

The dissertation is devoted to the representation of peasants in Old Polish historiography (1550 – 1650) in the context of theories characteristic to the research tradition of Sarmatism. The author verified, among other things, the widespread belief that Sarmatism as the state ideology of Polish gentry was founded on their faith in different ethnic origins than peasants and other plebeians. The most extreme realization of such a research hypothesis is the opinion that in the Polish historiography of the 16th and 17th centuries (and thus in the nobility's mentality) there was allegedly a myth of conquest. According to this hypothesis, by settling in the territory of Poland, the knights coming from the Sarmatians were to subdue the indigenous people turning them into slaves. The myth of conquest was meant to be the basic justification of the serfdom of the peasants. The author confronts it with a wide selection of historiographic texts in order to prove that this commonly valid opinion about the Sarmatian myth is not confirmed by the source texts from the analyzed period.

The corpus of texts analyzed in the dissertation consists of chronicles but also catalogues of monarchs, historical poems, descriptions of the country and, last but not least, journalistic texts reaching, within the rhetorical argumentation, to the nation's past. Source texts from the representative period between the second half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century were placed on a broader chronological and literary genres background. The source material extracted this way was examined in terms of depicting the peasants in the context of ethnogenetic myths and other myths about the "origins" of the nation. The time scope of the research was determined on the basis of the claims of some Old Polish literature researchers that the canon of Polish historiography was formed during this period. Pragmatic considerations also turned out to be important here: the chronological range covering the century of the development of Old Polish historiographic prose made it possible to establish an operative corpus of texts that could be efficiently examined in one dissertation. Moreover, one hundred year time scope of the research allowed the author to verify another thesis characteristic to the research tradition of Sarmatism which is the evolution of gentry's "origins" myths from its original integrating role to the state exclusivity.

The basic methodological tool used in the dissertation is Assmann's theory of cultural memory. This theory assumes that every community has a conscious attitude to its past set in a specific cultural space and transmitted through various forms of social communication (such as writing). The list of Assmann's concepts discussed in detail in the dissertation's introduction was used in an attempt to answer the most important research question of this work, namely how individual foundation myths constructed the community of memory and what was the place of peasants in

this community. The detailed research questions were aimed at verifying consecutively whether in the historiography of the period 1550 – 1650 there was a myth of conquest that justified the gentry's domination over the plebeian states; whether a similar function could have been performed by the Palemonic myth; what the relation between ethnogenesis and the biblical origin of the state differences (the origins of serfdom from Noah's curse on Ham's offspring) was, and how the foundation narratives of the nobility legitimized their privileged position in the country.

The research goals formulated above allow us to notice that the basic compositional principle of this dissertation was determined by tracing the traditional theories undertaken by researchers of Sarmatism in the context of peasants. Therefore, in the first place, the author tried to outline the background of the analyzed source material by discussing the problem of depicting peasantry in historiography preceding the analyzed period. The author set the work of Jan Długosz as a main narrative pattern in accordance with the findings of experts in Old Polish historiography. A particular place was also devoted to the works of Marcin Bielski and Marcin Kromer, considered to be the most important "Sarmatian historians", who established the foundations of the canon of early modern Polish historiography.

The next chapters focus on some problematic issues. Following the research tradition of Sarmatism, the author verified, as has already been noted twice, the popular conquest hypothesis. Later on, the excluding heroic myth of the gentry was discussed. The author concludes that within Polish national myths it was one of the most important discursive mechanisms justifying the increasing serfdom. In the next chapter, the author analyzed those fragments of foundation myths in which the peasants' presence or origin was expressed explicitly. This part of the thesis discusses, among other things, a rarely mentioned figure of the legendary monarch "from a peasant cottage" Leszek the Second. Then, the author analyzes the Palemonic myth, especially its version by Maciej Strykowski, since some specific fragments of the *Chronicle*, evoked or directly recalled by modern researchers, most often play the role of illustrating the alleged "colonial character of the Sarmatian mentality".

The last analytical chapter was devoted to the justifications of serfdom derived from biblical history. In this part, the author paid special attention to the pan-European tradition linking serfdom with the curse put on Ham's offspring and to the scheme of the three-function gradation of humanity (*tripartitio*). At the end, the author formulated conclusions that resulted from the application of the interpretation scheme outlined here.

The source literature for the dissertation were printed texts. As analysing the social scope of the terms used by Old Polish writers required reaching for the original wording of the texts the author quoted Latin sources both in their original form and in Polish translation. Old Polish translations were used in the case of *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum* by Marcin Kromer and the historical work of Aleksander Gwagnin *Sarmatiae Europaeae descriptio* and in others cases the author used contemporary translations published in professional text publications. All of the other translations without annotations come from the author of the dissertation.