

Skaryna's Stay in Denmark

BY

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Since the last quarter of the 18th century many scholars have studied the life and works of Dr Francis Skaryna, the first Byelorussian printer, and have published articles and monographs on the subject.¹ However, the question of his stay in Denmark was raised by S. Braha only in 1965.² Four years later A. Florovský discussed the matter.³

In March 1960 the Whiteruthenian (Byelorussian) Institute of Arts and Sciences, New York, sponsored my visit to Padua where I examined the original documents relating to Francis Skaryna. While I was studying the folio of the *Raccolta Minato*,⁴ in which the first Byelorussian printer was mentioned, I found the following: 'Taken from the Acts of the Bishop's Chancery 1510-1513 (f. 122) . . .'⁵ I then went to the *Archivio antico della Curia Vescovile di Padova* and in the manuscript entitled *Doctoratum*, vol. 49, f. 122, came across this document:⁶

M. D. XII. Indictione XV. Die Martis. VIII. mensis nouembris: Priuatum examen in medicinis Eximij viri Domini magistri francisci quondam lucae scorina de poloczko rutheni, Secretarij regis datiae: Coram Altissimo et. Excellantissimo Domino Suffraganeo, et Vicario per Venerabile Collegium Dominorum artistarum paduanorum. In assistentia spectabilis artium et

1. Although S. W. Ringeltaube mentioned the first Byelorussian printer in his *Gründliche Nachricht von Polnischen Bibeln*, Danzig, 1744, pp. 169-170, J. Bacmeister was the first to describe briefly some of Skaryna's works, namely the *Pentateuch*, in his *Essai sur la bibliotheque et le cabinet de curiosités et d'histoire naturelle de l'Academie des Sciences de Saint Petersburg*, St Petersburg, 1776, pp. 91-97.
2. Cf. S. Braha, 'Hieahrafičnaja lkalizacyja žyčciapisu doktora Skaryny', *Zapisy*, 3, Munich, 1964, pp. 19-21.
3. Cf. A. V. Fłaroŭski, 'Scoriniana', 450 *hod bielaruskaha knihadrukavannia*, Minsk, 1968, pp. 428-431.
4. Cf. *Archivio antico della Università di Padova, Raccolta Minato, Memorie sopra lo Studio e Collegia Sacro di Medici e Filosofi. 1150-1591*, vol. 646, f. 416.
5. *Tratto dagli Atti della Cancelleria Episcopate 1510-1513 (f. 122) ...'*
6. Since it is not a linguistic document, letters missing in abbreviations are supplied.
7. The best transcription of this part of the manuscript seems to be 'Altissimo et.' Dr C. Crowder, Professor of History at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, thinks likewise.

medicinae doctoris Domini magistri francisci fumanelli, almae
 Vniuersitatis artistarum Vicerectoris: examinati: Qui fuit
 Vnanimiter, Concorditer ac concorditer, et eorum nemine
 penitus dissentiente, in medicinis approbatus: Sub promotori-
 bus suis artium et medicinae doctoribus,
 Dominis magistris
 bartholomeo barisono, qui dedit Insignia
 francisco de nouali
 francisco estensi
 Hieronimo a mulo et
 Hieronimo de urbino:
 testes Spectabiles artium doctores Domini magistri
 Alouisius Zuchatus Huisinus
 et Daniel de foro iulio, patanus:
 Egregij artium Scholares, Domini
 Michael Zambonus quondam Iacobi Ciuis venetus: et
 Gaspar de Gabrielis filius domini petri: Ciuis paduanus,
 Dominus Valerius de largis clericus paduanus.
 (1512. 15 Indiction. Tuesday 9 November.

The private examination in medicine of the eminent man Sir
 Master Francis the son of the late Luke from Połack, Ruthe-
 nian, Secretary to the Danish King, in the presence of Noble
 and Most Excellent Sir Suffragan and Vicar, by the Venerable
 College of Sirs Artists of Padua, with the assistance of the
 Respectable Doctor of Arts and Medicine Sir Master Francis
 Fumanelli, Vicerector of the 'Alma' University: examined:
 Who was unanimously and in perfect harmony and nobody
 whosoever disagreeing approved in medicine:

Under his promoters Doctors of Arts and Medicine...

(Five names are listed.)

The Respectable witnesses, Doctors of Arts Sirs Masters...

(Two names are listed.)

The Egregious Students of Arts, Sirs ...

(Three names are listed.)

This entry of Skaryna's *Priuatum examen* was published, for the
 first time, but with errors in transcription, in *Žnič*, 56, Rome, 1960,
 p. 8. It should, however, be noted that in 1937 Professor Ettore
 LoGatto showed Professor A. Florovský the manuscript of a short
 article written for publication in *L'Europa Orientale* in which was
 included the document.⁸ But Professor LoGatto in a letter to me
 dated 2 July 1965 wrote: 'It is true that I showed to Florovský the
 documents about Skaryna during one of my journeys to Prague. I
 rather believe that I gave them to him. However, *I have never*⁹
 published such documents, nor have I written anything about them.'

There can be no doubt whatsoever about the authenticity of the

8. Cf. A. V. Flaroŭski, *op. cit.*, p. 429.

9. 'E' esatto ch'io mostrai al Florovský i documenti sullo Skarina in uno dei miei viaggi a Praga. Credevo anzi di avergli dati. Comunque *non ho mai* pubblicati tali documenti né scritto nulla su di essi.'

manuscript *Doctoratum* and therefore of the following passage: 'Eximij viri Domini magistri francisci quondam lucae scorina de poloczko rutheni, Secretarij regis datiae.' An indirect confirmation of the authenticity of the last three words in the passage is the fact that they are quoted in the *Raccolta Minato*, vol. 646, f. 416.

In both documents, *Doctoratum* and *Raccolta Minato*, 'Datia', in others sometimes spelled 'Dacia',¹⁰ can only mean Denmark. It could not possibly mean the Roman province north of the Danube, which occupied 'the region now constituted in Rumania, including Transylvania'¹¹ also called Dacia, because the Romans withdrew from the province during the reign of Emperor Aurelian (270-275 AD) and moved their colonists to 'a territory on the south of the Danube lying between Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior, which was hence called Dacia Aureliani.'¹² But Dr Francis Skaryna was 'Secretarius regis datiae' in 1512. Furthermore, even if by mistake a Rumanian duchy had been called Datia, no Rumanian duke had the title of 'rex' in the 16th century.¹³ Therefore, we may conclude that the 'rex datiae' cannot be anyone other than King Hans of Denmark.

Skaryna was Secretary to King Hans some time between 1506 and 1512. The first Byelorussian printer obtained the degree of Bachelor of Philosophy at the University of Cracow in 1506.¹⁴ When he came to Padua to take his examinations for the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1512, Francis Skaryna was already 'artium Doctor.'¹⁵ It is not known where he gained this degree. My search in the archives of the Universities of Bologna and Rome in 1960 did not throw any light on the matter. Skaryna might have obtained the degree of 'artium doctor' at the University of Copenhagen. A. Florovský thought about this possibility and in 1965 wrote to the University, but was notified by the Rector that there was nothing about Francis Skaryna in their archives.¹⁶ I still think that this answer does not preclude the above mentioned possibility, especially in the light of the following.

A. Florovský made enquiries in the State Archives in Copenhagen whether there was anything in their documents about 'Francis Skaryna's service in the Danish Royal Court.'¹⁷ The Director of the

10. Cf. S. Braha, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

A. Florovsky in his 'Scoriniana', *op. cit.*, p. 429, seems to have overlooked this when he spoke about the manuscript *Doctoratum*. Otherwise he could not have considered 'Datia' a variant of 'Dacia.'

11. *Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, New York, 1965, vol. 8, p. 388.

12. *Encyclop. Americ, loc. cit.*

13. Cf. A. V. Flaroński, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

14. Cf. J. Muczowski, *Statuta nec non liber promotionum philosophorum ordinis in Universitate Studiorum Jagellonica ab a. 1402 ad a. 1849*, Cracow, 1849, p. 144.

15. Cf. *Žnič*, 61, Rome, 1961, pp. 6 and 7.

16. Cf. A. V. Flaroński, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

17. *Ibid.*

Archives gave a negative reply in a letter of 11 December 1937.¹⁸ On 16 December 1968 I wrote to the Director of Det Kongelige Bibliotek (The Royal Library) in Copenhagen enquiring whether 'Franciscus Scorina (to-day commonly spelt: Francysk Skaryna) is mentioned in the Register of the Secretaries of the Danish Kings from 1506 to 1512.' For his information I quoted the relevant passage from the manuscript *Doctoratum* kept in the *Archivio antico della Curia Vescovile di Padova*. On 27 December the library acknowledged the receipt of my letter and said: 'The Royal Library does not possess relevant literature about the subject, and has therefore given your letter to Rigsarkivet (The Record Office) . . .' And the Record Office in Copenhagen in a letter dated 16 January 1969 and addressed to me wrote: 'In reply to your inquiry of December 16, which has been transferred to us from The Royal Library, we regret to inform you, that no mention of Franciscus Scorina has been found among the remnants of the chancery of King John of Denmark (1482-1513).' The letter is signed by Michael Hertz, Assistant Keeper, Historical Division.

Since M. Hertz speaks of 'the remnants' of the Royal Chancery and since A. Florovský refers to a small number of manuscripts in the same archives,¹⁹ it is very probable that the documents, in which the first Byelorussian printer was mentioned, have been destroyed. The absence therefore of Skaryna's name from the documents in the Royal Chancery can hardly constitute a valid argument against his stay in Denmark.

In the entry of his 'Priatum examen' in the manuscript *Doctoratum* of the *Archivio antico della Curia Vescovile di Padova*, Skaryna is called the King of Denmark's Secretary. As has been said, there is neither doubt about the authenticity of the document nor any positive argument to the contrary. The logical conclusion therefore is that the first Byelorussian printer was Secretary to King Hans of Denmark and for some time lived in that country.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*