

Artistic Expression of the *Translatio imperii* Concept in the Latin Epic Poetry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th Century and the European Literary Context¹

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Translatio imperii (transfer of the empire or transfer of power) is a political stereotype of transfer of metaphysical world domination from country to country. Having originated in late Antiquity in the realm of political ideology, this idea preserved its relevance and expressed itself in the literature of many countries all throughout the Middle Ages as well as during the Renaissance and Baroque period. The concept of *translatio imperii* explains the belief of the Byzantine emperors in their exceptional right over emperorship as legal successors of the old Rome. The emergence of the empire in the West in the times of Charles the Great (742-814) and then Otto I (912-973) did not destroy that stereotype and even added a new meaning to it.

After the fall of Constantinople (1453), “the history of the *translatio imperii* myth in the Latin West was over” (Paškin 2012: 117). This concept gradually lost its universal character and was interpreted within the confines of a nation. In that sense, the title *Sacrum Imperium Romanum Nationis Germanicae* is quite indicative. Maximilian I first used this title officially in his address to the Reichstag (Winkler 2006: 9-10).

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Two major sources of the idea in the European culture are as follows:

1. Virgil's *Aeneid* and the transfer of the Trojan domination to Italy (Rome as the new Troy);
2. a fragment from the Book of Daniel about "four kingdoms" that successively change from one to the other in the course of history.

Transfer of power as a topic became an additional artistic means of formation of the governmental patriotic concept in Renaissance literature, which eventually impacted the processes of forming the national conscience of various nations of Central and Eastern Europe. If we speak about the so-called Republic of both peoples² or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of both states (Korotkij 2009:194-195), then the historical narrative of the etiology and evolution of power, significant for the lifetime of this country, preserved its imperative power even after the country disappeared from the European political map (Kuolys 2007: 25; Kraūcevič 2008: 9).

The historically and legally complicated geopolitical situation in this region creates cultural and political tension even today. This is evidenced, for example, by the current events in Belarus and Ukraine in the 21st century (the annexation of Crimea, the long preservation of dictatorship in Belarus). The specificity of this historical and cultural situation also requires special approaches when studying the history of literature in this region. The monuments of Latin epic poetry created here contain relevant historical concepts and political ideas that influenced (and often still influence) the identification strategies of subjects belonging to this cultural space. These are primarily concepts and ideas related to the recognition of the legitimacy of power in the lands of Central and Eastern Europe.

The transition of power has always been accompanied by the task of redefining a certain territory and reinterpreting its political status. Discussion of these problems reveals the so-called condensed spaces (the term of Jürgen Joachimsthaler), various combinations of which are represented in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Study of the artistic embodiment of the idea of the transfer of power makes it possible to identify different cultural landscapes that complement each other or compete with each other (Joachimsthaler 2002: 18).

This research places a particular methodological relevance on the statement formulated by Pierre Bourdieu that the process of literary production happens in the frame of social spaces, which he calls fields of cultural production. These fields are subordinate to the field of power (Bourdieu 1997: 38), creating a social context in which ideology often plays the role of initiator of public aspirations. The social context itself, therefore, inevitably influences how any aesthetic idea, including the idea of *translatio imperii*, is implemented. However, the role of aesthetic experience (*ästhetische Erfahrung*), which Hans Robert Jauss considered a special kind of cognition, should not be underestimated.

² The term *Rzeczpospolita obojga narodów* was introduced into the literary discourse in 1967 by a Polish writer Paweł Jasienica. Gradually, the term pervaded scholarly research.

Thus, our research focuses not only on the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu, but also on the basic principles of literary hermeneutics as interpreted by Hans Robert Jauss. This methodological combination seems expedient because when the theme of state power is artistically embodied, “the refractoriness of aesthetic experience” (Jauss 1982:4) and its astonishing ambivalence; transgressive realization of this practice “in a reversal of direction, its transgressive function may also serve to transfigure social conditions by idealizing them” (Jauss 1982: 4)³. The transfer of power, presented in terms of aesthetic experience, has become a particularly powerful means of creating symbolic capital as the cultural memory of the nation, when important historical events have not only become of great topical interest but have also been sacralized. The mnemotechnic activity in the process of aesthetic experience very often acts as a driving force of mimesis.

In other words, memory can be more important than comprehension of reality in the practice of aesthetic cognition. Political and/or cultural-historical illusions at a certain stage of cultural development may become more important than political realities and established social hierarchies. Among such illusions I would include the Sarmatian myth, the ancient Lithuanian myth (the legend of Palemon) and the idea of Moscow as the third Rome. In contemporary humanistic studies a number of works devoted to comparing these theories and concepts and their interaction in the sphere of secular and religious politics have appeared (Vasilyauskas 2006; Kuolis 2007; Guzevičiūtė 2006⁴). Therefore, this article does not compare different ideological conceptions and political myths.

The concept of cultural memory is of special interest to us in connection with the embodiment of the idea of power transfer in literature. The Renaissance era, oriented towards the revival – both of pagan antiquity and early Christianity – can in a sense be called a period of cultural recollection, a return to the best spiritual traditions. But this memory was clearly projected into the sphere of public life. Jan Assmann has made a most interesting observation regarding how memory becomes pivotal in the field of power. The researcher emphasizes:

Die Allianz zwischen Herrschaft und Erinnerung hat auch eine prospektive Seite. Die Herrscher usurpieren nicht nur die Vergangenheit, sondern auch die Zukunft, sie wollen erinnert werden, setzen sich in ihren Taten Denkmäler, sorgen, daß diese Taten erzählt, besungen, in Monumenten verewigt oder zumindest archivarisch dokumentiert werden, Herrschaft “legitimiert sich retrospektiv und verewigt sich prospektiv” (Assmann 2007: 71).

The alliance between domination and memory also has a prospective side. Rulers usurp not only the past but also the future, they want to be remembered,

³ “The refractoriness of aesthetic experience as characterized here is marked by a curious ambivalence: in a reversal of direction, its transgressive function may also serve to transfigure social conditions by idealizing them” (Jauss 1982:4).

⁴ I am grateful to Sigitas Narbutas for his bibliographical advice in this area of research.

through their deeds they memorialize themselves, ensure that these deeds are told, sung about, immortalized in monuments or at least documented in archives, rule “legitimizes itself retrospectively and immortalizes itself prospectively”⁵.

This concept is well illustrated by expressions of power transfer found in poetry. The diffuse use of various onyms linguistically reveals a shift in power, and in this connection, different ethnonyms and politonyms (Sarmata – Sarmatia, Polonus – Polonia, Lithuanus – Lithuania) are used in this study. At the same time, it is impossible to organize and even minimally systematize their use in one study (see: Nekraševič 2020). For this reason many researchers note the difficulty in establishing an unambiguous ‘status’ of various cultural phenomena, which cannot be attributed to the history of only one national literature. For example, Giovanna Brogi Bercoff (Bercoff 2014: 335) and Marion Rutz (Rutz 2017: 81-83) illustrate this difficulty with Nicolaus Hussovianus’s monument of Latin poetry from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, *Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione bisontis* (A song about the guise, wildness and hunting of the bison) (1523). It belongs to the history of at least four national literatures (Belarusian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian), not because of the author’s birthplace or the place of publication, but because of the symbolic capital that was created in the field of cultural production through Hussovianus’s poem.

This article prioritizes epic poetry of the 16th century, as the *carmen heroicum* are certainly the most illustrative examples of the artistic realization of the transfer of power in this period. The possibility of creating an axiological paradigm of the transfer of power often intensifies the aesthetic effect of “the fascination an imaginary heroic universe exerts”⁶ and allows the “seductive power of aesthetic identification”⁷ to become visible. All this fostered the nascence of new plot contexts for various poetic genres and primarily for epic poetry.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the role of dynasties in the system of state power becomes more prominent. Representatives of various European dynasties claim imperial ambitions; one of the brightest examples is the Italian *condottiero* Francesco Sforza (1401-1466). The founder of the new dynasty of Polish kings is Lithuanian Grand Duke Jogaila (later Władysław II Jagiełło, c. 1352 or 1362-1434). A little later, in the second half of the 15th century, the dynastic factor influences the strengthening of the Tsarist autocracy in Muscovy. As Dvornik writes, “the marriage of Ivan III with Zoe-Sophia Palaeologus, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI, gave in the eyes of many a kind of juridical sanction to the idea of Muscovite Russia as the political and religious heir

⁵ Here and elsewhere, translations are mine unless otherwise indicated (ŽNK).

⁶ “A publication that could only escape the closed horizons of a world that was saddled with illiteracy and ordered by immutable doctrine if it listened to poetry or music or gazed at the illustrations of the “picture Bible of the cathedrals” must have felt with special intensity the fascination an imaginary heroic universe exerts” (Jauss 1982: 5).

⁷ “The seductive power of aesthetic identification was criticized by both the orthodox and the enlightened critics of the secular Trostbüchlein (book of consolation)” (Jauss 1982: 8).

of Byzantium” (Dvornik 1962: 372). The existing trends in the field of power influences the corresponding changes in the field of literature.

In the epic poetry of the Renaissance, the theme of *translatio imperii* can manifest itself in describing the history of a concrete dynasty that is fighting with another dynasty, albeit within the borders of the same country. Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481) muses on the concept of *translatio imperii* in the epic poem *Sphortias* dedicated to Francesco Sforza. The task of introducing the topic of the transfer (or continuity) of power requires a special emphasis on the traditional image of the protagonist in the introduction to the epic. So, it is noteworthy that the poet intentionally applies the motif of literary polemic in the introduction to *Sphortias*:

Prisca vocent alios, qui nil nisi ficta referre
 Et simulata velint vanique simillima somni.
 At nos vera iuvant, quae nostro maxima saeclo,
 Nemine posterior meritis ne laude priorum,
 Sphortiadum lux clara ducum columnaque ruentis
 Italiae, gessit Franciscus, solus in omnes
 Idem animo ingenioque vices infractus et hacer.
 (*Sphortias* I, 1-7; Keyser 2015: 3)

Let the past call for others – those who did not wish to speak of anything but the fictitious and the imaginary which resemble delusional dreams. We love the truth – all that which comprises the grandeur of our time. Francesco, the bright light of the Sphortias dynasty and the pillar of the crumbling Italy, a descendant whom not one ancestor surpassed neither in dignity nor in glory, determined, alone lived through all [the vicissitudes, ŽNK] in his soul and mind.

The narrator’s intentional distancing from the past events (*prisca*) which are proclaimed to be something “fictitious” and “imaginary” (*ficta et simulata*) allows him to focus the reader’s attention on the current history, thus, increasing its axiological status. The author’s own positioning is related in this case with contrasting himself to others (*alios*) – poets who sang of other empires and other rulers. Further, the recognition of the protagonist’s uniqueness is intensified with an even more specific contrast:

Hinc coepisse libet totumque heroa futuris
 promere temporibus. Non hic mihi fingitur ullus
 Aeacides Ithacusve sagax nec Troius error.
 (*Sphortias* I, 23–25; Keyser 2015)

From here I should start and tell everything about the hero for future times. Since I don’t simply picture here an Aeacides [=Achilles, ŽNK], or an Ithacus [=Ulysses, ŽNK], or Troy’s defeat.

The heroic context of Antiquity is clearly separated from the history that relates to the acts of Francesco Sforza. In doing so, Francesco Filelfo enables his

hero to take the prestigious symbolic position which once belonged to Achilles, Ulysses, and Aeneas in the previous poetic tradition. In this way, Filelfo creates a new situation of the game (*illusio* by Bourdieu) in the field of cultural production.

At the end of the 15th century, a new legend appears that claims the Byzantine origin of the Monomach's Cap. That, in turn, explains the religious and political idea of Moscow being the third Rome. Around the same period, with the rise of the Habsburg royal house, the idea of deification (*consecratio*) of the Holy Roman Emperor is formed. Maximilian I Habsburg, himself a man of literary talent, hired numerous poets, painters and engravers, demanding that in the course of his creative work they embody all the necessary motifs for political argumentation: they had to emphasize the claims of the Habsburg House to superiority over the rest of the world's rulers. This version of *translatio imperii* is based on the narrative of the supposedly continuous succession of emperors, beginning with Julius Caesar.

It was no accident that Maximilian I decided in 1499 to dictate the events of his reign to a secretary after the manner of Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars* (Silver 2008: 87-103). In the cultural context of the Holy Roman Empire, the motif for the transfer of power is equipped with various rituals with symbolic meaning, primarily the coronation and recognition of the Emperor as the anointed God. Maximilian I minimized the role of the Pope in the coronation process, declaring himself "chosen Roman Emperor"⁸ in 1508. The iconography of Emperor Charles V embodied the motifs of *defensor ecclesiae, miles Christi*, designed to present the Emperor as "the new Messiah" (Philipp 2010: 89-90).

To glorify the Habsburg dynasty, the poets of the 16th century naturally chose the model of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It is of note that in the course of a hundred years a total of four poems were written and dedicated to this family, three of which had *Austrias* in their title: *De Bello Norico, Ad Divum Maximilianum, Austriados Libri Duodecim* (*About the war in Noricum⁹, to the divine Maximilian, Austrias in twelve books*) by Riccardo Bartolini (1516), *Austrias* by Joachim Mynsinger (1540), *Austriados Libri Duo* (*Austrias in two books*) by Rocco Boni (1559), and *Austrias* by Andreas Gravinus (1602).

In the 15th and 16th centuries the process of spiritual development of the majority of Slavic peoples was influenced by the humanistic culture of the West. The European Renaissance played a key role here and overall changed the intellectual life of these peoples. Hans Rothe called the Hussite movement in the Czech lands "the first historic movement of universal importance that came from the Slavs" and added:

Doch erst die innige Verbindung des italienischen Humanismus mit der Reformation aus Deutschland bewirkte, daß nun zum zweiten Mal aus slavischen Ländern welt- und kulturhistorische Anstöße ausgingen. Vor allem ist hier Polen

⁸ "Erst Maximilian I. [ließ sich] 1508 im Dom zu Trient mit Zustimmung des Papstes zum 'erwählten römischen Kaiser' proklamieren" (Dopsch 2010: 213).

⁹ Noricum is the Latin name for the Celtic kingdom or federation of tribes that included most of modern Austria and part of Slovenia.

zu nennen, wo das eindrucksvolle Beispiel osteuropäischer Kultur entstand, das wir kennen. [...] Wichtiger aber scheint für den Kulturhistoriker zu sein, daß wieder, wie zuvor in Böhmen, die Literatur vielsprachig lebt (Rothe 1982: 15).

But it was only the close connection of Italian Humanism with the Reformation from Germany that caused cultural historical impulses to emanate throughout the world from Slavic countries for the second time. First and foremost, Poland should be mentioned here, where an impressive example of Eastern European culture we know was born. [...] But it seems to be more important for the cultural historian that again, as before in Bohemia, literature was bilingual.

The German scholar suggests that the term “Polonia” becomes not only a political but also a cultural concept during this very period, and its semiotic meaning can be understood in light of the dynastic history. At the same time, as Rothe notes, the literary context of the Renaissance is important for the historian of Poland (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). In light of this comment, the epic poem *Bellum Prutenum* (*The Prussian War*) written in Latin by Joannes Visliciensis (about 1485-between 1516 and 1520) is of particular interest.

Bellum Prutenum was published in the same year (1516) as *Austrias* by Riccardo Bartolini (died 1529). Although the poems are similar in their main artistic task (praising the ruling dynasty), they differ in the way the authors use the plot embodiment to fulfill this task. The difference is clear to the reader as early as the introduction. The beginning of the *Austrias* follows the tradition of epic narrative: like Homer and Virgil, after a brief formulation of the theme (“argumentum totius epopoeiae”), the cosmography of sea and earth (“cosmographia maris et terrae”) appears (Sarbievius 2009: 258). The argumentum is traditional enough for a heroic epic; it concerns the king’s battles and noble leaders.

Caesareis acies, Arctôaque regna, Ducisque
Magnanimos canimus, fontemque binominis Istri,
Et vastum, Helvetio spumantem vertice Rhenum
Strage hominum, atque atro maculantia aequora fluctu.
(Bartolinus 1531: 1)

We sing of the king’s battles and of the Northern country, of noble leaders, and of the Istra with two names, and also of the broad Rhine that springs from the Helvetian mountaintop, and of [its, ŽNK] banks marked by the dark stream [of blood, ŽNK] in the battle between people.

Recall that Horatius defined the theme for *carmen heroicum* as “res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella” (“the feats of kings and chiefs, and the deprivation of war”) (*Ars poetica*, 73).

Joannes Visliciensis generally does not violate the epic canon, but he begins the introduction in accordance with his own literary goals. Because the main idea of the poem is the war with the Teutons (the Prussian War), his *argumentum totius epopoeiae* is related to emphasizing the image-symbol of *fama felix*

(happy news). Thus, it is not the historical reality (the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410, which the writers of that time called the Prussian War) that is important for the work's ideological concept, but a happy memory (the happy news of the victory in this war).

Felix astrigeri veniens de cardine mundi
 Fama trucis nimium, Rex invictissime, belli
 Sanguineo reboat multum madefacta triumpho
 Fortis avi tollendo tui ad fastigia caeli
 Gesta...
 (*Bellum Prutenum*, 1-5; Vislicki 2005)

The happy news of the extraordinarily severe war, oh invincible King, having come from the star pole of the world and being filled with the battle triumph, had a forceful resonance and raised to the skies your mighty ancestor's heroic deeds.

Fama felix symbolizes the memory of the ancestors and continuity of the heroic traditions. The continuity concerns, first and foremost, king Sigismund I ("invincible King") and his grandfather ("mighty ancestor"), king Władysław Jagiełło, founder of the Jagiellonian dynasty. In this respect, Polish scholars St. Łempicki and B. Nadolski noted that the author of the *The Prussian War* "intended to produce a kind of *Jagiellonid*" (Łempicki 1952: 225; Nadolski 1956: 177). The theme of the continuity of power rises in several plot lines of the poem.

In *The Prussian War*'s first book, the author poetically presents the land that the "uninformed neighbor" ("accola rudis") called Sarmatia, even though, as the poet underlines, the indigenous name is *Polonia*. Having enumerated the peoples of Polonia (among which we find "triple Ruthenians" – "triplices Rutheni"), the author briefly writes about its first rulers: Lech I, Krakus, and Princess Wanda. After noting that the death of Wanda signified the fall of the Krakus's clan, Joannes Visliciensis cries for help in order to continue his story of the rulers of Polonia. All of a sudden, Apollo arrives and advises that the poet stop the poetic narrative (I, 234-235). Apollo spares *alterum ego* of the narrator from writing about the poetic genealogy:

Sed sileas reges, quos cana obliterat aestas,
 Fama quia illorum et probitas et bellica virtus
 Nota satis nituit pelago tellureque vasta,
 Haud secus illorum, genuit quos Ilia mater
 Aut Priami tellus aut nobilis ora Choaspis.
 Ipse tuam, moneo, quare lassare Minervam
 Noli; sunt et erunt vates qui postea reges
 Deproment, coluit quos durus Sarmatha, sed tu
 Sideream stirpem regis modulari Poloni,
 Nec non fortis avi praestantia facta sui, quae
 Prussia sanguineis sensit tenuata duellis.
 (*Bellum Prutenum* I, 246–256)

But don't say anything about those kings, who have been covered by the grey past, because their fame, dignity, and martial arts have already been praised sufficiently among the range of sea and land – in the same way as the fame of those, who have been born by the mother from Ilion, or from the country of Priamos, or from the shore of Choaspes. This is why I beg you not to trouble your Minerva: there will other poets come, later on they will pull out of neglect those kings, that a harsh Sarmatian venerates, and you sing of the heavenly heir of the Polish king and his mighty ancestor's heroic deeds, whom Prussia felt coming upon herself in bloody battles.

So, Apollo says, other poets should tell of the kings, which were revered by the ancient Sarmatians, but now we must sing the exploits of the ancestor of the modern king (i.e. King Jagiello, grandfather of King Sigismund I). Joannes Visliciensis clearly juxtaposes the names *Sarmata* and *Polonus* in these lines to separate the Jagiellons who ruled Polonia at the time from their predecessors, the Piast dynasty who ruled semi-legendary Sarmatia. Apollo leaves praising the Sarmatian kings to the Sarmatian poets, whereas the narrator of *The Prussian War* has to take on the role of *vates* (singer, prophet) of the new dynasty, the Jagiellons. Joannes Visliciensis unexpectedly transitions from Princess Wanda to king Władysław Jagiełło in order to underscore his patriotic stance. According to him, the crucial milestones in the history of Polonia (the defeat of the Teutons in the Battle of Grunwald in 1410 and the defeat of the Muscovites near Orša in 1514) are related to the rule of the Jagiellons. It was the Jagiellons who transformed an initially monoethnic country into a mighty political power which started to become a major political influence in Europe starting in the 16th century. Already at the time of King Casimir Jagiellon it was a *de facto* federative union of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and this very federation is what the poet calls *Polonia*. Sarmatia was simply a distant “barbaric” land in the minds of Western Europeans – hence, the poet uses the epithet *durus* (stern, crude) to describe a Sarmatian – while Polonia was one of the European monarchies.

King Władysław Jagiełło was the legal successor to the highest power in Polonia, and to articulate that, the poem contrasts him to the great duke Vytautas as *dux pacis* (chief of peace) versus *dux belli* (chief of war) (Daraškevič 1975: 58; Ulčinitė 1995: 30). Addressing Jogaila, the narrator calls him *rex divus* (divine king); indeed, the king functions as a thought leader of the army in the poem. The epithet *divus* is justified in the narrative by the fact that Jogaila acts as a *rex pius* (pious king): even in the face of the imminent threat after Vytautas's army has been vanquished, he thinks it morally right to first conclude liturgy and only then commands his own army to go into battle (although great duke Vytautas expresses his protest and condemns the king for his delay). As a result, it is Jogaila who gets the prophetic vision predicting his victory. In the heat of the Battle of Grunwald, Krakow's bishop Saint Stanislaus appears in the sky with the message that the victory has already been preordained in heaven – precisely for him and not for his cousin Vytautas: “Father Almighty [...] will reward you and your [warriors] with a blissful omen; His mighty Hand will set everything up

so that the victors who overcame the army of your cousin will be conquered”¹⁰. Therefore, the king is depicted as God’s chosen one.

The “divine nature” of Jogaila is even more emphasized in the third part of *The Prussian War*. It opens with the Council of the Gods on Olympus (as in the 8th Song of *The Iliad*). According to the plans of the Olympic gods, princess Sophia of the Halshany family becomes queen and bears Jogaila three sons, two of whom – Władysław and Casimir – become heirs to the throne. Hence, the problem of the dynasty is solved on the celestial level.

At the end of the poem, king Sigismund I is praised as the *victor celebris patriae pater atque Poloniae* (renowned victor and father of Polonia) (III, 256). Among the wishes for the king, we read the following:

Threiciusque sinu applaudet tibi Bosphorus arcto,
Per facilem tribuens Byzantia jugera Martem
Vincere, Turcaicis longum possessa ministris.
(*Bellum III*, 268-270)

Let the Thracian Bosphorus splash before you in a narrow bay, allowing you in an easy war to conquer the Byzantine land which has long been ruled by the Turkish ministers.

One should abstain from interpreting these lines as a poetic justification of the imperial conquering politics. Uladzimir Karotki writes that this is a “mythological and historical justification of the right of the Jagiellons not only to the lands of Eastern Slavic people but also to the rule of Byzantium” (Karotki 2013: 76). Looking at it this way, King Sigismund I acts in his military policy as a general Christian political leader, i.e. defender of the Christian faith (*defensor fidei Christianæ*).

Therefore, it would be erroneous to assume that *The Prussian War* is a poem dedicated to the Battle of Grunwald. The events of the Great War with the Teutonic knights and the Battle of Grunwald in 1410 became the symbol of political might of the Jagiellonian dynasty. The poem provided a literary formulation of the concept “Jagiellonian” patriotism for the first time (see: Nekrašević 2011: 217-218).

As far as the cultural transfer of the *translatio imperii* idea is concerned, the works of Johannes Mylius von Liebenrode (about 1535-3.7.1575) are of particular interest. He obtained a solid education in classical philology in the convent school of Ilfeld where he was taught by Michael Neander. In 1560-1561, Johannes Mylius worked in Cracow, published poetic paraphrases of the Christian canonic texts, and then moved to Zabłudów (today part of the Białystok

¹⁰ “Jam pater omnipotens [...]//Teque tuosque hodie solabitur omine fausto//Et forti tribuet victos succumbere dextra//Victores, qui fraternas vicere phalangas” (*Bellum Prutenum II*, 281, 283-285).

province in Poland) and obtained the position of court teacher with nobleman Hrehory Chodkiewicz.

In his epic poem *Ἱερώνικων* (*Holy Victories*) in two books published in Vienna in 1565-1566, Johannes Mylius endeavored to find common points between the Jagiellonian concept and the concept of *Sacrum Imperium Romanum Nationis Germanicae* (Holy Roman Empire of the German nation). Here the idea of *translatio imperii* is linked to the anti-Turkish issues and combined with the Biblical context.

The first part of this poem is dedicated to emperor Maximilian II, the second part to king Sigismund II Augustus. In the first part, the narrator tells about the kings of ancient Israel (from Abraham to Hezekiah) who were praised in history as the defenders of the Fatherland and of faith and who became prominent figures in the Old Testament. The second part of the *Ieronicon* tells about the heroes and rulers of the modern period. Mylius first mentions emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and in the end praises the Jagiellons (Ioannes Albertus and Sigismund I) and the Habsburgs (emperors Charles V and Ferdinand I). Lastly, he praises the Knights of the Maltese Cross under the leadership of Jean de la Valette (Iehanus Valettanus) (Mylius 1568, A4 r. – G3 r.). Therefore, the handover of power (in this case, from the kings of Israel to the Christian rulers) is directed to two ruling dynasties, the Habsburgs and the Jagiellons. Such intersections within the field of power spoke well to the then-current political situation: in the middle of the 16th century king Sigismund II Augustus (in his third marriage to Catherine of Austria) did not have an heir, and the Habsburgs hoped that it would be precisely them who would ascend the throne of the Kingdom of Poland.

Transfer of empire gets even more attention in the Latin language poetry of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the second half of the 16th century. After Sigismund II Augustus, the last ruler of the Jagiellons, died, there arose a new political leader-king and great duke Stephen Báthory. Well before his triumphant march on Pskov in 1581, literature had portrayed him as a liberator from the tyranny of Muscovy. Basilius Hyacinthus (second half of the 16th century)¹¹, the poet from Vilnius and alumnus of the University of Padua (where he was possibly taught by Francesco Robortello), published his *Panegyricus in excidium Polocense* (*Panegyric on the Seizure of Polotsk*) in 1580. In it, Stephen Báthory is portrayed as a warrior king. Appealing to the highest dignitaries, he reproaches them for inaction.

Reddere sollicitos si uos haec intima nolunt,
 Me mea sollicitant, nec enim quod temnor ab hoste
 Ferre queo patiens, ibo atque celerrimus ibo,
 Regalique meum caput hoc diademate cinctum
 Obiectabo libens morti, si regius iste

¹¹ Darius Antanavičius claims that this nickname was used by Vasilij Jackevič (or Jackovič) (Antanavičius 2019).

Legitimus sit honos, uelut est, uictoria certe
 Nostra manet, stabit Rex, corruet ille Tyrannus.
 (*Hyacinthius* 1580: 13 n.n.¹²)

If your hidden feelings don't make you worry, then my (feelings) worry me. I cannot tolerate the fact that the enemy humiliates me, and I will go as soon as possible and willingly put my crowned head to death. If only the regal honor is indeed legitimate, then, beyond a shadow of a doubt, victory will be ours; the king will stand and the tyrant will perish.

This and other fragments of the *Panegyric* suggest the motif of the tyranny of Muscovy which became one of the recognizable literary *topoi* of the late 16th century and can be found in an array of literary works. For example, a poetic volume dedicated to the tragic events of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris was published in Vilnius in 1573. One of the poems says, "So, celebrate now, Muscovy, celebrate: Gaul surpassed you in disgraceful barbarity"¹³. Basilius Hyacinthius also accentuates the problem of the legitimacy of power: this specific issue became a political stumbling block in the reign of Stephen Báthory. According to Nikolaj Karamzin, at the siege of Pskov, king Stephen expelled Muscovy's envoys "and, in mockery, sent Ioannes the books about the Russian princes and his own reign published in Latin in Germany, in proof of the fact (as he would explain) that the old rulers of Muscovy were not Augustus's kindred but the payers of tributes imposed by the Perekop's khans"¹⁴.

The aristocrats of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth placed their hopes on King Stefan Báthory for getting rid of the Moscow threat and saw him as a kind of messiah. It was during his reign that interest in different interpretations of the concept of *translatio imperii* intensified in the cultural space of the Commonwealth. In 1586 Theodor Skumin Tyszkiewicz (about 1538-1618) received the title of the great Lithuanian Scarbian. On this occasion statesman, military leader and poet Helias Pilgrimovius (about 1550-about 1604) sent him a congratulatory letter. Anastasia Davydava revealed the textual dependence of this letter on the work of the German humanist Agrippa von Nettesheim *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (*About the inaccuracy and mortality of sciences*), published in Cologne in 1527 (Davydava 2019: 82). After congratulating Skumin Tyszkiewicz on his new position, the narrator moves on to discussions

¹² The initials "n.n." mean "unnumbered page". In this and similar cases, where possible, the page number has been inferred by me.

¹³ "Barbara nunc igitur gaude, Moscouia gaude, // Te superat turpi Gallia barbarie" (*Illustrium* 1573: 3 n.n.).

¹⁴ "и с насмешкою прислал к Иоанну изданные в Германии на латинском языке книги о российских князьях и собственном его царствовании, в доказательство (как он изъяснялся), что древние государи Московские были не Августовы родственники, а данники ханов Перекопских" (Karamzin 1989: 190).

about the evolution of monarchies in world history. The most important world monarchies are listed here: the first is the Assyrian monarchy founded by King Ninus and Queen Semiramis; the second is the Persian Empire, led by Cyrus and then his son Cambyses (Cambyses the Elder); the third – the monarchy of Alexander the Great. At last, he writes, “the fourth monarchy of Romans, and there was not in the history of mankind a more formidable, powerful and authoritative [monarchy]”¹⁵. Further the narrative deductively focuses on the history of the Rzeczpospolita of both states, which makes it possible to mention King Stephen I in the corresponding historical row:

[...] post [...] longissima seculorum serie ad Boleslaum, inde ad Praemislum, mox ad Piastum, postea ad Jagellonem eiusque nobilissimam stirpem, & ab eo ad hunc Serenissimum Regem Staphanum Monarchiae potestas peruenit, non haereditario tamen, sed electionis iure... (Pilgrimovius 1586: 6 n.n.).

After many centuries [the monarchy passed on, ŽNK] to Bolesław, from him to Przemysł [the Ploughman, ŽNK], then to the Piast, then to Jagello and his noblest descendants, and from them the power of the monarch passed to the present king Stephen, not by right of succession but by right of election.

The richest and most diverse material pertinent to the artistic expression of the *translatio imperii* idea can be found in Ioannes Radvanus’s (died after 1591) epic poem *Radivilias, sive De vita et rebus [...] principis Nicolai Radivili (Radivilias, or On the Life and Deeds [...] of Prince Mikołaj Radziwiłł)* (1592). The poem is dedicated to Mikołaj “the Red” Radziwiłł (1512–1584), Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire in Biržai-Dubingiai.

Much in the same way as in the poem *Sphortias* by Francesco Filelfo, the argument of *Radivilias* is presented in a polemic way: Ioannes Radvanus is not interested in “omnia vulgata” (“all popular things”) (*Radivilias* I, 14; Radvanus 2009) such as “Semiramias arces” (“palaces of Semiramis”) or “Trojae labores” (“hardships of Troy”) (*Radivilias* I, 11). On the other hand, a Roman patrician Palaemo Libo is mentioned right at the beginning of the poem (Maciej Strykowski calls him Publius Palaemo Libo in his *Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia, and All of Ruthenia* published in 1582). According to a legend, Palaemo Libo arrived at the shores of Lithuania together with 500 families of Roman patricians in the early 1st century (in other sources in the 5th century) (Chronika 1975: 15). It was the legend about Palemon that became the basis of the Roman theory of origin of the grand princes and aristocrats of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This is why Ioannes Radvanus asks rhetorically: “who doesn’t know these days of Libo’s exile, of the great and audacious early endeavors of Palemon?”¹⁶.

¹⁵ “Quarta Monarchia Romanorum qua nulla in rebus humanis formidolosior, potentior & augustior fuit” (Pilgrimovius 1586: 5 n.n.).

¹⁶ “Quis nunc aut forte Libonis//Exsilium nescit, magnosque Palaemonis ausus?” (*Radivilias* I, 35–36).

Prince Mikołaj Radziwiłł is a descendant of Palemon as well because the *Chronicle of Lithuania and Samogitia* tells of Erdvilas (or, Radivil), the great-grandson of Palemon, in the year 1258 (Chronika 1975: 18). Accordingly, in *Radivilius* the genealogy of the Lithuanian dukes begins with Erdvilas:

Haec eadem Litauros tellus, acresque Sudinos, [...]
 Extulit, haec Erdiuilum, Troydenaque fortem,
 Mingallumque Ducem, Scirmontumque armipotentem, [...]
 [...] quin ista Iagellona tellus,
 Sarmatiaeque dedit Reges, Hunnoque potenti
 Imposuit dominos, et Cechi a stripe Bohemis,
 Totque duces genuit praestantia nomina, nec non
 Quem canimus Magnum Radivilum, nomen et omen
 Nicolei cui mens dederat praesaga parentum.
 (*Radivilius* I, 80, 84-85, 91-96)

Right from this land originated Lithuanians and courageous Sudovians [=Samogitians, ŽNK], [from this land originated, ŽNK] Erdvilas and warlike Skirmantas; [...] moreover, this same land provided the Jagiellons, kings for Sarmatia, provided sovereigns for the mighty Hunns as well as for the Czechs from the family of Bohemians; here all princes were born who are famous for [their, ŽNK] names, and here also one man was born of whom we sing – great Radziwiłł, to whom the prophetic wisdom of ancestors gave the name Nikolaus.

Therefore, the narrator weaves both king Sigismund II Augustus and hetman Mikołaj Radziwiłł into a unified “Palemonic” dynastic context, and both sovereigns are shown as legitimate representatives of the ruling dynasty.

At the same time, the Grand Prince of Muscovy Ivan Vasil’evič (the Terrible) is exposed in *Radivilius* not only as a tyrant but also an illegitimate ruler (perhaps even a bastard). It is no coincidence that the first part of the poem mentions ferocious (*ferox*) Muscovy’s boyar Ivan Ovchina-Obolensky when describing the siege of the city Starodub (the siege was laid by Jerzy Radziwiłł, father of Mikołaj Radziwiłł). Ivan Ovčina-Obolenskij entered into an “illicit marriage” (“furtivis hymenaeis”) (*Radivilius* I, 154-156) with grand princess Elena Vasil’evna (Glin-skaja), and so a rumor spread fast in the times of Ioannes Radvanus that prince Ivan Vasil’evič was born exactly as a result of this unlawful love affair.

The poem contrasts a liberal form of government (typical of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) and the tyranny of Muscovy (exemplified in the figure of Ivan the Terrible). The symbolism of the Monomach’s Cap acts in the poem as a distorting mirror for the concept of *translatio imperii*: the tyranny of Muscovy perverted the idea of empire succession, as discussed below. The true successors of the Roman empire are patricians led by Palemon, the founders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In that sense, *Radivilius* disproves the theory presented in the *Skazanie o knjaz’ jach Vladimirkich* (*Tale of the Princes of Vladimir*), according to which the Muscovite princes were descendants of Octavianus Augustus.

Describing Ivan the Terrible, Ioannes Radvanus frequently uses chthonic deities. For example, the second book of *Radivilias* tells that the Furies were the future tyrant's wet nurses. In minute detail, the narrator pictures Alecto, one of the Erinyes, at the end of the second book. In the artistic context of the poem, Alecto serves as an overall metaphor of nefarious forces. A corresponding gloss confirms it: "Satan incites Ivan to war; a poetic description of Satan" ("Ivanum Satanas in bellum incitat et descriptio Satanae poetica"). It is noteworthy in this context that it is precisely the "direful bitch" ("dira canis") from Hell that first flies over the lands of Muscovy "like a quick ominous bird" ("spinturnix veluti cita") (*Radivilias* II: 716) and then turns into a snake. The snake crawls up the body of the grand prince and, reaching his head, morphs into a crown of gold "which Vladimir tore off the head of his enemy as a war trophy: the kings of Muscovy wear this as a symbol of supreme power and put it on as a sign of royal dignity"¹⁷. A corresponding gloss gives a comment as to where the Monomach's Cap came from: "The crown of Vladimir Monomach which he perfidiously tore off [the head] of the Greek man after attacking him"¹⁸. Therefore, Ioannes Radvanus makes a broader generalization: the supreme power of Muscovy is tyrannical at its roots because even the symbol of this power was obtained in a cunning and violent way. Thus, the Monomach's Cap is not, to use Basilus Hyacinthus's expression, a "legitimate sign of royal dignity" ("regius legitimus honos") for grand princes of Muscovy, including Ivan the Terrible.

The power that was established by the uprooted Roman patricians is recognized as legitimate. The shield of hetman Radziwiłł described in the third part of the poem serves as a symbol of the legitimacy (*Radivilias* III, 87-195). The shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* and the shield of Aeneas in the *Aeneid* were the literary models for Ioannes Radvanus. The arrival of the Italics headed by Palemon is one of the central scenes in the whole description of the shield of Radziwiłł (*Radivilias* III, 90-98). It is highlighted in a special way that Palemon and his supporters "aedificant Novam Romam, solatia Veteris Romae" ("built New Rome, a compensation for Old Rome"). The idea of 'reward, compensation for loss' (*solatia*) in relation to Rome clearly places *translatio imperii* as one of the ideological priorities of the poem.

Much like king Jogaila in *The Prussian War*, hetman Radziwiłł is portrayed as a *dux pius* (pious prince) in *Radivilias*. Mikołaj Radziwiłł's death in the fourth part of the poem is described as a mournful event of national significance. The poet has no doubt that the Grand Hetman will smoothly enter the gates of heaven; he lists a whole catalog of the prince's virtues and merits in front of *Elysia puella* (the maiden of Elysium, i.e., Proserpina):

Numinis aetherei vix hoc metuentior ullus,
Aut Evangelii cultor reverentior, ex quo

¹⁷ "Quem Volodimirus ab hoste//Detraxit spoliū: primos hoc tollere fasces//Omen habent Moschi Reges, hoc scepra capessunt" (*Radivilias* II, 729–731).

¹⁸ "Torquis Vladimiri Monomachi, quem Graeco provocanti detraxit, duello congressus" (*ibidem*).

Prisca Fides iterum dignata invisere terras.
(*Radivilias* IV, 224-226)

Hardly anyone was more pious, hardly anyone was a more devoted worshipper of the Gospel, from which previous faith saw the world in previous dignity.

Mikołaj Radziwiłł, the devotee of the ‘previous faith’ (Calvinism), and Władysław Jagiełło, who is Catholic, are portrayed as God’s chosen ones by virtue of their peculiar missions in government affairs. To give a more vivid context of denigrating Ivan the Terrible, Ioannes Radvanus weaves a religious motif into the text which is important to the East Slavs: in the second half of *Radivilias*, he describes how the prince of Muscovy strikes the icon of Saint Nicholas with his notorious scepter (with which he killed his son Ivan) (*Radivilias* II, 544–554). The poet considered it necessary to write in a gloss that this was “Saint Nicholas, one of the heavenly patrons of the Muscovites” (“D. Nicolaus quidam patronus Moschorum”).

The upbringing and education of the main character (who is involved in the transfer of power) are crucial pieces of information in Ioannes Radvanus’s poem. The first part of the poem describes a journey to the Castalian Spring with legendary musician Musaeus, and the scene starts as follows:

Ergo dum florens aetas, dum mollior est mens,
Traditur ingenii sacris cultoribus: illi
Edoceant claras foecundi pectoris artes.
(*Radivilias* I, 220-222)

Thus, when he [Mikołaj Radziwiłł, ŽNK] was at the age when the mind is most malleable, he was given [for education, ŽNK] to the holy worshippers of talent: they taught him celebrated subjects to enrich his soul.

It should be noted that starting from the late Renaissance (to which *Radivilias* pertains), a proclivity for scholarship becomes one of the most essential elements of the main character’s virtue (*virtus*) in an epic poem. Such an interpretation of a *heros perfectus* (perfect hero) is fully represented in Baroque poetry. For instance, Giovanna Siedina writes of a peculiar interpretation of the heroic as the supremacy of scholarship, intellect, and spiritual growth over military achievements in the late 17th-early 18th centuries’ epic and panegyric poetry of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and confirms “the expansion of the subject matter in epic poetry” (“l’espansione dei temi della poesia epica”) (Siedina 2012: 245).

The literary works that we provided in this article as examples of the artistic realization of the *translatio imperii* idea enable us to draw the following conclusions. The motif of the transfer of empire, when integrated into the space of a literary work (in the heroic epic poems of the Renaissance), was never understood and interpreted narrowly as a problem of dynastic succession. Most often the narrators intended to express and discuss only certain aspects and facets of this motif, in keeping with its aesthetic experience. Moreover, each narrator

expands the theme of the transfer of power within their current historical and ideological context, one way or another tying this theme with the most important events in the political history of their countries. For many poets of the Renaissance who wrote in Latin (in particular, for Joannes Visliciensis, Johannes Mylius, Ioannes Radvanus), a political theme directly correlates with a religious theme, which results in a true successor of the political power being portrayed as both *dux pacis* and *defensor fidei Christianae*.

In the cultural region of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the artistic narrative often interacted with historiographical narrative, forming diffuse forms of stories (the most striking example is the *Chronicle* by Maciej Strykowski). The heroic epic was the most appropriate artistic form for such narratives; in particular, *Radivilius* of Ioannes Radvanus grew out of the plot frame of Strykowski's *Chronicle*. At the same time, historical reality was comprehended through the aesthetic experience, closely connected with various paradigms of cultural memory: the Sarmatian, Jagiellonian, or Roman concept, or the idea of a single Christian Europe (as in the poem by Johannes Mylius). These paradigms changed their content but kept following a common scheme. It was important to link the current political context with legendary or mythological notions of the past and to show the new ruler as the successor of the glorious deeds of previous rulers. This is how King Stefan Báthory is represented in Basilius Hyacinthius's *Panegyricus in excidium Polocense*.

The structures of the national mentality among Belarusians, Lithuanians, and Poles were formed depending on these symbolic notions, which is reflected in the monuments of the epic poetry of the Renaissance epoch. The balance of power in the field of power was often perceived by readers from this cultural region through the prism of such perceptions. In addition, cultural memory played a huge role. The new political leader had to conform not to European democratic standards, but to traditional notions of an ideal ruler that had developed in a particular cultural space.

The explication of the *translatio imperii* idea in 16th century literature was the most prominent factor that allowed the "the most universal idea of a perfect hero" ("idea universalissima herois absolutissimi", according to Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius) to be thoroughly analyzed and developed in the literature of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Political at its core, this idea enabled the poets who wrote in Latin to create an impressive symbolic capital in the genre of heroic epic poems. With insight into the concept of the transfer of empire, the artistic expression of both the 'Jagiellonian' and Lithuanian (i.e., Grand Duchy of Lithuania) patriotism had an enormous impact on the formation of the national identity of the Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Polish peoples.

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Abstract

Translatio imperii is a concept and political stereotype of transfer of metaphysical world domination from country to country. The concept of *translatio imperii* accounts for the belief of the Byzantine emperors in their exceptional right over emperorship as legal successors of the old Rome. After the fall of Constantinople (1453), the concept of *translatio imperii* gradually lost its universal character and was interpreted in the confines of a nation. In the epic poetry of the Renaissance, the theme of *translatio imperii* can manifest itself in describing the history of a concrete dynasty that is fighting with another dynasty, albeit within the borders of the same country. Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481) mused on the concept of *translatio imperii* in the epic poem *Sphortias* dedicated to Francesco Sforza, an Italian *condottiero*. At the end of the 15th century, a new legend appeared that claimed the Byzantine origin of the Monomach's Cap. That, in turn, explains the religious and political idea of Moscow being the third Rome. Alternative theories emerged in the epic poetry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The epic poem *The Prussian War* (Lat. *Bellum Prutenum*, 1516) by Ioannes Visliciensis depicts the events of the Great War with the Teutonic knights and the battle of Grunwald in 1410. The events became the symbol of political might of the Jagiellonian dynasty. The poem provided a literary formulation of the concept "Jagiellonian" patriotism for the first time.

In his epic poem *Radivilias* (1592), Ioannes Radvanus incorporates the idea of *translatio imperii* when he shares a 'Roman' legend according to which the kings of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania trace their origin from patrician Palemon (Publius Palemio Libo) who founded the city of Nova Roma. The true successors of the Roman empire are patricians led by Palemon – the founders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The artistic expression of both the “Jagiellonian” and Lithuanian (i.e., Grand Duchy of Lithuania) patriotism which incorporated the concept of *translatio imperii* had an enormous impact on the formation of the national identity of the Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Polish peoples.

Keywords: Translatio imperii, Latin epic poetry, Renaissance, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, literary production, aesthetic experience.