resistance which gave way only in the face of Sultan's enormous military power. According to the chronicler, Mehmed managed to gather 400 thousand soldiers (the number exceeds the actual data by four times) so as to fight against 9 thousand defenders of the City (this information is nearly correct).<sup>46</sup> Strykowski's account preserves the legend which glorifies indomitable defenders of the City. The chronicler mentions the Emperor's heroic attitude as well as the betrayal of Gierluka – Lukas Notaras.<sup>47</sup> He makes it explicit that Mehmed attacked the place indicated by the traitor. Only then did the drama of the City start. The interpretation entails an obvious conclusion: but for the treachery, first of Cantacuzene then of Gierluka, Eastern Christendom would have managed to defend itself. Strykowski's text offers a moral message which emphasizes the danger and disgrace of betrayal. The author may have been particularly influenced by Długosius and the "Janissery's Memoirs" but the sources do not account for the exaggerated number of the attacking Turks.

Further description of the fall of Constantinople resembles the fragments from Długosius, Miechowita and Cromer. It mentions rapes and desecration of the cross.<sup>48</sup> An interesting excerpt concerns the capturing of the Seven Towers' Castle – Jedi Kulle. The Turks were to have found plenty of gold, silver and money there.<sup>49</sup> A mythical image of the Byzantine richness is at work here because apparently the state finances were in an appalling condition.<sup>50</sup> It cannot be ruled out that Strykowski's image of rich Constantinople came from Basil's story. In the context of this information the chronicler notes that Turkish financial system is very efficient. He appreciates the fact that those who do not pay taxes to the treasury are punished.<sup>51</sup> Reverting to the description of the City, he deplores the fact that Mehmed destroyed many churches.<sup>52</sup> Others were converted into mosques, stables and zoos. The author

<sup>43</sup> *ibidem*, 467.

<sup>44</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibidem*, 467, 469, Cf: S. RUNCIMAN, *Upadek Konstantynopola 1453* (The Fall of Constantinople 1453), trans. A. Dębicki, Warszawa 1968, 128.

<sup>47</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 471-472.

<sup>48</sup> *ibidem*, 472.

<sup>49</sup> *ibidem*, 473.

<sup>50</sup> Among other things, Byzantium ran up enormous debts in Venice. Cf: D. M. NICOL, *Byzantium and Venice. A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge 1988, 388-389.

<sup>51</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 473.

<sup>52</sup> *ibidem*, 474.

himself saw lions, lamparts, monkeys and even rhinoceroses inside. He thought it obscene and expressed his grief because many imperial possessions had been converted into hotels, inns, baths and pigsties.<sup>53</sup> The anti-Turkish comment leads to the conclusion that Strykowski visited the places in Basil's and even Dzierżek's company. The author is sorry to see only two Christian churches in operation: the first is the Greek Patriarch's seat, the other the seat of the Armenian Archbishop.<sup>54</sup> Strykowski visited about 70 churches which were converted into mosques. He may have been very observant himself or Basil and Dzierżek may have drawn his attention to the walls and to the tombstones with Greek inscriptions.<sup>55</sup> Strykowski says that three palaces of former Byzantine Emperors were preserved; one of them was located near the Patriarch's seat and each Sultan was supposed to destroy it symbolically, thereby vowing to ruin other Christian castles (during the author's visit to Constantinople, Murad III repeated the act). The second castle Jedi Kulle housed the treasures of Porta and the third one which was surrounded by the beautiful orchard on the Bosphorus became the Sultan's place. Strykowski also visited Pera-Galata inhabited by Italians and Greeks who had retained their religious ceremonies. The author notices with delight the opulent Franciscan monastery with Our Lady Church and Dominican churches, Saint Sebastian's and Saint Dominic's.<sup>56</sup> He must have visited them in person. He reminds the reader that during the siege of Constantinople Galata got in touch with Mehmed, and only thanks to it was not destroyed. Strykowski took part in the services in Galata churches; he notes the fact that church bells are not used and the Holy Communion is received in silence.<sup>57</sup>

"And as I was watching the sorrowful cases in that glorious city of Constantinople, wrested from Christian hands, I also asked after Athens, the old and famous city destroyed by Mehmed the Tyrant".<sup>58</sup> The quotation conveys the perspective of a historian and humanist who was at home with classical education and the knowledge of former Athenian prosperity. Strykowski's guide told him a meaningful story about a widow of Nerio II Acciaiuoli, the Florentine ruler of the city. Mehmed accepted her rule in Athens, however, she was not able to appreciate it. She had a love affair with a Venetian and prevailed on him to divorce his wife and marry her. She reached her goal but the newly-wed husband started to persecute the local people on his accession to the rule in Athens. Mehmed was asked for help. He had the Venetian killed, and since the dispute went on in Athens, he invaded the principality and incorporated it in his own State.<sup>59</sup> Strykowski listened to the story of Chiara Zozzi, Nerio II's widow, and her love for the Venetian Bartolomeo Cantarini as well as its consequences.<sup>60</sup> Basil may have been the author of the story. It was for the third time that the figure of a culprit was created; this time it was Cantarini, a Latin.

In the conclusion to his story of Constantinople Strykowski called this city as well as Galata, Athens and Thebes "the cradle of liberated arts". "I brought it to light

<sup>53</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> *ibidem*, 474.

<sup>56</sup> *ibidem*, 475.

<sup>57</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> *l. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> *ibidem*, 476.

<sup>60</sup> K. M. SETTON, *Catalan Domination of Athens 1311-1388*, Cambridge, Mass. 1948, 209.



because I had been a sorrowful witness of the decline of those ancient cities".<sup>61</sup> The author expects the readers to be moved by the image of destruction, and he hopes they will give up the internal discord which causes the fall of powerful kingdoms. Strykowski explicitly advises Poles to be alert and thoughtful and to appreciate the freedom that can become an easy prey to the Turks.<sup>62</sup> What I find crucial in his interpretation is his vision of Byzantine history. Its message is clear. The treachery of Cantacuzene, Gierluka and the widow of Acciaiuoli, the ruler of Athens, proved decisive in the disaster of the Byzantine world. Strykowski may have obtained the information about Gierluka from Polish sources which emphasize the Greek's betrayal. Framed by an adequate comment, Cantacuzene's treachery and Chiara Zozzi's episode point to Basil as the main interpreter of a Byzantine tradition that was still alive. The message leads to the conclusion that the 16th century Greeks had already turned their past into a myth. They would have saved their State but failed for the Judas-like, satanic treacherous deeds. They provide the background for the spotless Byzantine community, staunch supporters of John V or courageous defenders assisting Constantine XI. Strykowski's account bears traces of Greek interpretation of the Byzantine past.

Interestingly, Strykowski did not let himself use the term "apostates" with reference to the Greeks. He may not have felt any need to do that. He knew that it were the Greeks who had broken the Church Union; he was able to read about that in Dlugossius.<sup>63</sup> Still, he was satisfied with the account offered by Basil, who avoided the subject of the Union. Strykowski did not put him right; in this way he presented himself as a modern citizen of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic which had brought together the Catholic and Orthodox population, as well as the post-Reformation community, the contribution resulting in freedom of Creed. In 1573 the Warsaw treaty was signed. It guaranteed freedom of denomination which made Poland an exceptionally tolerant country in the context of religious conflicts in Europe. As he came from a multinational and multireligious country, Strykowski was naturally open to religious issues. He is interested in the plight of humiliated Greeks and not in their connection or severance with Rome. Besides, he is full of admiration for their architecture and ecclesiastical art.

In the work that includes the comment on Byzantium, Strykowski also presents the history of Lithuanian origins, creating a legend about their Roman origin. Lithuanians were to have been descendants of Pompeius' soldiers who had wandered off into the far North after having lost the battle with Caesar.<sup>64</sup> The snobbish preoccupation with the noble origin of young Lithuania also testifies to Strykowski's interests in the antiquity. Weren't they instrumental in a particularly friendly attitude towards Byzantium which continued the tradition of the Roman Empire? Strykowski was not unique in his approach to Byzantium. As early as in the 15th century the change in European attitude towards the Christian East had been observed. The

<sup>61</sup> M. Strykowski, *op. cit.*, 476.

<sup>62</sup> *ibidem*, 477.

<sup>63</sup> J. Dlugossius, *Annales seu chronicae incliti regni Poloniae*, l. VII et VIII, Varsoviae 1975, 187.

<sup>64</sup> M. Strykowski, *O początkach*, 69-71. Cf: M. ZACHARA-WAWRZYŃCZYK, *Geneza legendy o rzymskim pochodzeniu Litwinów* (The Origins of the Legend of the Roman Descent of Lithuanians), *Zeszyty Historyczne Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego* III (1963) 29.

seizure of Constantinople by the Turks awoke compassion for the Orthodox.<sup>65</sup> As a visitor from Lithuania, inhabited also by Orthodox people, Strykowski was more favourably disposed to this religion. It is assumed that he met Jacob Palaiologos of Chios who came to Lithuania to consider the attempt of rapprochement between Reformation and Orthodoxy.<sup>66</sup>

Strykowski's text under analysis makes it difficult to conclude that the author went to Stambul with a diplomatic and secret mission, so as to spy on the functioning and defence of the Turkish State. A good secret agent as he was, he probably kept that information for a confidential conversation at the court. In his text he focused on that which was Byzantine, treating the Turk as an illegal owner of the previous imperial domains. Taranowski's account from his earlier journey to the East concentrated on those parts which were Turkish and therefore it presents the actual condition of the Sultan's state. By way of contrast, Strykowski's text is a quest for the past, probably conducted in the company of the learned Greek, Basil. It was Basil's narrative that proved more relevant to the chronicler's story than the talks to Murad the Hungarian or Dzierżek, both of them free from the emotional comment which must have haunted Basil's story. Strykowski's text about Byzantium gains prominence when juxtaposed with the works by the above mentioned chroniclers. His description of the Byzantine events is original because he knows the city from his own experience. Dlugossius, Miechowita and Cromer did not have any emotional attitude towards Constantinople. They used second hand materials, and therefore were more concise in their description. The influence of the Greek guide is also apparent in Strykowski's use of the name Constantinople instead of Stambul. The author uses the name interchangeably with the term *Carograd* accepted in the Slavonic territories. Following the story of his Greek cicerone, the chronicler lacks criticism in his judgement on the Byzantine past. He does not attempt to see whether Cantacuzene's deed justifies a powerful accusation and whether Palaiologoi were indeed a nearly spotless dynasty. Strykowski does not check whether anyone else sought the Turks' support apart from Cantacuzene. Therefore his sleek and cherished image of the dynasty remains intact. In fact, it was not only Cantacuzene but also Palaiologoi who tried to secure Turkish support for themselves.<sup>67</sup> The post-Byzantine collective memory refrained from associating the Palaiologoi with treachery. In spite of the opportunity to present an objective view of the Byzantine past, i.e. from the perspective of victorious Turks and defeated Greeks, Strykowski embraced the Greek point of view. The interviews with Murad or Dzierżek probably served as a basis for confidential reports only. As a result, the text conceals the true intention of the mission. Strykowski got interested in the past of Constantinople, and Basil, his talented guide, instilled compassion and sentiment for Byzantium in his mind. Polish literature contains comments on the fall of Constantinople but their message is detached. Strykowski, who visited the ghost of the Empire, was able to write with genuine emotion.

Strykowski's text is not a conventional lament on the fall of the City, which was in fact Dlugossius' option 100 years earlier. The story of Byzantium is at the same time

<sup>65</sup> P. LEMERLE, *Présence de Byzance*, Journal des Savants (juillet-décembre 1990) 248.

<sup>66</sup> Z. WOJTKOWIAK, *op. cit.*, 102.

<sup>67</sup> John V's mother, Anne of Savoy, also secured the help of the Turks. D. M. NICOL, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261-1453*, London 1972, 211.

a great warning for the generation contemporary to Matthias. It is marked by the fear of Turks and by the moral duty to make the fellow-citizens aware of the Turkish danger.<sup>68</sup> The fall of Byzantium is meant to be a memento and warning against treacherous politicians similar to Cantacuzene or Notaras. It is open to speculation whether Strykowski had in mind particular figures of Polish establishment and alluded to them. Embracing the identity of "antemurale Christianitatis", Poland in a way became an heiress to the legacy of the Christian East, which did not manage to defend its possessions from Islam. Byzantine history was read by Strykowski as a challenge for his own country. Describing his stay in Constantinople in 1574-1575 he travelled in time and space, creating the impression that he was in fact a visitor to Byzantium rather than to the Turkish State whose rulers set up their capital in the defeated City of Roman Emperors on the Bosphoros.

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<sup>68</sup> The fear can be justified by the economic potential of the Ottoman Empire whose budget was 20 times bigger than that of the Polish-Lithuanian State, inhabited by the population whose number was 3 times smaller. Cf: D. KOŁODZIEJCZYK, *Imperium Osmańskie w XVI wieku - kilka uwag o potencjale demograficznym i gospodarczym* (The Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century - Some Remarks on the Demographical and Economic Potential), *Przegląd Historyczny* 1987, 3, 391-392.