

Między Wschodem a Zachodem. Bernard Syruć (Siruć), 1731-1784

Between the East and West. Bernard Syruć (Siruć), 1731-1784

SUMMARY

The paper is devoted to the life and work of Bernard Syruć, a monk of the Lithuanian province of the Piarist order and an eminent, albeit now largely forgotten, scholar of his time. A man of wide-ranging interests: mathematician, historian, classical philologist, Bible scholar and translator, Syruć was the author of the first Polish publication (written in Latin and published in Rome) on integral and differential calculus. His pedagogical skills were highly valued as well: it is significant that after studies in Poland and abroad, Syruć was able to work at the Theresian Academy in Vienna. Later he was actively engaged in two successive educational reforms carried out in Lithuania: he participated in establishing a model Piarist centre at Wilno (Vilna, Vilnius) in the late 1750s and early 1760s, and later took part in the reform of the educational system conducted after 1773 by the Committee for National Education (KEN), as a lecturer of the Main School of Lithuania (1781) and as inspector general. At the same time he was responsible for many publications in various fields, including books meant for the general public; most of these were translations, adaptations and compilations of literary dating from Antiquity and Modern times (the latter included works in French, German and even Russian). Among those publications were translations of the history of Poland by Pierre Joseph Solignac and of the history of Russia based on the work of Jean Rousset de Missy (vol. 1-2 and 4), and translations of the memoirs of Tsar Peter the Great edited by Mikhail Shcherbatov (vol. 3), as well as translations of German works, mainly the memoirs of General Christoph Hermann von Mannstein and source materials edited by Christoph Schmidt (vol. 5).

The paper is based on source materials available at the Piarist Archives in Cracow, at the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences, at the Czartoryski Library, as well as many Polish, French, German and Russian old prints. The analysis of Syruć's biography and work makes it possible to state that, irrespective of his skills and unique abilities, he was a typical representative of the monastic intellectual elite of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which traditionally had strong links with the culture and scholarship of Western Europe, but was deeply engaged in the public life of the Commonwealth. This explains Syruć's interest in history in general, and in the history of law and political systems, as well as international relations in particular, which was directed not only towards the West (in line with the "reorientation to the lands on the Odra", which was taking place in the political-historical thinking of the times), but also towards the new European power in the East, Russia. There are also characteristic traces of "Lithuanization" to be found in the Piarist scholar's work. It is worth adding that Syruć planned to publish works on the history of Lithuania and with that goal in mind approached the KEN with a proposal for a source query in St. Petersburg.