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Sarmatisation of the Polish Christmas carol—posthumous success of the Jagiellonian dynastic ideology

The Europe of the late Middle Ages was looking for deep roots of its culture once again. Despite the will of some European rulers, the time of papal universalism, the dream of "Christian republic" had come to its end. Slowly but inexorably the modern ideas based on the community of interests, language, and common national goals prevailed over the religious-based sense of the Christian-European unity. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we can easily observe the growth of domination of the national language in literature and later in functional writing. The new understanding of Roman and Greek ideas inspired the quest for (or rather creation) an ancient lineage. Germans summoned up their Teutonic ancestry owed to Saxons and Vandals, the French Kingdom embraced the principles of Gallicanism[1], the Nordic countries sought their genealogy in the mythology of Goths and, needless to say, of course Italians viewed themselves as the offspring of ancient Romans. The ambitious kings of the Jagiellonian house followed this idea. For his dynastic purposes Władysław Jagiełło himself—or upon the suggestions of his advisors—adopted a legend well-known in Europe.[2]

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[1] See: John B. Wolf, *Louis XIV*, New York 1968: 388-392.
[2] See: Tadeusz Ulewicz, *Sarmacja. Studium z problematyki słowiańskiej XV i XVI w.* [Sarmatia. Study on the Slavic Issues of the 15th and 16th Centuries], Kraków 1950; in particular, see chapter 3: "Zwycięstwo humanizmu" ["Victory of Humanism"]: 33–52.

The term "Sarmatians"—as a synonym of Slaves—appeared in French chronicles as early as the tenth century.[3] What had the strongest impact on spreading the movement was the publication of 1475, a Latin version of *Cosmoghraphia* by Ptolemaeus. Describing in details the geography of Europe he mentioned two Sarmatias: first, a "European" one between the Vistula and the Don rivers and "Asiatic" between the river Don and the Volga.[4] Such a distinction was very useful for the king's ideologists (like Jan Długosz and later Miechowita) who could ascribe the name "Sarmatians" to numerous nations who lived between the Balitc Sea, the Carpathian mountains, the Don river and the proximity of east Germania and was widely known among Polish nobility. The Sarmatian ideology appeared in the fifteenth-century Polish political thought as a means of ideologically linking together a multi-ethnic state. The creation of the category of the Sarmatian, superordinate in respect of ethnic and national connotations (who could be a Pole, Ruthenian or Lithuanian, as well as a Pomeranian or a Silesian, used not as regional names, but as ethnic nationalities) aimed to assemble all persons of noble birth around the person of the king, as well as to politically unify the Commonwealth. Such understanding of Sarmatia can be found in *Annales seu cronicae incliti regni Poloniae* by Jan Długosz, the teacher of king's sons.

It is easy to understand now why Maciej Miechowita in his *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis Asiana et Europiana* (Krakow, 1517) identified the ancient Sarmatia with the Polish Kingdom—it was so stylish to find the forebears of Polish nobility among the invincible warriors, and horsemen who had never been defeated by the Roman army. This belief goes back to Herodotus who wrote about "Sarmatians" as descendants of the Scythians and the Amazons. It was also extremely useful to find the linkage between Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Silesians, Pomeranians and other related groups, and to unify the multi-ethnic country in that way. Although the real unification of rights between the noble class of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was confirmed much later (1569), Ruthenia's boyars, Lithuanian "kniazhaty", and Polish "szlachcic" could call themselves "brother Sarmatians", being officially equal.

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[3] See, for example: chronicles of 919-966 by Flodoard, who mistakenly mentions Czechs as "Sarmatarum".

[4] See: T. Ulewicz, *Sarmacja…* (1959): 150, note N° 3; copy to be found in the Jagiellonian Library, call number *Inc. 1432*, card d_8 r.
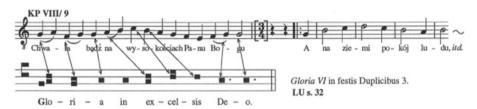
Other writers, like Konrad Celtis, Marcin Bielski, Marcin Kromer and, finally, by the end of the sixteenth century Maciej Stryjkowski, confirmed and expanded the myth. The best example can be provided by Stanisław Sarnicki whose main publication *Annales, sive de origine et rebus gestis Polonorum et Lithuanorum libri VIII* (Cracovia 1587; chapter 12) describes the background of Sarmatians as descended from the biblical Asarmot, son of Sem. The common understanding that the Sarmatians were unique, and more valuable than other European nations contributed to the rise of a new ideology, a new culture in opposition to the French, Italian or German traditions. The admiration of local habits, dances, clothing, literature and, surely, music paralleled the condemnation of the European fashion of any form. This process of separation of the Sarmatian nobility in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the main European culture and lifestyle intensified after the Polish-Swedish War in 1655 and lasted till the mid-eighteenth century. As a result, a negative image of a Polish Sarmatian—a xenophobic catholic and a narrow-minded person—was created.

To understand and describe the above mentioned cultural changes one can use various indicators. A clear representation of the problem can be found in the history of music. The surviving music from the Jagiellonian era decidedly alludes to European models. The professional compositions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (by Nicolaus de Radom, Nicolaus de Cracovia or Wacław of Szamotuły, to name but some) can easily be compared with the mainstream European music. Such standards were maintained until the mid-seventeenth century, which marked the beginning of a slow decline in musical composition bringing the repertoire of secondary standards. That "official" musical culture involved only a small portion of musical activity, cultivated at princes' courts. At the same time we can be very proud of Polish works in the style of Italian opera (since 1628), specifically due to their pan-European character, and of the opera theatre of 1635-1648. It is worth remembering, however, that those compositions merely provided amusement for the royal court, and did not result in forming a Polish/Sarmatian operatic movement. Great composers of that period (e.g. Adam Jarzębski, Marcin Mielczewski) belonged to the king's court circle or to the main church centres (e.g. Mikołaj Zieleński, Bartłomiej Pękiel). The question remains then, what kind of music was widely popular in the period between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries? To give an elaborate answer one can refer to the example of church song, which brings good

source materials. It stands to reason, the object of this discussion would not be Gregorian chant / plainchant or *officium*; the focus would be religious songs performed by a congregation. In the Polish ecclesiastical tradition there are two groups of songs of special importance: Marian songs and Christmas carols. The repertoire of the latter in the Jagiellonian Era will become the object of further analysis.

The study of the outstanding collection edited by Juliusz Nowak-Dłużewski[5] brings to one's attention the fact that the majority of carols are versions of Latin songs and hymns or translations of German (often Lutheran) composi-tions. Sometimes the Gregorian melodic pattern can easily be observed and the non-mensural notation confirms the plainchant background.

Example 1a and b
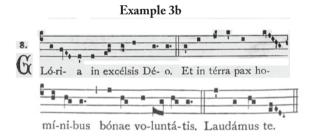

Or in other examples:

Example 2a

⁵ Juliusz Nowak-Dłużewski et al. (ed.), *Kolędy polskie: średniowiecze i wiek XVI* [Polish Carols: Middle Ages and the 16ᵗʰ Century] vol. 1-2, Warszawa 1966. For quotations from this publication the abbreviation "KP" will be used below with an appropriate number of a song. "LU" = *Liber usualis Missae et Officii*, Tornaci, Rome 1956.

Example 2b

Example 3a

Example 3b

One of the most popular international customs connected with Christmas liturgy was dividing the antiphon *Quem vidistis pastores* (or the carol *Quem pastores laudavere*) into separate parts of role-singers—the same habit can be found in Petrus Artomius' *Cantional* of 1601 and 1620, as well as in other sources.[6] The other melodies of Polish carols have often adopted original Latin

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[6] See the manuscript of 1586: 'Staniątki, Biblioteka Opactwa Sióstr Benedyktynek p.w. św. Wojciecha, MS St. 1'. For more detailed discussion see: Krystyna WILKOWSKA-CHOMIŃSKA, 'Muzyka kolęd polskich w okresie średniowiecza i renesansu' [Music of Polish Carols in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance], [in:] *Kolędy polskie*, 1966, vol. 2: 9–16; especially: 13–15.

melodies. But the European character of Polish carols from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries would be even more evident if we examined the texts. The majority of them do not go beyond the message of the Gospel. Thus, the main characteristics to be found in early carols include angels, joy and singing: the joy of the shepherds and of all the mankind, adoration of Magi and other witnesses, a thankful song and prayer, proclamation of peace in the world etc. The typical feature of those texts is, however, describing the overwhelming enjoyment without deliberation, without defining any details of the Holy Night, and without any deeper thoughts on the Christmas miracle. One can define it as the use of dogma of happiness, an element of religious belief—not a real human feeling. See, for example:

> Radość niewymowna
> Dzisiejszy dzień nam zjawiona, halleluja,
> Od Boga światłości,
> Szczerej swej miłości.
> Zesłał Pan Syna swego
> Ojcom ślubionego.   (KP IV/3)

> Indescribable joy
> This day revealed, alleluia,/ Today has been brought to us, hallelujah,
> From the Light of God,
> Out of his truthful love.
> The Lord has sent His Son
> Promised to the fathers.   (translation WM)

In in the text of another carol one can find the reminiscence of psalms:

> Niech brzmią bębny i organy, także i cymbały,
> Zaśpiewajcie wesoło, grajcie w cytary   (*Zaśpiewajcie wszyscy starzy…* Ch 43[7])

> Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.
> Blow the trumpet at the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day
> (Psalm 81, verses 2-3; *Webster Bible*)

If we compared Polish Christmas carols with similar songs from other countries the numerous similarities would easily be found. So we can recapitu-

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[7] See: Barbara Krzyżaniak (ed.), *Kantyczki karmelitańskie. Rękopis z XVIII w.* [Carmelite Canticles. Manuscript from the 18th Century], Kraków 1980: 38. All quotations from this source will be located with *siglum* "Ch" followed by the appropriate number of a song i.e. "Ch 134" means "song number 134".

late that while the official royal politics were concentrated on Sarmatisation of the nation, music in the Polish kingdom remained "officially" European—non-national.

Only the last decades of the sixteenth and the first decades of the seventeenth centuries brought diverse examples of songs applying to the Sarmatian ideology. Instances of this process of "Sarmatisation" and Polonisation of songs are to be found not only in songs alluding to history, but also in religious songs, especially in Christmas carols. The most obvious adjustments in music required changes within the texts. Shepherds were not "just shepherds" anymore, they received traditional Polish names: Kuba, Bartek, Staszek etc. All actors of Bethlehem's performance underwent the "local rendering"—the characters went or turned back from meadows or from a barn, they danced and jumped according to the local fashion, they used local instruments, like "dudy" (bagpipes), the fiddle and drums (instead of the psalmist's harp or lyre) and, last but not least, the weather and the whole countryside were typical of central Europe. The process of Sarmatisation of the church carol also involved the saints visiting Christ in his cradle behaving like vulgar vagrants, dancing, falling over and losing the attributes of their holiness. The anonymous author omitted the word "saint" to make the residents of Heaven seem more fraternised:

Już i skrzydła połamali
kiedy z radością latali.
Michał między trzodę
zleciawszy na grudę
w bok się ubił, skrzydło zgubił.

Even their wings they got broken
As they were happily flying,
Michael fell through the flock
onto the frozen ground,
he hurt his back and lost his wing.

Gabriel, kiedy zwiastował
Boga, także przylatował,
natrafił na dudy,
zbił biodra i udy
i szwankował, nadchromował.

While he was announcing God,
Gabriel was also passing by
yet, he hit a bag of pipes,
hurt his huckle and thighs
all unwell was harmed and limping..

Rafał, który leczył oczy
Tobiasza, gdy przyskoczy,
zbił olejek drogi
o baranie rogi,
gdy do trzody zleciał wprzody.

Raphael, who was the eye doctor
of Tobias, as he jumped,
broke the precious oil
against the horns of ram
when he first fell into a flock.

(*Kantyká* Ch 229, translation WM)

But the most striking changes appeared in the musical layer. In the sixteenth-century cantionals (collections of songs) one can very often come across the remark "to the tune of such and such song". Numerous songs employ the melody of *Dies est laetitiae* or *Vom Himmel hoch* for quite new texts. There was, however, a prevailing rule to use the sacred melodies for religious songs. In the seventeenth century and later such limitations did not exist. A very interesting document of Carmelite origin(carols to be performed within the monastery, written partly before 1721, with the repertoire of the turn of the 18th century century), referred to as 'Chybiński's manuscript'[8], provides many examples of secular melodies used for church songs. At Ch 134 (*Mili pastuszkowie* [*Deer Shepherds*]) there is a remark "biegła liszka" ("a fox was running") which is surely an incipit of a popular (maybe hunting) song. The evidence of setting the melody with an inappropriate text there are numerous trans-accentuations (marked with ×).

Example 4

The other song in the same collection (Ch 161 *Swarzyłam się z pastuchem* [*I Had a Brawl with a Herdsman*]) is entitled directly *Makowski's dance* and indeed it displays some typical elements of mazurka—it is a fine "kujawiak", belonging to mazurka-dance family. To avoid an overstatement that there are only singular examples of dance-like patterns in carol-songs after 1600 I have checked the time signatures of songs between and after 1600. The table below shows the results:
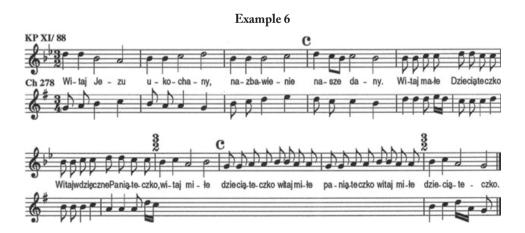
Time signatures in Polish carol songs	regular meter	triple meter	free meter
Songs before 1600	40%	28%	31%
Songs after 1600	33%	66%	1%

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[8] See edition of this manuscript by B. Krzyżaniak (ed.) (1980); as well as another publication—B. Krzyżaniak *Kantyczki z rękopisów karmelitańskich* [Canticles from the Carmelite manuscripts], Kraków, PWM 1977—the detailed description and discussion of the source.

As we can see, the "plainchant" free meter disappeared from musical practice after 1600. The considerable increase in triple meter examples is caused by the application of dance-like patterns (mostly triple), typical of Polish national dances. This leads to a reversal of proportions after 1600, because within the group with regular time signature we can easily find secular dances used as music for Christmas songs. See, for example, Ch 269 (*Witaj Jezu kochany* [*Welcome Beloved Jesus*]) below. It is a regular polka with typical repetitions of single measures inside the stanza (measures 6-7).

Example 5

In particular cases the same text and basically the same melody could receive the new rhythmic version like in *Witaj Jezu ukochany na zbawienie nasze dany* [*Welcome Beloved Jesus, Sent to Save Our Souls*]. This song survived both in the Renaissance version with mixed time measures (transcribed as **c** and $\frac{3}{2}$) and in a baroque style with $\frac{3}{4}$ time measure and characteristic mazurka-like rhythmic pattern.

Example 6

Special attention should be paid to a very unique publication by Jan Żabczyc entitled *Symfonie Anielskie* [*Angelic Symphonies*], Krakow 1630. In the introduction he explained that:

> …iż dla krótkości czasu i defektu pewnego w typografijej nie włożono noty każdej symfonijej należącej, przeto niż wygotowano będzie śpiewanie przystojne, podkładam noty tańców zwyczajnych w Polszcze.

> …because of the rush during publishing and because of the defect of typographic system we did not attach the music to each symphony; therefore, until the appropriate publication is ready, I enclose the sheet music with dances popular in Poland.

Careful examination of the collection[9] shows that, clearly, there was no "defect of the typographic system", yet, a fully informed decision was made to popularise texts using well-known melodies. Some of these songs were quite inappropriate and obscene in their character and this, most likely, inspired the excuse of the trickery. In spite of that fact Żabczyc had a fantastic idea because some of his songs are still popular in Poland today (*Przybieżeli do Betlejem, Na onej górze, A wczora z wieczora* [*The shepherds have come to Bethlehem*, *On that mountain*, *And yesterday evening*]).

Next to the carols there was another group of Christmas repertoire in the Sarmatian national style, that is, semi-professional pastorellas. What is more, even professional composers, while writing non-liturgical compositions intended for the Christmas season, employed a selection of stylistic ploys including archaisation of music and bringing elements of folklore. This can be confirmed indirectly by the formation of a peculiar Sarmatian musical style at the turn of the seventeenth century, This, however, may become the topic of another study.

Text revised by Agnieszka Gaj

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[9] The basic analysis by Julian Krzyżanowski in *Paralele: studia porównawcze z pogranicza literatury i folkloru* [Parallels: Comparative Study Performed from the Perspective of Literature and Ethnology], *U kolebki pastorałek* [From the Cradle of Christmas Carols], second edition extended and revised, Warszawa 1977: 320-327; quotation: 321. For the latest analyses see, for example, Bożena Czernek, 'U źródeł rodzimej kolędy polskiej (Jan Żabczyc i jego „Symfonie anielskie")' [The Origins of the Native Polish Carols (Jan Żabczyc and his 'Angelic Symphonies'), *Kieleckie Studia Filologiczne*, No. 1, 1994: 17–31; Cecylia Galilej, 'Stylizacja ludowa w XVII-wiecznych pastorałkach Jana Żabczyca (na materiale „Symfonij anielskich")' [Folk Stylisation in the 17th Century Carol Songs by Jan Żabczyc (Based on the Material of 'Angelic Symphonies')], *Facta Simonidis. Zeszyty Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej w Zamościu*, Zamość 2008: 285–301.

Abstract

The Sarmatian ideology appears in 15th c. Polish political thought as a means of ideologically linking together a multi-ethnic state. The creation of the category—superordinate with respect to ethnic-national connotations—of the Sarmata (who could be a Pole, Ruthenian or Lithuanian, as well as a Pomeranian or Silesian—here we are speaking of ethnic nationality, not of regionalism) aimed to assemble all persons of noble birth around the person of the king, as well as to politically unify the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, music surviving from the Jagiellonian era alludes in decidedly greater measure to pan-European models. Only the last decades of the 16th and the first decades of the 17th cc., bring diverse examples of songs appealing to the Sarmatian ideology. Instances of this—Sarmatization and Polonization of songs are to be found in not only historic, but also religious songs—especially Christmas carols. What is more, even professional composers, in writing non-liturgical compositions intended for the Christmas season, use a stylistic staffage encompassing elements of archaization and folklorization of music. This is confirmed indirectly by the formation, at the turn of the 16th and the 17th cc., of a peculiar Sarmatian musical style.

Keywords: Christmas carol, Sarmatian ideology, nationalization of culture.