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Juliusz Słowacki's Encounter with the Ionian Islands
(within the context of Polish Reception of History and Culture of the Ionian
Islands)

I would like to thank the organizers of the Congress for inviting me here and accepting my proposal. I'm not a Hellenist. My specialisation is the history of Polish literature in the Romantic period, so you may wonder what I am doing here in Kefalonia, among experts in the history and culture of the Ionian Islands.

I really wanted to come to the Panionian Congress for several reasons. Aside from my own family connections with the island of Corfu, there is also an academic interest. Firstly, I have been very interested in the theme of the Greek journey in the works of one of the most outstanding Polish Romantic poets, Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), who visited the Ionian Islands in 1836 and met Dionysus Solomos here. Prof. Panos Karagiorgos, the participant of the Panionian Congress, wrote excellently and interestingly about that meeting¹. Yet, I have a somewhat different take on this encounter between two great national poets, and I would like to present my point of view here. Secondly, I would like to present the anthology of Polish Romantic poetry concerning Greece and translated into Greek, which has just appeared from the Athenian publishing house Batsioulas. We've prepared it together with Paweł Krupka and Jorgos Petropoulos, a Greek poet².

The Ionian Islands appear in Polish literature in various contexts, especially in nineteenth-century travelogues by writers such as Maurycy Mann (1814-1876). This is a topic that still needs to be properly researched. For the moment, I would like to mention one of the

¹ P. Karagiorgos, *The Polish Poet Juliusz Słowacki and Solomos*.

² «Ἡ Ἑλλάς τῶν Πολωνῶν ρομαντικῶν – ποιητικὴ ἀνθολογία». Ἐπιλογή ποιημάτων: Maria Kalinowska καὶ Paweł Krupka. Μετάφραση στὰ ἑλληνικά: Πάβρου Κρούπκα καὶ Γιώργος Πετρόπουλος. Πρόλογος καὶ σχόλια: Maria Kalinowska, Ἐκδόσεις Ν. & Σ. Μπατσιοῦλας Ο.Ε., Ἀθήνα 2018

most interesting Polish references to the cultural specificity of the Ionian Islands – that which is to be found in the text *Pauzaniasz* [Pausanias] by the prominent Polish intellectual Stanisław Vincenz (1888-1971), who emigrated to Western Europe after the Second World War. However, he originally came from the south-eastern borderland of the former Polish state, where different cultures, nations and religions coexisted. In this text written in 1964, Vincenz draws parallels between Pausanias' times and the contemporary crisis of values. The theme requires detailed consideration, but here I would like to say that in Vincenz's text we find a great account of Greek culture, both ancient and modern, in terms of the potential it holds for European recovery. The highpoint of Vincenz's essay is his description of folk religion in Kefalonia and the use of snakes during the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 15th. The description of this religious celebration becomes the basis for a broader reflection on the unique specificity of the ritual in Kefalonia, which combines and integrates various Greek, Christian and pre-Christian traditions, becoming a fascinating proposal for European recovery and healing after the Second World War.

Let me begin with the first topic: Juliusz Słowacki on Corfu and Zante. Słowacki's significance to Polish culture is fundamental, and everything that concerns this poet is extremely important to us. Słowacki is the most important Polish Romantic poet (alongside Adam Mickiewicz), and, as a Philhellene³, is responsible for some of the most beautiful descriptions of ancient and modern Greece in Polish Romantic literature. .

The itinerary of Słowacki's journey led him from Italy to Greece, and then on to Egypt, the Holy Land, and Lebanon. He devoted his magnificent poem to Greece: *A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples*, inspired by Byron and Chateaubriand, among others. The manuscript of the poem can be found in his travel notebook and was never published during his lifetime. In addition to the poem, this notebook contains many notes, sketches, drawings and records that are very interesting to researchers. Słowacki's notebook disappeared during the Second World War in 1939, and everyone was convinced that it had been burned. A few years ago, however, our colleague, Prof. Henryk Głębocki found this notebook in a library in Moscow and following this sensational discovery, the team I manage have been working on editing this travelogue.

Regarding the poet's stay on Corfu and Zante, I would be grateful to our Greek colleagues for any suggestions that might be of interest to our research team, especially regarding Słowacki's sketch of Corfu. While Słowacki's descriptions of Zante are among the finest descriptions of this island and its beauty, especially the views from the fortress, at the

³ About Polish Philhellenism see: *Filhellenizm w Polsce*, vol. I and II, Warszawa 2007-2012.

moment I am more interested in the Corfu drawing, and I would be grateful to the Greek colleagues for any comments concerns it.

There are very few accounts of the poet's stay on the island of Corfu. There is a reference to Corfu in the initial stanzas of the poem, as well as at the beginning of Slowacki's diary entry for August 29th: "I am just waiting for a courier ship arriving every week to Otranto – and from this city returning to Corfu to get to this Anglo-Greek city". *Gazetta degli Stati Uniti Delle Isole Jonie*, a newspaper appearing in Corfu, ~~*Gazetta Degli Stati Uniti Delle Isole Jonie*, appearing in Corfu~~ reported the arrival on September 4th, 1836 of two first class passengers named "Zenone Brzozoneski and Jules Stowacki (Gulio Stowaki)" [Zenon Brzozowski, Juliusz Słowacki] and subsequently also recorded their departure on September 8th. This may well prove recognition of the high social position of the two travellers, as probably only significant passengers were written about in this way. Among the standard police documents in the Ionian Island Archives on Corfu, I came across confirmation that both travellers had arrived in Corfu and had left the island.

The poet spent four days on Corfu, so he had a relatively long time to get to know what he referred to as "the Anglo-Greek city". There are not many references to Corfu in the poem (perhaps a second canto, now lost, may have been about Corfu), but there is a drawing in his notebook, one of several very accurate and refined sketches which he completed in Greece, and signed "Corfou –7 Sept[ember] 1836" (illustration 1). The picture shows a view of the Old Fortress in the city of Corfu, the Bay of Kastrades (today Garitsa), and the buildings belonging in the general vicinity of Palaiopolis (the old city). You will know these areas better than I do. It may have been drawn from a hill located in the Garitsa and Anemomilos area. In Słowacki's drawing, in the foreground houses are visible most probably belonging to the village of Kastrades (today Garitsa), and more broadly – to Palaiopolis.

The view which Słowacki depicted in his drawing was a popular subject for artists in the nineteenth century, especially among Western European travellers visiting the island. There are other depictions by Edward Dodwell and Simone Pomardi, William Purser, Edward Lear, William Linton, Christopher Wordsworth, and Henry J. Wilkinson. Generally these views tend to focus on the presentation of the Old Fortress. However, the foreground in these depictions tended to be handled in different ways. Most of the artists focused on the pictorial composition in their representations, adding, for example, depictions of the ancient ruins of the old town or – from the 1830s on – the outline of the Mon Repos palace (in the drawings made from a greater distance, closer to Kanoni).

Of course on Corfu there were – and are – many places from which there were attractive views of picturesque landscapes or interesting objects, even near the city of Corfu itself. It is obvious that Corfu would attract travellers like Słowacki and others interested in "Greek Antiquity". As such, this area may have been located on the routes of travellers interested in ancient monuments.

Słowacki may also have been interested in seeing the summer residence (Mon Repos) built by Sir Frederick Adam, the English commissar of the Ionian Islands, and the palace gardens made available to the public by George Nugent-Grenville, a successor to Sir Adam.

Of the well-known depictions of the view of Corfu, Słowacki's drawing is distinguished by its diligence in presenting the buildings near the Bay of Garitsa. It appears as though the poet devoted more attention to the ordinary buildings of the lower parts of Palaiopolis than to the Old Fortress, which tended to arouse greater interest among other artist-travellers. It seems that these ordinary buildings are more attractive to him than this picturesque fortress.

Of the many representations of this part of the island, most of the best-known ones were made from a slightly different vantage point than that used by Słowacki. It is interesting to determine the place where Słowacki made his drawing, because it may also tell us something about the nature of the poet's stay on the island (or in this particular place) and his travel interests. Of the few depictions of the scene that adopt Słowacki's vantage point, the picture by Simone Pomardi displays the same interest in the ordinary buildings near the old harbour (illustration 2)⁴. It is significant that both the Pomardi drawing and the drawing by Słowacki show a fairly accurately drawn outline of the Church of St. Jason and St. Sosipater. The similarity between the two drawings is surprising, because the two travelogues (Dodwell, Pomardi and Słowacki) are completely different.

The neatness of Słowacki's drawing suggests that a lot of time went into completing it, and spending the night in the area would have provided a convenient opportunity for such a time-consuming work. Another possibility is raised by an unusually similar view in a drawing by Pomardi, produced at the nearby Monastery of Christ Pantocrator, situated on a hill close to Mon Repos. Is it possible that Słowacki may also have stayed in this monastery, considering that he later stayed at the Monastery of Mega Spileon?

⁴ See: *The Ionian Islands & Western Greece. Catalogue of an Exhibit of Drawings by Edward Dodwell and Simone Pomardi from the Collection of the Packard Humanities Institute*, ed. Despina Zernioti, John McKesson Camp, Corfu Museum of Asian Art 2014, p. 54-55 (Corfu town and fort seen from Kanoni, looking northeast, in afternoon light. PHI 11. Pen and ink line drawing with some shading by Pomardi, dated April 29, 1806; 36 x 55 cm).

However, the situation becomes more complicated when we consider the opinion of archaeologist Katerina Kanty, a long-term resident of Corfu who has done extensive research on the history of this area. Kanty suggests that the poet's vantage point for his drawing may, in fact, have been on the estate of Lord Williams H. Lawrence, the first English resident of the hill (from 1829), a fairly high British official, later a police sanitary inspector. If this were the case, it might give us some indication of the political contacts of Polish travellers at the time? It must be added that my own research team have investigated all traces of political contacts of Polish travellers as we have been working on the, so far unproven, hypothesis that has long existed in Polish research studies that the journey of a Romantic poet and a Polish aristocrat had a political purpose as well.

As mentioned earlier, among the huge number of 19th-century representations of this scene in Corfu, including those made from Słowacki's vantage point, the one that comes closest to his is the drawing by Simone Pomardi, Dodwell's travelling companion, showing the view stretching from the Church of Christ Pantocrator. It is clear that both drawings – Pomardi's and Słowacki's – depict the same place, although seen from a very slightly different angle. The most surprising and puzzling thing about them, however, is the similarity of the two representations, considering that their journeys were very different.

Dodwell's travel reports are typical of a pre-Romantic Greek journey: cold, objective, matter-of-fact, though indicative of poet's the poetic sensitivity to beauty, focussing on the ancient past of the places he visited, authenticating their uniqueness, but also open to the beauty of the landscape and the realities of the time, documenting the peculiarities of nature, especially the landscape. This is the model of an earlier, pre-Romantic travelogue. Dodwell's model was used as the basis for the Romantic travelogue, but Słowacki, as Romantic poet and traveller, goes beyond it, towards a deep internalization of Greek Antiquity as part of his own existence. Travelling to Greece is for Słowacki a deep spiritual and existential experience.. But in Slowacki's poem there is also a distance and an irony that we don't find either in Dodwell or even in other Romantic travelogues.

Dodwell and Pomardi documented the condition of ancient historical buildings in particular, while the Słowacki set off on a pilgrimage, in a broad sense, to the cultural and religious sources of his spiritual formation. Both of them – Pomardi and Słowacki – drew pictures very distant from those ideas for their travels. Pomardi's drawing documents a detailed examination of the scene, aiming for objectivity; however, the draughtsman's eye does not rest on the relics of the past, as even the picturesque fortress is relegated to the background.

Słowacki's amateur drawing is very similar, devoid of any trace of a Romantic approach: it reveals no subjective gaze, no emotions, no play of the imagination, no irony, and no fascination with what, after all, is a unique site. Even the old fortress, which is a picturesque site stimulating the imagination – indeed a “romantic” site – loses its uniqueness in Słowacki's interpretation. All of the poet's attention in the sketch is concentrated on rather mundane houses, drawn in great detail despite not being particularly picturesque or having much potential to fire the imagination. Słowacki's drawing doesn't seem to suggest that the poet had searched for this kind of view for any special reason or that he had been on the lookout for something particularly picturesque, but rather that the traveller simply had time to spare here: maybe they (poet and his aristocratic travelling companion) stopped to rest or even stayed for a while, and the poet made use of that time by drawing. But in this kind of representation, the view in a way lost its picturesque uniqueness to some rather commonplace details, shown faithfully and carefully. This is an entirely different landscape from the one Słowacki depicted in his poem: a Greek landscape revealing a variety of historical and spiritual secrets to the poet...

Like Byron before him, Słowacki in his poem speaks of Greece as the land of ancient gods, but also a land still marked by the fact of being divinely chosen. For example, the poet writes about the eternally blue sky which “seems to lie pensive over the wistful country of the past, an age-old image and remembered only by God himself... who ponders within”⁵. In fact this is one of the poem's most exquisite visions of Greece's past: an age-old image remembered by God...

Słowacki's drawing of Garitsa Bay in Corfu is focused on detail rather than on Romantic picturesqueness, and the same goes for his drawing of Agamemnon's Tomb. On the other hand, the Greek landscape in Słowacki's poem is filled with signs of an extraordinary unity of nature and the sacred, while also preserving the memory of both history and the world of myths. For example, the high mountain above the Gulf of Lepanto, behind which the famous Missolonghi lies, reminds the poet of a giant pyramid built not by people but by God, who had sensed this country's greatness and glory. Here, Greece combines different aspects of existence: nature, history and the sacred. Słowacki's text features reproducing daily life in 19th-century Greece and the eternal – Greek – harmony between nature, art and myth, but it also includes a broad repertoire of Philhellenic poetic themes. The poem is characterized by a distinctive lightness, highlighted by the versification structure and built especially by the construct of the subject – a

⁵ See: J. Słowacki, *Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu*, in: M. Kalinowska, *Juliusza Słowackiego «Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu»*, Gdańsk 2011, Canto VI, lines 26-28.

Romantic ironist in control of the represented world, juggling – often with humour – the conventions and motifs of Romantic travel writing. And it is this irony – not irony in general, but a Romantic, creative irony encompassing all areas of reality – that dominates the portrayal of Dionysios Solomos, with whom Słowacki sailed on the same steamboat from Corfu to Zante. Between September 8th and 10th 1836, both poets happened coincidentally to be passengers on board the *Eptanissos*, Solomos sailing from Corfu to Zante, Słowacki to Patras. We don't know if this journey resulted in their meeting, or even being introduced, and quite an extensive speculative literature has arisen on the journey, not only in Polish but also in Greek⁶. Most recently it was the topic of the presentation by Prof. Karagiorgos.

As noted above, the portrait of Solomos that Słowacki creates in his poem is strongly ironic in character, and as such it should not be viewed as a personal attack on Solomos. In the personality of the author of the Greek *Hymn to Liberty*, Słowacki notices qualities that contrast with the Tyrtæen image of Solomos. In *A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples*, Słowacki highlights what he sees as Solomos' weariness, egocentrism, an inclination for poses, his peculiarly theatrical behaviour and, finally, dandyism. Yet what Słowacki sees in Solomos is also what he sees in himself. As such, this rather malicious portrait of Solomos in a sense also serves as Słowacki's self-ironic reflection on himself and also on Romantic poets in general. "It is not sharp satire [...], but simply a brilliant display by a virtuoso of Romantic irony who has maintained the entire work in an equally magnificent satirical-digressive tone. However, I think [writes Polish researcher, Oktawiusz Jurewicz] [Józef] Birkenmajer more aptly noted that Słowacki was probably referencing the scene with the lackeys from Molière's play *The Bourgeois Gentleman*". Jurewicz agrees with Gizela Reicher-Thonowa: "One can ascribe to Słowacki a desire to ironize Solomos in the sense of Romantic irony concealing 'the suffering soul of someone too sensitive, proud, of great inner richness and a complex mind, who not only

⁶ Γεώργιος Θ. Ζώρας, «Διονύσιος Σολωμός και Ιούλιος Σλοβάτσκι», in *Επτανησιακά Μελετήματα*, Β' Αθήνα, 1959, pp. 41-49.

is aware of the tragedy of his own position or that of society, but [...] who ironizes in order to drown his own pain in irony' (Reicher-Thonowa⁷)⁸.

A Journey to the Holy Land from Naples is saturated with the poet's admiration for the heroic struggle of both ancient and contemporary Greeks, and for their love of freedom. Reminiscing during the voyage about his youthful reading of stories recounting the deeds of warriors of the Modern Greece (including the brothers Ypsilantis, Botsaris, Kanaris), Słowacki builds an extraordinary image of the Greek struggle for independence, as well as his own inner world. As the greatest Polish Romantic Philhellenic poet, Słowacki had a very strong impact on later generations of Polish poets. Greek-Polish themes occupy a special place in his oeuvre: Greece juxtaposed with Poland, Greece as a model for Poland, and Greece as a mask for Polish national problems.

But the motif of parallels between Greece and Poland, and also simply a fascination with Greece and its struggle for freedom, was shared by other Polish poets as well, and we invoke those poets in anthology we have just published. The collection begins with the words of one of the most important Polish poets and thinkers, Cyprian Norwid (1821-1883). In 1875, recalling the enthusiasm that had swept across all of Europe a few decades earlier, Norwid wrote: "Old men, women and children, people from salons and factories, rich and poor, those who were educated and those who were aware of little, political statesmen, the offices and chambers of rulers, just like commoner communities... everyone... absolutely everyone sent Greece the most selfless feelings, songs, gold, exceptional people and freedom"⁹. Norwid compared this selfless enthusiasm for Greece and Greek struggle for independence, which spread across Europe in the 1820s and united different circles within European societies and nations in solidarity, to the Crusades of old. In Norwid's view, from the whole of European history the Crusades were the only thing comparable with the selfless enthusiasm which united Europe around the cause of Greek independence: "throughout all European history, it is only the Crusades that shine with a similar and equal enthusiasm."¹⁰. Juxtaposing the Philhellenic movement with the Crusades, he underlined the ardour of its participants and their dedication to the cause, which went beyond the political dimension.

⁷ O. Jurewicz recalls opinion of G. Reicher-Thonowa (*Ironia Słowackiego w świetle badań estetyczno-porównawczych*, Kraków 1933).

⁸ O. Jurewicz, *Greckie peregrynacje Juliusza Słowackiego* (24 VIII 1836 Neapol – 12 XI 1836 Hermupoli), „Meander” 1959, 4/5, p. 190-191.

⁹ C. Norwid, *W rocznicę powstania styczniowego*, in C. Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. J. Gomulicki, vol. 7: Proza, Warszawa 1973, p. 99.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

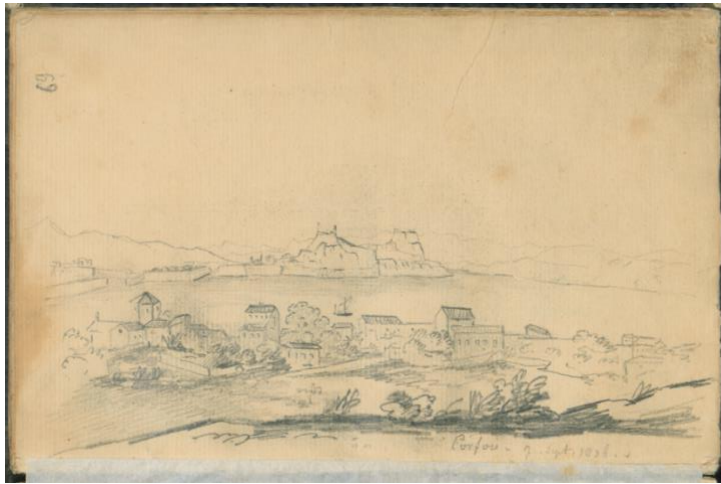


Illustration 1



Illustration 2

ΙΑ΄ ΔΙΕΘΝΕΣ ΠΑΝΙΟΝΙΟ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ. ΕΠΙΤΑΝΗΣΙΑΚΟΣ ΒΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΣ Κεφαλονιά, 21-25 Μαΐου 2018 XI INTERNATIONAL PANIONIAN CONFERENCE LIFE AND CULTURE IN THE IONIAN ISLANDS CEFHALONIA, GREECE, MAY 21-25 2018. ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ Τόμος IV: Φιλολογία, Φιλοσοφία, Γλωσσολογία, Λαογραφία. PROCEEDINGS Vol. IV: Philology, Philosophy, Linguistics, Folk Culture, Επιμέλεια τόμου: Ηλίας Τουμασάτος, Δρ Ιστορίας. Γενική Εποπτεία: Γεώργιος Ν. Μοσχόπουλος, Πρόεδρος της Εταιρείας Κεφαλληνιακών Ιστορικών Ερευνών, ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ ΚΕΦΑΛΛΗΝΙΑΚΩΝ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ ΒΡΑΒΕΙΟ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ. Εκτύπωση-Βιβλιοδεσία: ALKODI, Argostoli 2019, pp. 503-512.