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SARMATISM AS A WORLD-VIEW AND LIFE-STYLE OF PRINCE MICHAŁ KLEOFAS OGIŃSKI

Looking at the second half of the eighteenth century as a period in cultural genesis, we can clearly observe a process of transition of cultural patterns that the aristocracy in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had been adhering to and return of the aristocracy to its contemporary social and

cultural trends. Aristocratic elite still played a decisive role in politics, economy and culture.

A valuable footprint in the cultural lives of a number of European countries was left by Prince Michał Kleofas Ogiński. His endeavours in politics, economy and cultural creativity have been thoroughly studied both by Belarusian and foreign researchers. However, there is still no comprehensive study that would analyse the world-view, world perception and belief system of that outstanding personality. Appropriate analysis of his biography and artistic legacy gives us sufficient evidence of sarmatism as a major influencing factor reflecting on Prince Ogiński's mentality and ideology. Sarmatism deeply rooted in the aristocratic feudal stratum of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's society as early as in the sixteenth century. The Sarmatian concept asserted ancient origin of the noble class, underscored knightliness of the nobility and defined the position of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's aristocracy among their European peers.

The Ogińskis and, specifically, Prince Michał Kleofas followed that theory. They traced back their origins up to the Rurik dynasty. A Roman Catholic nobleman who valiantly fights against his country's enemies in a war period was Prince Michał's ideal during all his life. Indeed, with arms in his hands he fought defending his Motherland: first against the army of Targowica Confederation and then in the army of General Tadeusz Kościuszko during Kościuszko uprising.

The sarmatism principles stipulated that in peace time a nobleman in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania should take a lot of care of making his lands and properties flourish. Prince Michał Kleofas Ogiński was very much such an assiduous landlord. He had possessions in Minsk and Wilno provinces, one of them being Zalesie where he created a wonderful estate with a park. Efficient agricultural and land development endeavours by Prince Michał Kleofas set a pattern to follow; with all its very active cultural life, Zalesie became known as the Northern Athens.

Equally, followers of sarmatism were expected to give all kinds of assistance to the poor. Prince Ogiński by no means was an exception. Using his funds he created an orphanage and a county school in Molodechno. Every year the name day of the Prince's wife, Princess Maria de Neri Ogińska, was celebrated in Zalesie with a large participation of local farmers who were invited to the festive tables.

Among the spiritual values of sarmatism, religiousness was the most important. Religion as a generic system of values, concepts and imperatives played a significant role in the Prince's life. Notably, in the will left to his son Ireneusz, he told him to be a Christian in the first place. One of the buildings Prince Michał Kleofas had constructed in Zalesie was an eight-faced chapel with a pyramidal roof and a little wooden tower on its top.

A very feature of the life of true followers of sarmatism was profuse generosity in organising exuberant family parties in a grand style. The Northern Athens estate was famous for having many guests. Among those who would stay in Zalesie for considerable periods of time were an orchestra director in the Russian Imperial Theatres Józef Kozłowski, an Italian composer Giovanni Polfani, and a Polish-Lithuanian historian and writer Alexander Chodźko; a number of professors of the University of Wilno were frequent visitors. When Prince Ogiński at the age of fifty seven moved to Florence, young Adam Mickiewicz, the most famous Polish national poet would visit the Prince in his new Italian home many times; they would spend time playing chess.

An awareness of one's family origin was a fundamental component of sarmatism. Having an aristocratic lineage and belonging to a highly noble clan was a necessary condition of being an aristocrat. The lineage as the family's precious value has been extensively described and preserved in Prince Michał Kleofas Ogiński's archives, diaries and memoirs, in a meticulously maintained genealogical tree and the ancestors' portraits which once decorated as a gallery one of the chambers in the manor house in

Zalesie. According to principles of sarmatism, nobleness and gentility was supposed to appear through a specific system of symbols such as clothes, their colour, personal weapons or jewellery. The coat of arms was a very important symbol; every aristocratic family was supposed to have one. The Ogińskis' coat of arms was called Oginiec; its shield consisted of two parts: silver Saint George against the red background in the upper part; and a red heraldic gate with a silver cross on its top against the blue background in the lower part. That coat of arms gave evidence that the Ogińskis were princes.

Based on the aforementioned we may well conclude that Prince Michał Kleofas Ogiński belonged to the part of aristocracy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania whose mentality, ethical values, system of concepts, cultural orientation and life style clearly stemmed from basic concepts of sarmatism such as nobleness, aristocratism of lineage, aristocratic code of honour, religiousness, extensive education, appreciation of prevalence of freedom, authority and law. All these principles and values of sarmatism were firmly rooted in Prince Michał Kleofas Ogiński's consciousness and constituted a basement for his world outlook and inner life.

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