

Anna Jabłońska*

Characters Invoked in Old Polish Literature (Selected Examples)

Postaci przywoływane w piśmiennictwie staropolskim (wybrane przykłady)

Abstract: A rich and varied collection of historical sources comes from the Old Polish period. A few examples have been selected for the purposes of this article. They represent different epochs, genres (epigram, chronicle, diary) and authors: Mikołaj Rej, Maciej Strykowski, Teodor Billewicz and Teofila Morawska née Radziwiłł.

These sources contain a lexicon of characters, remembered, known and recalled. These characters come from the past and present, from Christianity, real and mythical antiquity, and Polish and foreign circles. They are saints, rulers, heroes, scholars, artists, authors' patrons and their ancestors, both domestic and foreign. They function primarily as role models, although some are also invoked as anti-role models. The selection and evaluation of the characters recalled depend primarily on the authors – their origin, education, environment, horizons and the purposes for which they created their works, and so on.

The characters referred to in Old Polish works constitute a very important element and reflect the atmosphere of the epochs in which they were created. They are also an extremely important fragment of tradition, existing values and interpretation of the past and social memory.

Key words: Mikołaj Rej, Maciej Strykowski, Teodor Billewicz, Teofila Morawska née Radziwiłł, Old Polish literature

* Anna Jabłońska (ORCID: 0000-0002-0111-7011) – a habilitated doctor, professor at the Institute of History of the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, contact: anna-jablonska@ujk.edu.pl.

Streszczenie: Z okresu staropolskiego pochodzi bogaty i zróżnicowany zbiór źródeł historycznych. Na potrzeby artykułu zostało wybranych kilka przykładów. Reprezentują one różne epoki, różne typy źródeł (epigramat, kronika, diariusz) oraz różnych autorów: Mikołaja Reja, Macieja Strykowskiego, Teodora Billewicza, Teofilę z Radziwiłłów Morawską.

Źródła te ukazują pewnego typu leksykon postaci – zapamiętanych, znanych i przypominanych. Postaci te pochodzą z przeszłości i teraźniejszości, z kręgu chrześcijaństwa, starożytności rzeczywistej i mitycznej, z kręgu polskiego i zagranicznego. Znaleźli się tu święci, panujący, bohaterowie, uczeni, artyści, mecenas autorów i ich przodkowie, swoi i obcy. Pełnią one przede wszystkim funkcję wzorców, choć niektórzy są przywoływani także jako antywzorce. Dobór i ocena przypominanych postaci zależy przede wszystkim od autora – jego pochodzenia, wykształcenia, środowiska, horyzontów, celu tworzenia dzieła, itd.

Postaci przywoływane w dziełach staropolskich stanowią bardzo ważny element tychże oraz świadectwo charakteru epoki. To także niezwykle istotny fragment tradycji, wymaganego zestawu wartości, interpretacji przeszłości i pamięci społecznej.

Słowa kluczowe: Mikołaj Rej, Maciej Strykowski, Teodor Billewicz, Teofila z Radziwiłłów Morawska, staropolskie piśmiennictwo.

Old Polish literature is an extremely extensive collection of literary works and so only a few examples are discussed in this article. They represent the various eras that make up the Old Polish period, including the Renaissance, the Baroque and the Enlightenment, as well as various genres and artists. As a historian dealing with this period, as well as with social history and cultural history, I want to show the memory and knowledge about the characters functioning in the social space of authors representing various circles and literary styles, as well as the mechanisms that made them refer to specific figures and events. The aim of this article is to create the widest possible panorama of the authors' contemporaries and those living in the past, cited in the literature, as well as showing which of them were treated as role models and which the opposite, and what features, circumstances and events were emphasised at that time. I attempt to reconstruct the understanding of the world in the period when an individual played an important role and stories about specific persons were among the most important elements of understanding the past and present, contained didactic messages and were used to create myths, stereotypes and ethical principles in society.

The core issue is who the authors were and how they perceived the world. The first is Mikołaj Rej from Nagłowice, one of the most famous figures in Pol-

ish literature. Born in 1505 in Żurawno, he attended several schools, but with little success. He acquired the necessary skills (including knowledge of Latin) when sent to the court of Andrzej Tęczyński. He was an intelligent and brilliant self-taught man, the life and soul of noble and royal court society, without which he could not live. He was favoured by the Polish king Sigismund the Old and great lords. 'Żadnego sejm, zjazdu, ani żadnej koronnej sprawy nie zamieszkał' [He did not omit any sejm meeting, congress, or any major matter].¹ He was also successful in music. He lived the life of a Renaissance nobleman – he started a family, increased his fortune by all means and praised the good life. He first converted to Lutheranism and then to Calvinism. He pretended to be 'God's simpleton'. During his lifetime he was already famous as 'vates Sarmaticus', and the document in which the king gave him the village of Temerowce, reads that it was for 'Nicolao Rey, vati Polono et Rymarzowi'.² He left behind a significantly enlarged fortune and a literary legacy that places him in the canon of the greatest authors of Polish literature.³

One of his works is entitled Żwierzyniec w którym rozmaitych stanów ludzi, zwirząt i ptaków, kstałty, przypadki i obyczaje są właśnie opisane [The Bestiary in Which Shapes, Cases and Customs of Various People, Animals and Birds Are Described] (1562)⁴ largely consists of a series of portraits written in the form of epigrams.⁵

The first part of *Żwierzyniec* has a very symptomatic title: *A tu już się poczynają sprawy i postępki pamięci godne onych królów i innych stanów sławnych,*

- 1 A. Trzeciecki [?], *Żywot i sprawy pościwego ślachcica polskiego Mikołaja Reja [...]*, in: M. Rej, *Wybór pism*, oprac. J. Ślaski, Warszawa 1979, p. 342.
- 2 Z. Nowak, „Vates Polonus alias Rymarz” – Mikołaj Rej, in: *Pisarze staropolscy. Sylwetki*, Vol. 1, (ed.) S. Grzeszczuk, Warszawa 1991, p. 474.
- 3 A. Brückner, *Mikołaj Rej. Studium krytyczne*, Kraków 1905; M. Garbaczowa, *Portret osobowy i literacki Mikołaja Reja*, in: *Mikołaj Rej z Nagłowic. Sylwetka – twórczość – epoka*, (ed.) M. Garbaczowa, Kielce 1997, p. 49–57; *Mikołaj Rej z Nagłowic. W pięćsetną rocznicę urodzin*, red. W. Kowalski, Kielce 2005; Z. Nowak, „Vates Polonus”, pp. 474–547; A. Trzeciecki [?], *Żywot i sprawy*.
- 4 *Żwierzyniec w którym rozmaitych stanów ludzi, zwirząt i ptaków, kstałty, przypadki i obyczaje są właśnie wypisane*, (ed.) W. Bruchnalski, Kraków 1895.
- 5 For more details about this work, see: J. Krzyżanowski, *Żwierzyniec, w którym rozmaitych stanów ludzi, zwirząt i ptaków, kstałty, przypadki i obyczaje są właśnie wypisane*, in: *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, (eds.) J. Krzyżanowski, C. at al., Vol. 2, Warszawa 1985, p. 693; Z. Nowak, „Vates Polonus”, pp. 519–524.

tak pogańskich, jako i krześcijańskich, z którychby właśnie każdemu poczciwemu stanowi przystało dobre przykłady ku swym postępkom brać [And here begin the memorable matters and actions of kings and other famous estates of the realm, both pagan and Christian, that should constitute good examples for every estate to follow]. It contains 236 apophthegmata devoted to over 160 figures derived largely from antiquity.⁶ Each one is assigned specific features of role models, but not only these. The following associations are therefore made: Lyncurgus – law; Alexander the Great – fame, good deeds, freedom, a solid and honourable heart, faith, good will; Alcibiades – respect; Antiochus – truth; Aurelius – virtue; August – mercy; Tatar khans – a community, vigilance, the rule: do not trust your enemies; Tiberius – justice; Julius Caesar – a good heart; Agis – boldness; Lysimachus – bravery; Hannibal – exercise; women (for example, Fredegund, Judith, Artemisia – the Carian queen) – steadfastness, bravery, good ideas, fame, honour, virtue, devotion to their own people; King Garcia of Navarre – the cruelty of a tyrant; Julian the Apostate – contempt for truth; and so on.

The most common, exemplary features are: fame, virtue, law, justice, steadiness (including a steady and good heart), exercise, faithfulness, mercy, love, truth, consent and patience. On the other hand, betrayal, greed, pride and susceptibility to flattery are seen as negative traits. Thus, these features form the ancient archetypes of the ruler and outstanding or distinguished people, and constitute the ideal of the Old Polish virtues that are characteristic of decent people and wise, just and law-abiding rulers. This can also be seen later in Rej's work.

The second chapter of this work is devoted to the estates of the realm and houses of the 'noble Polish nation'. It begins with the description of an undoubted role model, built on the principles preached by Erasmus of Rotterdam, Sigismund the Old, the king of Poland from the Jagiellonian dynasty (1467–1548), who is depicted as 'noble and famous' and compared to Jupiter. He is characterised as famous, virtuous, righteous, just, constant (he had a steady and good heart), faithful, merciful, patient and loving truth, peace and patience. This righteous ruler of the golden age primarily cared for

6 It is a modification of the Latin collections by Erasmus of Rotterdam, among other authors.

his subjects. Such honour, reason and virtue are what befits a king. Sigismund Augustus (1520–1572) is characterised as a good sovereign, who, however, lacked the features of other rulers, such as Scipio's diligence and Alexander's assiduity and ability to give good advice. Among the women of the Jagiellonian royal family, Bona Sforza, the wife of Sigismund the Old, is mentioned. Her origin and reason are recognised, but the author typically concludes that 'lecz, co nazbyt, szkodzi' [she does much harm].⁷

The epigrams contained in *Żwierzyniec* also show a group of senators and great noble families. Among them are: Stanisław Tęczyński, described as anger with reason; Stanisław Odrowąż, who most cherished fame, which he 'z poczciwością najwięcej pilnował' [decently guarded the most]; Jan of Tarnów, compared to Hercules for his bravery; Jan Krotowski, a worthy representative of a noble family because he combined customs with attention, as well as having reason and beauty; and the Archbishop of Lviv, Paweł Tarło, and his brothers who always showed noble constancy, without the courting and falsehoods so typical of others.⁸ In the case of this group of people, the family, ancestors, brothers and other relatives were also important, and sometimes they worked to create their image and appreciation of others for several generations. On the other hand, Rej unfavourably mentions the archbishop of Gniezno and the bishop of Cracow, Piotr Gamrat, whom he cites in the meaningful phrase 'też nas wszyscy postronni polską zowią świnią' [all bystanders also call me a Polish pig].⁹

Thus, in his work, Rej portrays a certain type of man, defined by a set of desirable virtues (reason, steadiness, bravery, truth, responsibility, justice, customs, beauty, and so on) and undesirable vices (such as falsehood, flattery, unfounded

7 M. Rej, *Żwierzyniec*, pp. 109–110.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 111–114, 121, 127.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 43. Piotr Gamrat was a very ambitious clergyman, who climbed the career ladder in the Polish Church and reached the highest position. He was very active, reformed the Church's structure and developed the church life. He was also a patron, a man of culture, who belonged to the elite. At the same time, he led a very secular and licentious lifestyle. For more detail, see: K. Hartleb, 'Piotr Gamrat', in: *Polski słownik biograficzny*, Vol. 7, (eds) W. Konopczyński et al., Kraków 1948–1958, pp. 264–266; J. Korytkowski, *Arcybiskupi gnieźnieńscy, prymasowie i metropolici polscy od roku 1000 aż do roku 1821*, Vol. 3, Poznań 1889, pp. 81–134.

pride, lack of steadiness), in line with Old Polish virtues. It is the Renaissance ideal of the ruler, the power elite, the citizen, but it also applies to the average person. It is only a pity that in the twenty-first century, hardly anyone wants to be such a person – decent and respectable.

Another author, Maciej Strykowski, was born in Stryków near Łódź in around 1547, probably to a court janitor. He was educated in nearby Brzeziny. He started his career at the courts of local nobles and then moved to Lithuania, where first he became a soldier, then he joined the Chodkiewicz family, took part in the legation to Turkey (1574) and, finally, took advantage of the patronage of the Duke of Słuck, Jerzy III Olelkowicz, under which he created the work described. After the duke's death (1578), he moved to the Samogitian bishop Melchior Giedroyc, thanks to whom he became a canon in Jurbork, which probably ensured his financial security. He was already known as a poet, painter and historian. His songs were sung by soldiers. He was the author of various works published at that time, including *Opis Sarmacji* [Description of Sarmatia], famous in Europe and seized by his commander, Gwagin. During his trip to Turkey, Strykowski worked as a cartoonist, a secretary and was supposed to collect information. Since his youth as a soldier, this man of many talents was interested in various sources concerning the past. He died before 1593 as an independent person, surrounded by a circle of acquaintances and friends, one of whom was Andrzej Trzeciecki.¹⁰

Today, *Description of Sarmatia* by Maciej Strykowski belongs in the field of history. For us it is a source, yet it would have been a historiography in the author's time. From the Middle Ages, history was understood as the personalistic, event-related, political and militaristic story of the past. Thus, history was viewed through the prism of individuals, the outstanding ones of course, primarily belonging to the group of to the group of ruling laity and clergy, military leaders and heroes. The characters were naturally perceived through events, pri-

10 J. Bardach, *Mikołaj Strykowski i jego twórczość w świetle najnowszych badań*, in: *Studia z ustroju i prawa Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego (XIV–XVII w.)*, Białystok 1970; M. Karpluk, *Maciej Strykowski i jego dzieło*, in: M. Strykowski, *O początkach, wywodach, dzielnościach, sprawach rycerskich i domowych sławnego narodu litewskiego, żemojdzkiego i ruskiego, przedtym nigdy od żadnego ani kuszone, ani opisane, z natchnienia Bożego a uprzejmie pilnego doświadczenia*, (ed.) Julia Radziszewska, Warszawa 1978, pp. 5–29.

marily those related to war, military advantages testifying to their glory, and politics. Strykowski's work and perception of the world and the past obviously fits in with that trend. This historical perspective was changed for good by the twentieth-century Annales School, which emphasised the process, group and aspects such as society, economy, culture and the so-called long duration.¹¹

Strykowski's work entitled *O początkach, wywodach, dzielnościach, sprawach rycerskich i domowych sławnego narodu litewskiego, żemojdzkiego i ruskiego, przedtym nigdy od żadnego ani kuszone, ani opisane, z natchnienia Bożego a uprzemie pilnego doświadczenia* [On the Beginnings, Accounts, Virtues, Marital and Domestic Affairs of the Famed Nations of Lithuania, Samogitia, Ruthenia; Never Before Touched or Described by Anyone, Put Down out of God's Inspiration and Own Experience] is a chronicle written in verse and prose, although it was supposed to be more of a literary work. From the point of view of the methodology of history, a chronicle is a descriptive, historiographic source that combines narration with a chronology and draws conclusions from a specific sequence of events, creating a vision of history according to the author's principles.¹² This one was based primarily on individuals' biographies. It should also be remembered that the author's career path and patronage played a very important role, shaping the purpose and direction of his chronicle (the subject, interpretation, praise of the patron).

Strykowski's work is actually a series of stories about individual people: those ruling in Lithuania and Poland, neighbours – allies and enemies (Teutonic Knights, Polovtsians, Tatars, internal opponents), famous families and ancestors of his patron. This determines a specific point of view, selected people, method of assessment and context. The way they are depicted is to show the glory of the individuals and their realm, to describe their greatness,

11 A. F. Grabski, *Dzieje historiografii*, Poznań 2003; *idem*, *Zarys historii historiografii polskiej*, Poznań 2000; On understanding history and creating a narrative about it, see, e.g.: J. Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej*, Warszawa 1996; *idem*, *Wprowadzenie do historii*, Poznań 2009.

12 For detailed information on the types and division of historical sources, see: M. Pawlak, J. Serczyk, *Podstawy badań historycznych. Skrypt dla studentów I roku historii*, Bydgoszcz 1994, pp. 21–25; A. Swieżawski, *Warsztat naukowy historyka. Wstęp do badań historycznych*, 3rd edition extended and supplemented, Częstochowa 2001, pp. 128–135. The work also refers to the chronicle and diary.

conquests, and to justify them. It is based on the 'we – they' opposition. They are also characterised by certain features which are in contrast to ours. Of course, there are also certain topoi, myths and stereotypes.

The invoked figures and their deeds are treated as role models, as shown in the following telling examples:

Obaczysz tu, Jaśnie Oświecone a Miłościwe Książę, wszyscy książęta narodu waszego przesławnego, ony, mówię, książęta, którzy nie jako pogańscy, ale jako najniezwycięższy i najwaleczniejszy wodzowie i rozmnożycielowie wielkiego tego Księstwa Litewskiego dokazywali, którzy dzielnościami zacnymi w sławie i tytule z nasławniejszymi monarchiami greckimi i rzymskimi porównywali. [...] historia uczy każdego senatora jakoby mógł najlepiej radzić w Rzeczypospolitej, prawa i ustawy starodawne, przodków zeszytych obyczaje, postęпки i porady ich z ksiąg historyków rozmaitych wybierając. [...] Taż historia hetmana i wodza wojsk, przeszłych rzeczy sławnych, w spamiętaniu i rozmaitych przykładów rycerskich rozbiernaniu do stoczenia bitwy wspomaga i śmielszym czyni, i naucza, jak prześpiegować nieprzyjacielskie postęпки, jak ufy [chorągwie – oddziały żołnierzy EK] szykować, wywodzić i wwozić. Jak żołnierów rozterki uśmierzać, jak gdzie obóz stanowić, jak fortele, którymi bywa najczęściej nieprzyjaciel działyany i zwyciężony, przemyślać, jak rycerstwo bojaźliwe posilać, jak ich w sprawie zatrzymać, jak do boju zapalać. I wszelkich inszych postępków wojennych hetmanowie i rotmistrzowie z krojnik i historia starodawnych snadnie się nauczyć mogą. [...] A co więtsza, historyje ludzi od szkaradnych i sprośnych uczynków do cnotliwych spraw odzywają, gdy niewymowną chęcią, chwałą i miłością w nieśmiertelności ku dzielnościam uczciwym mężów zapala [ją], spodziewając się tego, iż jeśli będzie dobrze a dzielnie poczynął, tak też o nim krojniki potomkom świadczyć będą (author's emphasis)¹³

- 13 'You will see here, Your Illuminated and Most Loving Duke, all the princes of your glorious nation, them, I say, princes, who acted, not as pagan, but as the most invincible and bravest leaders and multipliers of this great Lithuanian Duchy, and whose famous bravery and titles were compared the Greek and Roman ones. ... history teaches each senator that he could best govern the Commonwealth by selecting ancient laws and statutes, ancestors' customs, deeds and advice from the books of various historians.... This story of the hetman and the commander of the army, past famous things, as well as recalling various knightly examples, are required for battle as they support and make one bolder, and teach how to spy on enemy deeds, and how to prepare and lead troops. How to ease the dilemmas of knights, how to set up a camp, how to make strat-

The importance of the characters in Strykowski's work is evidenced by numerous examples:

Ukaże się... Mendog król litewski, ..., który litewskie państwo wasze od trybutu ruskiego i niewoli hardych Krzyżaków pruskich dochcipnym męstwem wyswobodził i wojska ich często porażał... Obaczysz... Władysława, który był strachem Turkom i od których potym w rychle był u Warny zabit..., Zygmunt pierwszy i Zygmunt August, z niego urodzony, królowie prawdziwej pobożności i świętego nabożeństwa, miłośnicy szczerzy, a Rzeczypospolitej rozmnożycielowi potężni... Najdziesz w domu własnym przykłady cnót rozmaitych... litewskie mocne Herkulesy, przeważne, dzielne Hektory, śmiałe Achillesy i stałe Epaminondy, Agezylausy przemysłne, mężne Anibale i fortelem chytne Ulissesy. Będziesz też miał przed oczyma książąt litewskich w tejże familiej swojej, sprawiedliwe Arystydesy i Trajany roztropne, i mądre Temistoklesy, i inszych tym podobnych wiele nasławniejszych, mężnych książąt, których sprawy, gdy inszy czytają, przykładów cnót s nich się uczą...¹⁴

The specificity of this type of work is also important as they were expected to explain the genesis and course of events. Their authors were supposed

agem, which are most often used to surprise and defeat the enemy, how to embolden timid knights, how to stop them and how to ignite them to fight. And all other war deeds can be easily learned by hetmans and captains from old chronicles and history books... And what is more, the stories divert honest men from hideous and dirty deeds to virtuous matters, igniting in them unspeakable willingness, glory and love in immortality and courage, ensuring that, if they act well and bravely, the descendants will also testify about this [author's emphasis].¹⁴ M. Strykowski, *O początkach*, p. 35, 39.

- 14 'Mindaugas, the Lithuanian king... will appear, who liberated your country with his witty courage from the Ruthenian tribute and captivity of the tough Prussian Teutonic Knights and often defeated their army... You will see... Władysław, who evoked fear in the Turks and was soon killed by them in Varna..., Sigismund I and Sigismund Augustus, born of him, kings of true piety and holy devotion, sincere lovers and powerful multipliers of the Commonwealth... You will find in your own home examples of various virtues... strong Lithuanian Herculese, brave Hectors, bold Achilleses and permanent Epaminondas cunning Ageslauses, brave Anibals and smart Ulysseses. You will also see the Lithuanian princes in this family of yours, the righteous Aristideses and smart Trajans, the prudent and wise Themistocleses, and the like, many of the most famous, brave princes, whose matters are the examples of virtues for readers.' *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 37.

to show erudition and also knowledge of the facts, legends, myths and Latin-Christian traditions. Hence, Strykowski also describes biographies of people known from the Bible – beginning with Adam¹⁵; those who formed Roman history (such as Julius Caesar, Pompey, Brutus, Antony, Consul Quintus Lutatius Catulus and Aetius) and led various tribes with whom Rome fought (such as Attila).¹⁶ He also refers to the history of characters from Greek and Roman mythologies.¹⁷ There are also references to earlier authors dealing with similar topics and their lives (such as Kallimach, Marcin Kromer, Maciej Miechowita and Aeneasz Sylwiusz).¹⁸

Memoir sources, also appearing in the form of very popular diaries,¹⁹ are also characteristic of the subsequent Old Polish eras, that is, the Baroque and the Enlightenment.²⁰ They were often associated with travels, which comprised events that were different from everyday life and worth remembering. It is a very large section of literature (and sources) and, therefore, only selected examples are used in this article.

The first is *Diariusz podróży po Europie w latach 1677–1678* [The Diary of Journeys around Europe from 1677 to 1678] by Teodor Stefan Billewicz.²¹ The author was born to one of the wealthiest and most important families in Samogitia. The date of his birth is unknown, yet it probably happened early in the second half of the seventeenth century. The Billewicz family converted to Calvinism and then back to Catholicism. Teodor studied at the Philosophy

15 *Ibid.*, 44–45.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 65–67, 69–71.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 72, 74.

19 The most famous source of this type from that period is J. C. Pasek, *Pamiętniki*, (ed.) W. Czaplinski, Wrocław 1979.

20 H. Tadeusiewicz, *Pamiętnik*, in: *Literatura polska*, Vol. 2, p. 130. For a detailed description of modern Polish culture (Renaissance-Enlightenment), see: M. Bogucka, *Kultura. Naród. Trwanie. Dzieje kultury polskiej od zarania do 1989 roku*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 157–245; for a detailed description of the literature of that period, see: J. Ziomek, *Renesans*, Warszawa 1995; C. Hernas, *Barok*, Warszawa 2006; M. Klimowicz, *Oświecenie*, Warszawa 1998.

21 T. Billewicz, *Diariusz podróży po Europie w latach 1677–1678*, (ed.) M. Kunicki-Goldfinger, Warszawa 2004.

Department of the Vilnius Academy, where he held various positions. He also started accompanying his father in his political activities early on and began his career as a Samogitian stolnik.²² In 1677, he set off on a journey around Europe, partly accompanying Prince Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł and partly alone. During his peregrination, like other travellers, he paid attention to art, collections, peculiarities, curiosities, miracles, relics and certain social phenomena. Sometimes he did it very superficially, but at other times he adopted an individual approach. After his return, he married one of the 'best' ladies in Samogitia and continued his political and official career, increasing his importance and wealth. He died between 30 January 1723 and 10 September 1724. Teodor Billewicz was a typical representative of the wealthy nobility educated by the Jesuits.²³

No wonder then that the characters mentioned in his *Diary* and the knowledge about them are primarily related to Christianity. Billewicz very often shows his knowledge about saints, their lives and miracles in the context of the places associated with them. For example, he refers to Saint Antoni Padewski, Saint Francis, Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine of Bologna, whose body has been preserved in its entirety, even though more than 200 years had passed since her death. When she was carried on a bier to the grave, the nuns did not bow to the crucifix. In response, she stood up, sat down and remained in this position at the request of the sister superior.²⁴ Billewicz knew about martyrs, their martyrdom, the circumstances of their deaths, their relics and the places where they were stored (for example, Saint Justin, Saint Simon, Saint Dominic, Saint Agnes and 30 innocents murdered by Herod).²⁵

The author of *The Diary* also shows the opposite side – transgression of Christian standards, even blasphemy and punishment for them, which should be a warning. He tells the story of a certain Oswald Milsner: 'który chciał kapłańską hostią świętą komunikować przed lat 293. Gdy tedy stanął

22 Stolnik was a court office in Poland, Lithuania and Russia, responsible for serving the royal table, then an honorary court title and a district office [translator's note].

23 T. Billewicz, *Diariusz*, pp. 7–17; M. Brensztejn, *Teodor Billewicz*, in: PSB, Vol. 2, (eds) W. Konopczyński et al., Kraków 1936, pp. 101–102.

24 T. Billewicz, *Diariusz*, pp. 140, 146, 168, 177–178.

25 *Ibid.*, np. pp. 140, 146–147, 176, 178.

u ołtarza, wdziawszy czapkę, z nadętością serca chciał pożywać Ciała Pańskiego. Skoro wziął w usta hostię, zaraz go skała poczęła żywo pożerać' [wanted to eat the priestly holy host... When he stood at the altar, wearing his cap, he wanted to eat the Body of the Lord with an inflated heart. As soon as he put the host into his mouth, the rock on which he was standing began to devour him vigorously].²⁶ Grasping the altar did not help because it began to melt. He expressed regret and penance, and then the teeth marks were imprinted on the rock, the altar and the host.

Billewicz also had knowledge of figures important to Christians who had lived in antiquity. He recounts the story of St Peter's escape from Rome, during which he met Christ and said to him: 'Idę znowu do Rzymu, abym [...] drugi raz był ukrzyżowany.' [I am going back to Rome to be crucified again]²⁷ He knew the story of St Ambrose baptising St Augustine, 'napelnionego Duchem Świętym Doktora' [the Doctor filled with the Holy Spirit], as well as the genesis of the hymn known as the Ambrosian hymn. They were two famous saints from Milan. Moreover, in Ambrose's time, 'inter catholicos et arianos et Turcas de fide walna... był utarczka' [between Catholics and Arians and Turks... there was a skirmish over faith] – all the bodies were mixed up in one place, so, to provide the Christians with a dignified burial, St Ambrose asked God to intervene. The bodies of the Christians turned their faces to heaven, and those of the pagans to the earth, and the blood made a circle.²⁸

From the canon of ancient figures, Billewicz knew about Cicero (and the place where he had lived) and Nero – the cruel man who enjoyed the martyrdom and death of 'wszystkich pro fide et Christo' [all pro fide et Christo],²⁹ also in the mouths of lions. The Roman emperor is, of course, the anti-role model presented in the context of the martyrdom of Christians.

This anti-role model must have been well-rooted in the Polish cultural tradition since he is also described by Strykowski, who lived a hundred and several dozen years earlier. The author of *On the Beginnings...* much more emphasised:

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 266–267.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 230, 198.

... tyraństwo Nerona... Którego srogość była nad ine szkaradna/Bo matkę własną rozpruł, chcąc wiedzieć, leżał,/ Senekę, mistrza swego też w wannie zarzezał./ Rzym kazawszy zapalić, patrząc się dziwował,/ Przyjaciół, krewnych wybił, wymordował./Piotra też z Pawłem stracił, wiernych prześladowając,/ Rzym łamał, pałac wielki swój piękny budując.³⁰

Billewicz, a Polish nobleman who described the world from his perspective in the second half of the seventeenth century, gives a completely opposite example of heroism and patriotism. He refers to a 'szlachcic rzymski' [Roman nobleman], a young man, Curtius, who sacrificed his own life by throwing himself into the abyss, from which fire came, threatening the residents. Thus, he saved them because the fire disappeared after his sacrifice. Incidentally, this figure and his act must have been well embedded in the memory of the Polish elite for several centuries since it is recalled by Strykowski, who lived in the Renaissance, as well as by Teofila Konstancja Morawska née Radziwiłł.³¹

Billewicz also knew of Pope Sylvester I (314–335) and the legend about him. Namely, there was a dragon pit, and in it a dragon that devoured animals and pagans, but did not touch Christians. Finally, to save people, the holy pope went to the dragon with a crucifix, swore and locked up the beast so that it would not move until the Day of Judgement.³²

In his work, the Samogitian nobleman also describes great lay people of this world and their miracles. He mentions St Edward the Confessor, 'the king of England..., *primus confessor*', who was said to heal people by mere touch, and Louis IV, the Roman emperor of the German nation, 'rebeliami pewnych prowincji swoich stargany' [shattered by the rebels of certain provinces], whom 'cudownie anioł w osobie św. Benedykta' [an angel in the person of St Benedict] decided to miraculously console and gave him the statue of the Blessed Virgin

30 ... 'the tyranny of Nero... whose severity was exceptionally horrible/Because he had ripped his own mother's guts out... /he also slaughtered Seneca, his master, in the bathtub/Having ordered to burn down Rome, he looked surprised at it/He killed his friends and relatives/He also ordered killing Peter and Paul and persecuted the faithful/He broke down Rome, building his great palace'; M. Strykowski, *O początkach*, p. 64.

31 M. Strykowski, *O początkach*, p. 59; T. K. Morawska, *Diariusz podróży 1773–1774*, (ed.) B. Rok, Wrocław 2002, p. 160.

32 T. Billewicz, *Diariusz*, pp. 231–232.

Mary.³³ Billewicz also recalls a figure from the history of Poland – Henry III, who was notorious for one event, his escape from Poland to the French throne.³⁴

In the case of *Diary* by Teodor Billewicz, the dominant biographical field is Christianity and Catholicism, which are an important element of the mentality of a nobleman living in the Baroque period. They provide knowledge, patterns and anti-patterns that also play a didactic role.

My last chosen author is Teofila Konstancja Morawska née Radziwiłł, who represents the Enlightenment in which much changed, including the position of women.³⁵ Her work entitled *Diariusz podróży 1773–1774* [The Diary of Journeys 1773–1774]³⁶ is one of three diaries of this type written by women of that time. Teofila Konstancja was born in 1738 to the Radziwiłł family, one of the most powerful in Lithuania. Her father, Michał Kazimierz, known as ‘Rybeńka’, was a Lithuanian voivode and Grand Hetman of Lithuania. Her mother was Franciszka Urszula née Wiśniowiecka, and her older brother was Karol Stanisław, the well-known troublemaker, also called ‘Panie Kochanku’ (‘My Beloved Sir’). Little is known about Teofila Konstancja. She may have been an educated person, certainly intelligent, interested in the world, perceptive, probably energetic and decisive. She refused to get married to candidates chosen by her father and imposed by her brother. She had an affair with a certain Ignacy Morawski, a nobleman belonging to the Radziwiłłs’ dependents, which led to a mésalliance when she married him under unusual conditions. Thanks to this, her husband was promoted. Less than ten years later, Teofila went to meet her brother, who was in exile due to political turmoil in Poland. It was then that she made her great journey through Europe, trying to see, experience and learn as much as possible. Among all the works described in this article, her writings are the most individual and diverse.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 303, 134.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

35 For details on the situation of women over the centuries, see: e.g. M. Bogucka, *Gorsza pleć. Kobieta w dziejach Europy od antyku po wiek XXI*, Warszawa 2006, and in the modern era in Poland, see: Z. Kuchowicz, *Obyczaje staropolskie XVII–XVIII wieku*, Łódź 1985, pp. 144–180, 256–305; W. Łoziński, *Życie polskie w dawnych wiekach*, Kraków 1978, pp. 171–184.

36 T. K. Morawska, *Diariusz*.

Like Billewicz, Morawska perceives the world in the context of Christianity. She notes the presence of saints and their relics – including the bodies of Saint Catherine, located in Bologna, Saints Clare, Catherine of Siena, Barbara and Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, as well as Saints Anthony, Matthias and Luke.³⁷ When visiting Rome, the traveller writes about the life of Christ, when visiting Reims – about the Christianisation of the Franks carried out by Saint Remigius, and in Lyons, she describes the bridge built thanks to the alms of Innocent IV and the circumstances of the tragic death of the pope: ‘podczas procesji Bożego ciała w przytomności królewskiej murem obalonym zabitym został, na którym wielka liczba ludzi odprawianym przypatrywała się ceremoniom’ [during the procession of God’s Body, he was killed, in his royal consciousness, by a falling wall, on which a large number of people watched the ceremonies].³⁸ She also mentions Saint Ambrose and Saint Gervasius, who did not let the Emperor Theodosius into the church because he had ordered the slaughter of the population of Thessaloniki: ‘dzieciom nawet i żonom nie przepuściwszy’ [not even sparing children and wives].³⁹ Being a Catholic, Morawska writes about Martin Luther as a heretic, his ‘wicked’ writings, the Council of Trent, his death in Eisleben and his burial site in Wittenberg.

Morawska knew and appreciated people of science as well. In her diary, she mentions Nicolaus Copernicus, ‘ślawny astrolog [...], astronom, humanista, kanonik warmiński’ [the famous astrologer..., astronomer, humanist, canon of Warmia], and Pliny, whose curiosity with the erupting Vesuvius cost him his life.⁴⁰ Morawska also recognises famous artists: Michelangelo Buonarotti, Rafael Santi and Palladio.⁴¹

Morawska, of course, also knew of characters from ancient history: she recalls the story of Romulus and the fabulous tradition of founding Rome, the logistic merits of Appius Claudius (the Via Appia and Rome’s first aqueduct), the assassination of Julius Caesar by Brutus and others, the buildings of the emperors Antoninus, Trajan, Constantine, Vespasian and Septimius,

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 116, 134, 138, 141, 175.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 97, 154.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 113.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34, 184.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 148, 216–217.

the birthdays of Nero, Caracalla, Domitian and Agrippa, the martyred mother of Nero Agrippina, the chieftains Hannibal and Scipio Africanus, as well as Theodoric, the king of the Goths.⁴²

As befits the aristocracy, Morawska exhibits knowledge of the ruling families, including relatives of the Prussian king (including Zofia Dorota, Amelia) and the greats of this world (such as Cardinal de Rohan, the Bishop of Strasbourg and the great Almoner of France).⁴³

Morawska was also interested in the king of Poland, and later the prince of Lorraine, Stanisław Leszczyński (1677–1766), about whom she knew a lot.⁴⁴ She paid special attention to him. She describes Luneville, where which he lived after his final departure from Poland (1733), as a city and a beautiful residence with a garden. She also mentions the school of knights, books, the king's piety and churches in the provinces associated with him. She recounts the circumstances of his tragic death (his bathrobe caught alight from a fire which broke out) and the beautiful tombstone of the ruler of Lorraine and his wife, Katarzyna Opalińska. She considers him a wise man and a very good host. He was a role model for man and a ruler for her.⁴⁵

According to Morawska, the kings of Sardinia, Karol Emmanuel (1730–1773) and his son Victor Amadeus (1773–1796), were also role models. She believed that the former 'jest to monarcha i narodowi własnemu ukochany, i od obcych ulubiony. Rozum, sprawiedliwość i ludzkość zdają się tron jego otaczać' [is a monarch, beloved by his people and a favourite of strangers. Reason, justice and humanity seem to surround his throne]. He was also accessible to foreigners and 'do Polaków osobliwie skłonny' [peculiarly inclined towards Poles].⁴⁶

The Diary also clearly shows the author's emotional attitude to the figure and deeds of Joan of Arc. Morawska describes the heroine's tomb as fol-

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 97, 142, 157, 162, 169, 190, 193, 201.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41, 60.

44 The activity of Stanisław Leszczyński and his participation in the history of Poland are controversial and are assessed differently (e.g. J. Feldman, *Stanisław Leszczyński*, Kraków 2007; M. Forycki, *Stanisław Leszczyński – Sarmata i Europejczyk 1677–1766*, Poznań 2006).

45 T. Morawska, *Diariusz*, pp. 61–63.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

lows: 'Sława jej do dziś po całym kraju szeroko płynie' [Her fame flows widely throughout the country to this day], because only she, among the frightened French, resisted the cruel Englishmen with her arms and spirit: 'panna wyższym duchem ożywiona, z bronią i orężem udała się do wojska, czy jej odwaga była nadludzką, czy płeć sama rozegrzała wstydem mężczyzn, dosyć że Anglicy szpetnie zwyciężeni z hańbą powrócili nazad' [Animated by higher spirit, armed with weapons, the unmarried lady went to the army, whether her courage was superhuman, or her sex itself filled men with shame, but the Englishmen, badly defeated, returned with disgrace]. Morawska was visibly fascinated by Joan of Arc and emphasises how important righteous behaviour, bravery, regardless of estate, and duty were:

bronić kraju własnego białogłowom, które równie płcią drugą powinne ojczyźnie wszystko, ale jakież razem na wszystkich wstyd mężczyzn, których silniejszymi i właśnie zdrotnymi do boju utworzywszy natura męstwa ich jak prawa i powinności upominać się musi, a ci gnuśni, lękliwi, nieroztropnie w majątkach zakochani, próżnując, nie broniąc się [na] początku słabym, a potym najwięcej pragnąc, najmniej uczynić zdołają.⁴⁷

Morawska was proud of women who could be role models because of their characteristics and behaviour. This is also evidenced by the story of another resolute woman, living in Venice, where a nobleman Bajamonte Tiepolo, 'zebrawszy rozpustnych, łakomych i zysku potrzebujących ludzi, hersztem był buntu tego' [having gathered the dissolute, greedy and profit-making people, was the leader of this rebellion] in 1610. In response, the doge summoned virtuous citizens and there was a danger of mutual fights in St Mark's Square. Then, the woman, who was watching the events with curiosity, threw a heavy vessel from the high floor straight at the leader. 'Righteous fear and a bad omen filled the hearts of the unbelievers and a sudden flight from the city saved many lives

⁴⁷ The women, who owe everything to the homeland as much as the other sex, defend their country to the shame of all men, who are stronger and by nature more fit for battle, and their innate bravery makes them stand up for their rights and obligations, but those lazy, timid, idle and weak men do the least as they are carelessly in love with their property, do not first defend themselves and then desire the most. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

that deserved due punishment. The others were scattered, the guilty ones, for example, miserably perished and the city was saved.¹⁴⁸

In Teofila Morawska's notes, attention is drawn to the fact that in noting the presence of both saints and laity, she provides various, sometimes very substantive and detailed information about the people and places associated with them, not limited to the stories and curiosities heard from guides. In this, she resembles the authors who had a modern approach to knowledge about the visited world much later. Moreover, she was also able to express her own opinion.

In the case of travellers, the knowledge of characters and their fate comes from their circles, but also partly includes curiosities, rumours and 'news' occurring in connection with the visited places. One can also ask about the role of local guides and already existing written informational texts, *topoi*, motives and so on. However, for this kind of information to be more easily assimilated and remembered, it had to (or could) comply with the already shared knowledge. In any case, the authors pay attention to specific characters, compare them, sometimes provide detailed data, comment on them and show an emotional attitude.

The analysis of the aforementioned works makes it possible to create a certain lexicon of characters that, according to the authors living in the Old Polish era, were worth remembering. This lexicon includes representatives of very different groups: the creators and heroes of Christianity, saints and martyrs, as well as their opposite – Luther. It also contains secular and clerical rulers, figures from ancient history and mythology, figures who formed the past of the countries with which the authors were associated, as well as the greats of the authors' contemporary world – their patrons, rulers and, in the Enlightenment, artists and scientists as well. This lexicon was written by men and women. The characters that were remembered and recalled functioned primarily as role models and authorities. Some, such as Nero, however, were remembered as anti-role models. Sometimes it seems that certain characters and information about them were treated as a kind of curios-

48 'Bojaźń i tak zła wróżba słusznym postrachem opanowała serca bezbożnych, że w nagłej z miasta ucieczce uchowało wielu życia należnej kary warte. Reszta rozproszona została, winniejsi na przykład potomności sromotnie poginęli, miasto ubezpieczone'. *Ibid.*, pp. 205–206.

ity. The authors described their features and types of activity, including martyrdom, military deeds, the activity of patrons, as well as of Renaissance and Enlightenment rulers, Old Polish virtues, science, art, as well as the patriotism and courage of women.

The lexicon is the result of the authors functioning in specific cultural and social noble and magnate circles, governed by particular rules. On the one hand, this set of figures depicts the diversity of the Old Polish period including the Renaissance, the Baroque and the Enlightenment. On the other hand, it contains some unchanging features and references, cultural codes and symbols (such as the cruel tyrant Nero and Curtius who sacrificed his life to save others), which continue to be valid despite the passage of centuries and subsequent epochs.

Several factors influenced the perception of who was remembered, and how, over time and space. These were primarily the individual authors, their origin, education, living and creative environment, the intended purpose for which they wrote their works and the intended recipients of their works. Moreover, the form of communication was very important – in this case, an epigram, a chronicle and a diary. The general type of education, knowledge, culture and worldview in a given era were also extremely significant aspects. The political position of the authors' countries in a given period also played a certain role.

In the Old Polish era, knowledge of the culture proposed by the Renaissance and the Jesuits, i.e. Latin, humanistic, classical.⁴⁹ Therefore, part of it was also the compulsory knowledge of the following characters: leaders, heroes, authors of the ancient epoch; the saints of the Christian religion; figures from the history of Poland and other countries associated with it, as well as Western Europe, including antiquity, the Middle Ages, modern times and rulers, heroes and saints. They primarily served as the role models of heroic, religious and patriotic attitudes, but also as anti-role models.

The Polish elites, to which all the authors belonged, were expected to know the history of the state, its systems, laws, society and power. In addition

49 For details on education and upbringing in the Renaissance, the Baroque and the Enlightenment, see: S. Kot, *Historia wychowania*, Vol. 1: *Od starożytnej Grecji do połowy wieku XVIII*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 198–401; S. Litak, *Historia wychowania*, Vol. 1: *Do Wielkiej Rewolucji Francuskiej*, Kraków 2004, pp. 83–229.

to the canon of the past, they knew a lot about famous people of that time, representing power circles, famous families and all those who should be known. Thus, the knowledge of specific characters was supposed to constitute a kind of coded guidelines for judging what was good and right and what was not, and for determining proper conduct. It was part of the current tradition.

Conclusions resulting from the analysis of selected Old Polish texts confirm the statements of the history of biography, which dates back to antiquity. Its distinctive features were: a description of human life, moralising and didacticism, vivid stories, emotionalism, individualism, and also portray a hero as a reflection of a specific socio-political ideal, deliberate on the meaning of human existence and attempt to indicate the motives for their actions. A separate issue is the presence of women among the authors and the invoked heroes of the past and present, which was related to their position and social roles.⁵⁰

The biographies described and the way in which they were selected, interpreted and recalled are an extremely important element of the so-called social memory/social awareness/historical awareness. It is also a proof that this memory exists and a way to trace its mechanisms.⁵¹ The knowledge of specific characters and their history are fixed points on the map of Old Polish authors in their journeys through time and space.

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- 51 For more details on the phenomenon, see e.g.: M. Kula, *Krótki raport o użytkowaniu historii*, Warszawa 2004; *idem*, *Nośniki pamięci historycznej*, Warszawa 2002; *idem*, *Wybór tradycji*, Warszawa 2003; B. Szacka, *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit*, Warszawa 2006.

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