

Western Influences on Byelorussian Literature in the XVth and XVIth Centuries

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The beginning of the XVth century marked an intensification of cultural relations between Western Europe and Byelorussia. The immediate reason for this was the attempted union between Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the establishment of the Catholic Church in the latter country.

In 1385 the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Jahajla, was offered the Polish crown, together with the hand of the young queen Jadwiga. In return, he promised to incorporate the Grand Duchy in the Kingdom of Poland and to baptise the Lithuanians and Samogitians in the Catholic faith. The attempt to undermine the political independence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania met with a great deal of resistance and had to be abandoned. The establishment of the Catholic Church, on the other hand, was more successful.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a highly interesting political organism. From its very beginning in the XIIIth century it was a multinational state, the two largest ethnical groups in it being Lithuanians and Byelorussians. Of those two nations the Byelorussians were the more civilized. They were Christians, belonging to the Orthodox Church, having received baptism from Constantinople at the end of the Xth century. At the time of the formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, they had behind them three centuries of vigorous cultural development. The Lithuanians on the other hand were still pagans; writing in their own language was unknown to them. It was therefore natural that the Lithuanian nobles, including the Grand Dukes, should have tended to adopt Byelorussian language, culture and customs, many of them even becoming Christians. This process of "byelorussianisation" was hastened by frequent inter-marriages between the Byelorussian and Lithuanian noble families. By the middle of the XIVth century Byelorussian had become the official language of the Grand Duchy, and it was being used in the grand-ducal chancery, courts and in all official documents.

While the Lithuanians were thus gradually "byelorussianised" in the cultural sphere, the Byelorussians were undergoing a process of political "lithuanisation." Not unnaturally they considered the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as their own state, and, while remaining

ethnically Byelorussians, they were proud to call themselves Lithuanians¹.

The advent of the Catholic Church in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania concerned at first only the ethnical Lithuanians and Samogitians. However its influence soon began to be felt also among the Byelorussians, especially among the nobility in the circles near the Grand-ducal throne. By the middle of the XVth century, there was already in existence a small but influential group of Byelorussian Catholics.

Initially, the young Catholic Church in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had to depend largely on the support of the Polish Church. However, there was not much sympathy between the Byelorussians and Poles, and the formation of a native clergy rapidly became an urgent problem. It was largely for this purpose that young men were sent to study at the Western European universities. The Charles University in Prague was an obvious first choice, both because of its proximity and because of the cordial political relations existing between Bohemia and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Jadviga, wife of Jahajla, in 1397 even founded a "Lithuanian" college in the Bohemian capital and bought for that purpose the house known as *Jerusalem*². Unfortunately, very little is known of the role played by this establishment. It seems certain, however, that by the middle of the XVIth century there were at least a few dozen of students from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania who made their studies in Prague³. Among them the most illustrious one was Mathias de Vylna, future bishop of Vilnia (1423-1453), well known for his xenophobic and

1) "Byelorussian" is a comparatively recent term. Initially the Byelorussians called themselves "Ruthenians" (ruskia) and their language the "Ruthenian language" (ruski jazyk). From the XVth century onwards they tended more and more often to refer to themselves as "Lithuanians" (litviny) in much the same way as the English would call themselves British. Thus Francis Skaryna while student in Cracow in 1506 was described as "Franc, de Poloczko, Litphanus" (cf. J. Fijałek, *Uchrześcjanienie Litwy przez Polskę*; Polska i Litwa w stosunku dziejowym, Warszawa 1914, str. 159, Notes). The term "Byelorussian" was not generally accepted till the end of the XIXth century and even then it did not completely supersede the name "Lithuanian." In 1901 Maria Kosič, the first Byelorussian poetess, published an interesting ethnographical work under the title: "Lithuanian-Byelorussians of the Chernigov Province" (М. Косич, *Литвины — белоруссы Черниговской губернии*. Живая Старина, СПб. 1901). Even when Byelorussians called themselves Lithuanians, their language remained "Ruthenian." Attempts to call it "Lithuanian" at the beginning of the XVIIth century by certain writers, such as Laurenty Zizany, were not successful. In the XIXth century a certain confusion reigned among scholars with regard to the proper name of the Byelorussian language. Some called it "West Ruthenian" (or "West Russian"), others "Lithuano-Ruthenian"; others still referred to it as "Kryvian-Slavonic", from the name of the largest of the old Byelorussian tribes, the Krivichi. In the end the name "Byelorussian" has prevailed.

2) Cf. A. В. Флоровский, *Чехи и Восточные Славяне*, т. I, Прага 1935, стр. 339; J. Fijałek, *Uchrześcjanienie Litwy przez Polskę*. Polska i Litwa w stosunku dziejowym, Warszawa 1914, str. 122.

3) Cf. Флоровский, *op. cit.*, стр. 336-339; I. Дварчанш, *Беларусы на Пражскім Унівэрсытэце*. Запісы Беларускага Інстытуту Навукі і Мастацтва, т. 2, № 2, New York 1953, бб. 65-69.

particularly anti-Polish feelings. After the middle of the XVth century the number of students from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania fell rapidly, owing to the fact that Prague had become a hotbed of the Hussite heresy.

A second centre of study was Cracow University. Founded in 1374 by the Polish king Casimir, it was reestablished by Jahajla in 1401 as a full university with all faculties, including a faculty of theology. Although suspicious of any political ties with Poland, the noblemen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania recognized the importance of having a university so near their own home, and therefore many of them became benefactors of this new seat of learning⁴.

In the second half of the XVth century the orientation of students changed, and among them were no longer only the candidates for the ecclesiastical state. Moreover, Prague and Cracow were no longer the only places to which the young men from the Grand Duchy resorted in search of learning; many of them went to Italy, Germany and other countries. The most famous of these scholars was indubitably Francis Skaryna of Polack, Bachelor of Arts in Cracow in 1506, and Doctor of Medicine in Padua in 1512. There are reasons to believe that he also studied in Copenhagen. By the year 1517 he had settled in Prague, where he printed the first Byelorussian Bible, translated by himself. It is also probable that among the Byelorussian students abroad was a certain John Lettou, or John of Lithuania, who between 1480 and 1483 lived in London, where he established a printing press and printed a few books, mostly of a jurisprudential character⁵.

In the XVIth century there was already an established custom for many noble families to send their sons abroad, to study at foreign universities⁶.

Not all young men were academically inclined. Some of them went abroad to enter into service at the courts of foreign princes. This custom was particularly encouraged by Bona Sforza⁷, the Italian wife of the Grand Duke Sigismund (1506-1548), and it persisted long afterwards. Theodore Jeūlašeūski (1546-1604), a minor Byelorussian nobleman from Liachavicy near Navahradak, refers in his *Memoirs* to his son Joachim, who was in Italy in the service of the Duke of Mantua⁸. Jacobus Grasser, who in 1615 published in Basle a book entitled *On the customs of the Tartars, Lithuanians and Muscovites*

4) Cf. Fijałek, op. cit., str. 120-192.

5) Cf. Г. Піхура, *Ян з Лєтвы*. Божым Шляхам, № 3, Лёндан 1965, бб. 4-8.

6) For the list of young noblemen studying abroad, mostly in Protestant universities, in the 16th century see: S. Kot, *La Réforme dans la Grand Duché de Lithuanie*. Mélanges Henri Grégoire, Bruxelles 1953, pp. 240-244.

7) "Bona facilitated the voyages of the Lithuanian nobles to Italy, providing them with letters of recommendation to the Italian princes. We meet more and more often the Chadkievič, the Radziviłł and other Lithuanian nobles at the courts of Este in Ferrara, Gonzaga in Mantua etc." Cf. Wł Pocięcha, *Królowa Bona*, t. 4, Poznań 1958, str. 187.

8) Cf. *Дневник Новгородского подсудка Федора Евлашевского*, Киевская Страница, т. 14, № 1, Киев 1888, стр. 158.

by Michalon Lithuanus, noted in the dedication of his book to Prince Alexander Pronski, that the father of the latter "...spent abroad almost all the years of his youth and adolescence ... and when he reached a more mature age, he displayed his virtues at the court of the French king Charles IX, as if in the great theatre of the world."⁹

With this multiplication of contacts, there began to appear Byelorussian translations of Western religious and literary works. Among these the Byelorussian text of the Latin Mass is of considerable interest. The translation bears the title: *How the Mass to the Mother of God is said according to the Roman custom*. The parts said secretly by the priest are omitted, which seems to indicate that the translation was made for a layman who did not know Latin. It is interesting to note the attempts to make the language of the translation sound as near as possible to that of the Orthodox Slavonic liturgical texts. Thus the priest on several occasions is called "pope" and the server — "djak"; "amin" is frequently used instead of "amen" and so on. Sobolevski, who first published the text, thought that it belonged to the second half of the XVth century. He suggested that the translation was made not directly from Latin, but from an already existing Czech text of the Mass¹⁰.

Also to the same period belongs the Byelorussian text of the *Canticle of Canticles*, or rather of a work including the Canticle with commentaries to it. It begins thus:

"The voice of the soul, the bride, to her beloved bridegroom, Christ, crying out to Him from her immense love: Kiss me with the kiss of thy lips, for thy breast is better than wine... The voice of the soul to the assembly of saints: I am black, but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon..."¹¹

It is probable that this work was yet again the translation from a Czech original which has now been lost.

It is interesting to note that Sophie of Halšany, the fourth wife of Jahajla, ordered a Polish translation of the *Bible* to be made from the Czech in 1455. The work, known as the Bible of Queen Sophie, is incomplete, and one of the missing books is the Canticle of Canticles. It is not inconceivable that Sophie, who was a staunch Byelorussian, intended also to make translation of the Bible into her native language.

That the first Byelorussian translations of Western works were made from Czech was only to be expected in view of what has been said about Byelorussian-Czech cultural relations in the Middle Ages.

9) Cf. Michalonis Lithuani, *De moribus Tartarorum, Lithuanorum et Moschorum Fragmina X...* per I. Jac. Grasserum, C. P., ex manuscripto autentico edita. Basileae... MDCXV (Introduction).

10) А. И. Соболевский, *Старшие переводы русских католиков*. Сборник Отд. Русс. Яз. и Слов. Имп. Ак. Наук, т. 88, № 3, СПб. 1910, стр. 193-203.

11) П. В. Владимиров, *Доктор Франциск Скорина*. СПб. 1888, стр. 340.

However they were not limited to the liturgical and biblical texts, and among other Byelorussian translations of that early period must be counted such works as the *Visio Tundali* and the *Story of Sybill, the prophetess*. The country of origin of the *Visio Tundali*¹² was XIIth century Ireland, and the story concerns a brave, but wicked knight, Tundalus, who cared nothing for the salvation of his soul. Once, whilst carousing at the house of his friend, he fell asleep and remained in this state for three days. During this time his soul left his body and was taken by an angel on a visit of hell and purgatory. There is something almost Dantesque in the descriptions of the torments of the sinful souls:

"... They went further and there was complete darkness, except for the light shining forth from the angel. And they came to a horrible and very dark ditch, full of burning coals. Over the ditch there was an iron lid, even hotter than the coals, fifty feet thick. From the lid there emanated such an evil smell, that the soul would prefer to it any torments. Over the ditch sat many sinful souls. They were thrown on the cover where they were fried and melted, like bacon in a frying pan. What was still more terrible, they were strained through the cover, just like wax is strained through a piece of cloth. Then again they fell on the coals to suffer in the fire. Then the angel said: 'These are the tortures reserved for the parricides, fratricides and all kinds of murderers'..."¹³

When Tundalus awoke, he summoned to him a Frater Marcus and told him all he had seen in his vision. Frater Marcus duly wrote it all down in Latin.

The *Visio Tundali* enjoyed considerable popularity in many countries outside Ireland throughout the Middle Ages, especially when, in the middle of the XIIIth century, Vincent de Beauvais included it in his *Speculum Historiae*. It was translated into various languages, Czech being one of them, and it is from this Czech version, now lost, that the Byelorussian translation was made, probably in the second half of the XV century.

The *Story of Sybill the prophetess*¹⁴ belongs to the class of pseudo-prophetic works which were relatively widespread, both in the West

12) For extracts of the text and comments see: A. Brückner, *Visio Tundali in böhmischer und russischer Übersetzung*. Archiv für Slavische Philologie, Band. 13, Berlin 1890-91, S. 199-212.

Brückner writes *inter alia*: "Dass die Sprache sogenanntes weiss, oder litauisch-russisch ist, die Sprache des Skorina und seiner Zeitgenossen, bedarf keines besonderen Nachweisen." (Op. cit., S. 208).

The title of the Byelorussian work is: Починається книга о Таоудале рыцери.

13) This is a part of the passage in Middle-Byelorussian:

...отидоста немеюще жадное светлости нижили от ангела и придоша до долу прелишь грозного а велми темного, а тот бяше велми глубокии а полон горящего оугля а на том долоу покрывало железное тольстотою падесять локоть а то своєю горкостию примогаше. тоу бяше от того покрывала такін смрад, и што бяше душа терпела всех моук, премогал тот смрад ...

(cf. Brückner, op. cit., p. 203).

and in the East. In the Byelorussian version, Sybill is confused with the Queen of Sheba. According to the story, she was a prophetess and a "star-gazer" and was "beautiful and rich, but one of her feet was in the likeness of a goose's foot, and that was for her the cause of great embarrassment."¹⁵ Sybill heard about the wisdom of Solomon and decided to pay him a visit. Solomon received her with great honour, but refused to discourse with her on any subject before she partook of a meal with him. When they were walking to the place where the banquet was prepared for them, they had to pass over 'Adam's tree.' Sybill, "...after having inspected the tree, refused to cross it. And at the same time there happened a great miracle from God: her goose's foot was made whole. She was filled with joy, but the king who saw it all remained silent. He said nothing till the meal at the royal court was over. Only then did the king ask the Sybill: Tell me, Sybill, what was in your mind, when you refused to cross with me over that tree? And she answered: Know, O king, that from your stock a Child must be born of the Virgin, and He must die on that tree, and thus bring salvation to many people who will believe in Him and in His Virgin Mother..." Then, at the request of the king, Sybill went on to tell him about the advent of Christ, the fate of Jewish people, and finally about the appearance of Antichrist, the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. Among the signs of the end of the world, it is not difficult to discern the German peasant revolts, and the beginning of Reformation movement. Since similar prophesies were made post *factum*, it may be deduced that the story, or at least the latter part of it, was probably written in the first half of the XVIth century. Karski, who was the first to make a special study of the story and published its text, thought that the Byelorussian version was a translation from Serbian. Florovski however, after making a comparison with two similar — but not identical — Czech stories of the Sybill, came to the conclusion that the original of the Byelorussian tale was not a Serbian, but a Czech text, now lost¹⁶.

Of course, Czech was not the only language from which Byelorussian translations were made. Some of the works were translated directly from Latin. Among these must be numbered the life of Alexius, the man of God, taken from the *Legenda Aurea Jacobi de Voragine*. The Byelorussian text belongs to the second half of

14) The title of the story in Middle-Byelorussian is: Сказание о Сивилле Пророчици. For text and comments see: Е. Ф. Карский, *Западнорусское сказание о Сивилле пророчице по рукописи XVI в.* Варшавские Университетские Известия, Варшава 1898, № 2, стр. 1-32. Reprinted in: Е. Ф. Карский, *Труды по белорусскому и другим славянским языкам*, Москва 1962, стр. 316-339.

15) Here is the same passage in Middle-Byelorussian: ...и бяше красна а богата але едину ногу на подобенство гусину ногу мела, и за ту ся велми смущашеся ... (Карский, *Труды...*, стр. 317).

16) Флоровский, *op. cit.*, т. II, Прага 1945, стр. 31-35.

the XVth century¹⁷. The story of Alexius, a young Roman nobleman who, at the height of his earthly happiness, abandoned all and subsequently spent the rest of his life as a beggar, living, unrecognized by anybody, under the stairway in his father's house, became one of the most popular stories of all time among the ordinary Byelorussian people. It even found its way into folklore, giving rise to many spiritual folk songs¹⁸.

Another work translated from Latin was the "Tale of the Three Kings."¹⁹ The name of the original work is *Liber de gestis ac trina beatissimorum trium regum traslatione*, and its author was a German Carmelite friar, Johannes von Hildesheim (c. 1375). It is in the main the narrative of the lives of the three kings who, being led by the star, came to adore Christ, and of the subsequent history of their relics. Needless to say, it is completely apocryphal in character. According to the tale, the three kings came from a part of the world vaguely described as "India", which included such countries as Nubia and Tarsis. After adoring the newly-born Christ, they went back to their respective kingdoms. Later they were baptised by saint Thomas the Apostle, and even became archbishops. Their incorrupted bodies were acquired by Saint Helena at the time when she was searching for the Holy Cross, and the relics were taken to Constantinople. From thence they were translated to Milan, and found their final resting place in Cologne. The story ends with description of the customs of various peoples, which have a certain relationship with the cult of the three kings. On the customs and usages of the Greeks, the tale relates that: "...The Greek priests are married and have long hair and do not believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, but from the Father alone. They also do not believe in Purgatory, and in these points they differ from the Roman Church. When they wish to celebrate mass, they cut out a square host from the leavened bread for consecration, and put the host on a golden or silver plate, placing over it a star, like a bent frying pan; then, covering it all with a clean cloth, after the offertory they lift the plate with the host and the star and place it on their head and thus carry it through the church to the altar with incense and candles and great piety and reverence. At that moment all the people fall with

17) П. В. Владимиров, *Житие св. Алексея человека Вождия в западно-русском переводе конца XV века*. Журнал Министерства Народного Просвещения, Ч. 253, СПб. 1887, стр. 250-268; also: В. Перетц, *Повесть о трех королях в западнорусском переводе XV века*. СПб. 1903, стр. 108-111; А. Ф. Коршунаў, *Хрэстаматыя на старажытнай беларускай літаратуры*, Мінск 1959, бб. 408-411.

18) Е. Романов, *Белорусский Сборник*, вып. 5, Витебск 1891, стр. 357-370; П. В. Шейн, *Материалы для изучения быта и языка русского населения северо-западного края*, т. 2, Сб. ОРЯС т. 57, СПб. 1893, стр. 591.

19) For the text see: В. П. Перетц, *Повесть о трех королях волхвах в западнорусском переводе XV века*, СПб. 1903. Extracts from the text and comments in: Е. Ф. Карский, *Западнорусский сборник XV в.* Сб. ОРЯС, т. 65, СПб. 1889, стр. 1-73; reprinted in: Карский, *Труды...*, стр. 263-315. See also: A. Brückner, *Die Dreiköniglegende russisch*. Archiv für slavische Philologie, Band 11, Berlin 1888, S. 619-21.

their faces on the ground. They do this in memory of the three kings who were led by the star when they were searching for the Lord with their gifts; and who, on finding Him, fell down and kissed the ground ..."²⁰

The Byelorussian *Tale of the Three Kings* dates from end of the XV century. At approximately the same time, there appeared in Byelorussian another work from the Latin: the *Passion of Jesus Christ*²¹. The original work in Latin has not been found. Karski is inclined to think that the *Passion* may be an independent version, or compilation, by a Byelorussian author from various apocryphal Latin sources, the last of these undoubtedly being the Gospel of Nicodemus. The story clearly consists of two parts, not very skilfully joined together, with numerous repetitions and overlappings. In the first part, the author mainly concerns himself with Our Lady, her sufferings and her feelings. It begins with the story of the betrayal of Judas, and at the same time relates the history of the thirty silver pieces. The tale has it that they were the selfsame pieces which had been received by the brothers of Joseph when they sold him into Egypt, and "...having passed from one to another by the Old Testament fathers, in a miraculous way they came down intact to Solomon when he was building the temple. Solomon put them into the treasury and there they were hidden all the time till they were handed over to the accursed Judas."²² After he had received money, Judas said to the archpriests: "I promise to give you this man, and I shall do it with pleasure. However, when you shall wish to apprehend Jesus, see that you take not James instead, for they are alike in appearance. Therefore I shall go in front of your servants and shall give this sign: whomsoever I shall kiss, let them take him. But I wish to say this: even if He should go free or escape from your servants, the money

20) The same passage in Middle-Byelorussian reads: ...попове грецке соуть женаты. а носять долге волосы да не верять штобы Святыи Дух от Отца и Сына походил. але толко от отца. теж не верять штобы чистебы был. да тыми члонки от церкви римское соуть отделены. да коли мшоу держати хотять тогда вырежутъ с кислого хлеба гостию ал'бо оплаток на чотыри оуг'лы на посвященіе да тую гостию кладуть на блюдечко золотое ал'бо серебряное да верх положить звезду какбы сковорода загнутоую накривши чистым платем да по оферторыи оуздоимоуть бл'дно с оплатком наверх головы. и с кадилницами и свечами з великою пил'ностію почтивостію несоуть через церковь аж до олтаря тогда весь люд падоуть на землю на лице свое. да то чиняьт на знамя. занюж три короли господина ис дары искали, которе з'везда аж до ясель проводила. да там падше землю перед ним целовали. (Перецц, op. cit., стр. 77).

21) Full text in: Н. Тупииков, *Страсти Христовы в западнорусском списке XV века*, СПб. 1901. Extracts of the text and comments: Карский, *Западно-русский сборник...* See also: А. Brückner, *Passio Christi polnisch und russisch*. Archiv..., B. 11, S. 620-622. Brückner makes a supposition that the Byelorussian text is a translation from a Polish original, now lost. He admits however that he had not seen the full text of the story, but only small extracts.

22) The Middle-Byelorussian text of the same passage reads: ...тые пенязи от братов от братов Езона. через отцев старого закону. исходяче от дного до друго дивно неразлуочные прешли до Соломона коли церковь Божью боудовал. да через тогож Соломона оу скарбь были оуложены и схованы так долго аж до преклятого Иуды пришли. (Карский, *Труды...*, стр. 269).

should all the same be mine, and you must not take it away from me."

When Judas returned from Jerusalem, Mary asked him: "O my dear friend, what did you hear in Jerusalem about my beloved Son?." To this Judas answered: "All is well, my dear Lady, fear nothing." Shortly before, there comes a digression taken from saint Bernard: "O Mary, Mother most merciful! If you knew that your Son, your heavenly treasure, was sold for such a wretched and paltry sum, you would surely go from house to house, asking and begging and collecting those thirty silver pieces, to give them to despised Judas and thus liberate your Son from his purse." There is another digression further on, this time from Saint Anselm. When the time of his Passion was drawing near, Mary tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem. When He remained inflexible, she asked Him at least to let her die first in order not to see His sufferings. But this request was also refused her. Then Mary, as a last resort, implored the Archangel Gabriel to convince Christ to change His mind, but once again to no avail. Then follows the description of the Passion and death of Our Lord, His descent into hell and His resurrection. We also find an account of the "eyewitnesses" of Christ's descent to hell by the two sons of Simeon the Just, Carinus and Lentius, both of whom rose from the dead. Finally the author reproduces the letter of Pilate to Tiberius, and an account of the life of Joseph of Arimathea.

At the end of the narrative, there is a note to the effect, that this work was written by Nicodemus in the Hebrew language. This observation gave rise to the misconception that the whole "Passion" is a Byelorussian version of the Gospel of Nicodemus, which certainly is not the case. The Gospel of Nicodemus is only one of the sources: the others remain still to be identified.

By the middle of the XVIth century Poland, Byelorussia's Western neighbour, had become an important intermediary for transmitting Western literature to that latter country. A number of books were first translated into Polish, and then from Polish into Byelorussian. Such was the case of the work called "Gesta Romanorum." It was a collection of short stories of edifying character, the heroes and episodes being taken supposedly from Roman history. The origin of the collection is to be found in the *Disciplina Clericalis*, compiled by a Spanish priest Petrus Alphonsus in the XIIth century. The name of *Gesta Romanorum* first appeared in the XIIIth century, and the work proved to be very popular, especially in England. The Polish translation first appeared in print in 1553. The Polish editor included the story of Appolonius of Tyrus, a Greek novel dating probably from the IIIrd century A.D. The original of the novel was lost, and it was known in Western Europe only in its Latin version, probably made in the VIth century. There was a revival of interest in the novel during the Renaissance. In about 1457 a translation was made into Czech, from which was made the Polish version included in the *Gesta*. The story tells of Appolonius, king of Tyrus, who brought

misfortune up on his head by guessing a guilty secret of king Antioch. Later he suffered still more by losing his wife and his daughter but they were ultimately restored to him, when he had lost all hope of seeing them alive again. The moral of the novel is that the virtue is always rewarded in the end.

The Byelorussian *Gesta* was a translation from the Polish edition of 1553, although the story of Appolonius of Tyrus differs slightly from that in the Polish version. It may be that there was another Polish translation in existence which has now been lost, or that the Byelorussian author used other sources in addition to the Polish text²³.

Another well-known work translated from Polish into Byelorussian was the *Story of Atilla*²⁴. The author of the original book, written in Latin, was the Hungarian humanist Nicholas Olah, Archbishop of Strigonia, a friend of Erasmus. The Polish translation by Cyprian Bazylik appeared in 1574. The Byelorussian version must have followed soon after this, for by the end of the 16th century it was already in possession of a certain Gregory Unichoŭski, a wealthy nobleman from Navahradak district in central Byelorussia²⁵. This Unichoŭski was a noteworthy figure: he was interested in literature, and had a small library of Byelorussian books, among which there were the stories of *Tristan and Isolde*, *Lancelot and Bovo*²⁶.

The famous medieval love story of Tristan and Isolde is well known. The story of Bovo, on the other hand, is the XIIth century French Chivalry romance, better known as Bueves d'Hantone. There is an English version bearing the name of Sir Beavis of Hampton. It begins with the story of a good old king Guido, who foolishly married a woman much younger than himself. A son was born of this

23) For the original Byelorussian text of the *Gesta* and the story of Appolonius see: *Римския деяния (Gesta Romanorum)*, изд. Общества любителей древней письменности, СПб. 1877-78. The text is published from a manuscript found in Mahilou and dating from 1688. The Story of Appolonius bears the title: История о Апполоне короле тирском і о Тарсе корлевне приклад что печаль пременяется в радость. The history of the peregrinations of the Appolonius story among Slavs is given in: Nils Ake Nilsson, *Die Appolonius Erzählung in den Slavischen Literaturen*, Uppsala 1949.

24) А. Н. Веселовский, *Белорусские Повести о Тристане, Бове и Атилле в Познанской рукописи*. Из истории романа и повести. Сборник Отд. Русско-го Яз. и Слов. Имп. АН, т. 44, кн. 2, СПб. 1888 (text and exhaustive comments); A. Brückner, *Ein Weissrussischer Codex miscellaneus in Gräfllich-Raczynskischen Bibliothek in Posen*. Archiv für Slavische Philologie, Band 9, Berlin 1886, S. 345-391 (comments). The title of the Byelorussian story of Atilla is: История о Атыли короли угорском. (Веселовский, op. cit., стр. 173, прибавление).

25) Unichoŭski was a friend of T. Jeŭlašeŭski who mentioned him in his *Memoirs* (see Note 8). He died in 1606 (Brückner, op. cit., s. 351).

26) Веселовский, op. cit.; Brückner, op. cit. The tales of Tristan and Bovo have a common title: Починается повесть о витезях с книг сэрбских, а звлаща о славном рыцэрры Трысчане, о Анцалоте и о Бове и о иных многих витезех добрых. (Веселовский, op. cit., стр. 1, Прибавление). In addition to this, the tale of Bovo has its own title: История о княжати Кгвидоне. (Веселовский, op. cit., стр. 129, прибавление).

marriage to whom was given the name of Bueves (Bovo in the Byelorussian version). However, the young wife hated her husband, and brought about his death. She also intended to kill her son Bueves, but he escaped. From that time on the story tells of the young Bueves, his chivalrous exploits and his love for the beautiful Josianne (Druzhenna in the Byelorussian version)²⁷.

As occurred with many medieval works of literature, the tales of Tristan and Isolde and of Bueves soon spread all over Western Europe. Among other countries, they came to Italy and from there they reached the Dalmatic coast, probably by the end of the XVth or beginning of the XVIth century. It is from the Serbian versions, now lost, that the Byelorussian translations were made, and this fact is stated in the title pages of the Byelorussian books²⁸.

The two latter novels introduced the Byelorussian readers into the unknown world of chivalry and adventure. The greatest adventure story of all times was however the *Alexandria*, or the story of the fantastic exploits of Alexander the Great in the mysterious East. Byelorussians had already been acquainted with the life of Alexander in the XIth century Slavonic version of the *Chronicle* of the Greek writer John Malalas. Other versions followed later, the most popular being the translation of the Latin work *De proeliis* through the Polish medium in the XVIth century²⁹. Another great adventure novel was the story of the Trojan war³⁰. Here again Byelorussians read the story for the first time in the *Chronicle* of Malalas. The later versions were based on the book called *De hello Troiano* by the XIIth century Sicilian writer, Guido de Columna. Guido's aim was to discover the truth about the Trojan war which, according to him, had been obscured and corrupted by Homer. His authorities were Dares the Phrygian and Dictis the Cretan, both supposed witnesses of the actual happenings. The real source of his work however would appear to be the *Roman de Troie*, a poem by the XIIth century French writer Benoit de Saint-Maure. It is in this

27) As an illustration of the language used in the stories, we append the beginning of the tale of Bovo: Яко писмо говорыт: Добрыи мужу, Бог ти будь на помоч и вховаи тя от смерти и от злое прыгоды! хочу вам поведати добрую повесть о Кгвидоне Антонском княжати и о его сыне, о великом и славном рыцэру Бове. Тот Крайдон храбрый конник был, але одну реч зле вчынил, иж в час жоны не понял, але коли вже стар был, тогды понял жону з великого племени, и она его не мела ни за один пенез. (Веселовский, *op. cit.*, стр. 129, прибавление).

23) The tale of Bovo was very popular in Russia (Muscovy). It was generally thought that it came thither from the same sources as the Byelorussian version, but independently of it. However in recent years the opinion has been expressed that the tale of Bovo reached Muscovy from Byelorussia in the first half of the XVIth century. (Cf. М. К. Дабрынін, *Беларуская літаратура. Старажытны перыяд*. Мінск 1952, бб. 252-253).

29) For the most recent edition of the various Byelorussian texts of *Alexandria* see: *Александрыя*, выд. АН БССР, Мінск 1962.

30) A short version of the Trojan war story is published in: А. Ф. Коршунаў, *Хрэстаматыя на старажытнай беларускай літаратуры*, Мінск 1959, бб. 446-454.

latter work that incidentally the episode of Troilus and Cressida appeared for the first time in West European literature, probably an invention of the author.

Guido de Columna wrote his novel at the end of the XIIIth century, at a time when the memory of the Crusades and the Latin Kingdom of Constantinople was still fresh, and the age of chivalry was at its height. His heroes, although they bore Greek names, were really mediaeval knights in disguise, and his work must therefore be classified together with Western chivalry romances.

Both the *Alexandria* and the *Trojan war* were so well known to Byelorussian readers, that they were even mentioned by name by Skaryna in his preface to the Bible³¹. Moreover, the story of Alexander became part of Byelorussian folklore, and there is in a Byelorussian folk nativity play a scene depicting the fight between Alexander and the Indian king Por³².

Even a short survey of some of the Western literary works which were popular in Byelorussia sheds an interesting light on the cultural life prevailing there among the gentlefolk in the XV-XVIth centuries.

In the great majority of cases the originals, from which Byelorussian translations were made, are now lost. Their existence can only be inferred from the philological and other considerations of Byelorussian texts. It seems not improbable, — although its extremely difficult to prove, — that the Byelorussian translators did not adhere strictly to the original texts, but from time to time introduced elements of their own.

The Western religious works were Catholic in spirit, and as such were foreign to the Eastern Orthodox mentality of the great majority of Byelorussians. In the same way the secular novels were spreading among Byelorussians notions of the Age of chivalry, of which they had no direct experience. Thus in a certain sense those Western literary works, both religious and secular, through their influence contributed to create this strange blend of Western and Eastern elements which has been noticed by many on their first acquaintance with the Byelorussian culture of XV-XVIth centuries. This blend is evident not only in literature, but also in art, architecture and music. It may help to understand to a certain extent the enigmatic figure of Francis Skaryna, a typical man of the Renaissance, most probably Catholic, yet publishing books for the use of his Orthodox countrymen, illustrating them with charming engravings in a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance styles.

Perhaps in this happy blend of Eastern and Western elements lies the true originality of Byelorussian culture of that period.

31) »Аще ли кохание имаши ведати о военных а о богатырских делех, чти книги Судей, или книги Махавеев; более и справедливее в них знайдеш, нежели во Александрии или во Тройи« (Коршунаў, *op. cit.*, б. 174).

32) Г. I. Барышаў, А. К. Саннікаў, *Беларускі народны тэатр Батлейка*, Мінск 1962, бб. 35-38, 97-98.