

Georgius Drohobicz de Russia (Jurij Drohobyč z Rusi): Authentic Sources, 20th Century Positivistic Scholarship and Contemporary Quasi-Myths

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For centuries, the University of Bologna was an important center for cultural exchange between Eastern and Western Europe as well as for the spread of classical and Arabic cultural traditions in Europe. The contribution of fifteenth-century professor and rector of the University of Bologna, George Drohobyč represents an interesting chapter in the history of scholarly contacts between East and West. He is of importance for the Ukrainian scholarship also because he is the first known Ukrainian author of a printed book. Sources on the life and works of George Drohobyč are to be found in the archives and libraries of several countries¹.

N. N. Liubovič, professor of the Russian University in Warsaw, noted in 1888 that George Drohobyč was, according to published Italian sources, one of three rectors of the University of Bologna in 1481-1482². Later the Polish scholar, A. Birkenmajer, found a number of archival documents that provided information on the biography of George Drohobyč. Yet neither Birkenmajer nor Liubovič were aware of George Drohobyč's sole printed book. Its title was first published in *Bücherkatalog XVI: Enthaltendes seltene und wertvolle Bücher* (München, J. Halle, 1898). On the basis of what he found in the catalogue, the Russian academician N. P. Lixačev published a notice about this "outstanding and most rare book"³.

Neither Lixačev nor the later authors of newspaper articles about the discovery had access to the book. The first description of the two extant copies was published in 1932 by the Ukrainian bibliographer and historian Ivan Krevec'kyj (Krevec'kyj 1932). More recently, George Drohobyč has been mentioned in the articles on the history of medicine by N. Oborin and mathematics by Ja. Matvijšyn, and others, as well as in general surveys of Ukrainian culture. George Drohobyč's biography and his place in the history of Ukrainian international cultural contacts have been presented by the author of this article in several

¹ For an overview of the works of George Drohobyč and a bibliography of secondary literature about him see my introduction and comments in: *Jurij Drohobyč. Bibliohrafičnyi pokazčyk* (L'viv 1983).

² Liubovič 1880: 7.

³ Lixačev 1898: 6-7.

papers as well as in a historical novel⁴. However, there are still many unknown aspects of his life and texts.

It should be noted that George Drohobyč was mentioned under different names in the various sources: George (in Latin documents, "Georgius" or "Jeorius") of Drohobyč, George of L'viv ("Georgius de Leopoli"), George Drohobyč of Rus' ("Georgius Drohobicz de Russia"). From the context, it is clear that Rus' in this case is to be understood as Galician Rus', i.e. South Western Ukraine. (The term Rus' was also used in reference to the Eastern Slavic lands in general). Although his surname was in fact probably Kotermak⁵, the scholar is best known by the name he used in his works: George of Drohobyč or simply George Drohobyč (Drohobicz in the old spelling).

George Drohobyč was born in approximately 1448-1450 in the Western Ukrainian town of Drohobyč. His family was not wealthy. Later, he wrote that from the beginning he had to earn whatever he achieved at the cost of great effort, overcoming poverty and difficulties⁶. At the end of 1468 or in early 1469, George enrolled in the University of Cracow⁷. It was not coincidental that the young Ukrainian went there to continue his studies. Cracow was not only the nearest university town, but also a cultural center of international format for all Central Europe. Moreover, Cracow maintained especially close cultural ties with Ukraine. At different times students from L'viv, Sambir, Drohobyč, Mostyska, Holohory, and even Kyiv studied there. From Drohobyč alone, there were thirty-two students enrolled in this university in the nearly two centuries between 1411 and 1600. Only few of those who enrolled actually left with degrees, George Drohobyč among them. In 1470 he earned a Bachelor's degree, in 1473 a Master's.

In approximately 1474, he transferred to the famous University of Bologna. He may have heard of the University while still in Drohobyč, because the manager of the Drohobyč saltworks, Ainolfo Tedaldi, was a Florentine who knew the cultural life of Italy well. Tedaldi was a relative of the outstanding scholar and humanist Callimachus (Filippo Buonaccorsi), who came to Poland and Ukraine on Tedaldi's invitation. (Callimachus later visited the Drohobyč area a number of times).

Even in Bologna Georgius continued to suffer from financial hardships, which was emphasized in his letter from February 6, 1478, written to Nicho-

⁴ Cf. Isaievych 1969, 1972 and 1973.

⁵ It is not quite clear whether Kotermak was his family name, or a kind of nickname given to him. Professor R. K. Lewański suggests that the allegedly Polish form *Kotermak* has derived from Ukrainian *Kotermašuk*. We do not see any argument for substantiating this hypothesis. See Lewański 1995: 12-14.

⁶ Jagiellonian Library, Cracow, Manuscript No. 6394/9. A reproduction, rather bad: Isaievych 1972, between pp. 64-65.

⁷ *Album studiosorum universitatis Cracoviensis* (in 4 t.), I. *Ab anno 1400 ad annum 1489*, Cracoviae 1887: 194. The reproduction of the entry on the enrollment of Georgius Michaels Donati de Drohobicz: *Jurij Drohobyč. Bibliohrafičnyj pokažčyk*, between pp. 18 and 19.

las Czepil from Bologna: "I came to Bologna having very little money. I could achieve much in scholarship if I didn't have to worry constantly about the necessities of life"⁸.

George later sent Czepil his *Iudicium anni 1478 currentis ex planetarum figuris siderumque influxibus*, an astrological prognosis for the period from March to December 1478. This text has survived only as part of a compendium, copied in the hand of Hartmann Schedel (1440-1514), a famous German scholar who was the author of the *World Chronicle*⁹. In this treatise, George Drohobyč refers to the works of the Arabic astronomer Alchabitius Abdilazi ('Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Uthmān Ibn 'Alī al-Qabilsī), who lived circa 950 and wrote a book called the *Liber isagogicus (al-Madkhal ila Sind'āt Ahkam al-Nujūm)*. This book was translated by Johannes Hispalensis and first printed in 1473 in Mantua. The translation was emended by Matteo Moreto, a lecturer at the University of Bologna¹⁰. It is this latter edition that was most probably used by George Drohobyč. He especially valued the works of Albumazar Abalach (Abu Ma'shar Jafar Ibn Muhammad Ibn Umar al-Balkhl), an astronomer who was born in Balkh and lived mostly in Bagdad where he died in about 885-886.

In the same year George Drohobyč wrote another treatise, *Judgement on the Solar Eclipse of July 29, 1478*¹¹. In this work, he argued against those astrologers who maintained that events are inevitably determined by the influence of stars upon the earth. He also devoted much attention to geography. Spain, Britain, France, Lithuania, Greece, Prussia, Ethiopia, Arabia, and Egypt were mentioned in this treatise. Especially interesting for Western European readers are his references to East European lands — Rus' (Galicia), Russia Alba (White Rus'), Russia Alta (Upper Rus'), which he called "the most fertile land under the sun"¹². He also mentioned "the lands of the Tartars and the Goths", namely, the Crimean Khanate and the former Mangup principality (Theodoro) in Crimea which existed until 1475. Moreover, in this treatise on the eclipse, George Drohobyč demonstrated his knowledge of classical literature and of the works of Italian humanists. He referred to Ptolemy and cited Seneca in Latin and Petrarch in Italian.

In 1478, George Drohobyč earned a Doctorate in Philosophy and Arts. From the fall of 1478 to the spring of 1479, he taught astronomy at the University of Bologna. Later he spent some time at the court of Marquis Giulielmo VIII Paleologos in the town of Casale. On June 28, 1479, George sent another of his works to the Duke of Milan, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, and Duchess Bona. This

⁸ Cf. Lewicka-Kamińska 1956.

⁹ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München, Manuscript Clm. 647: 102-126. A reproduction: Matvijšyn 1969, II, 50 pp.

¹⁰ *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, I, Leipzig 1925, Sp. 416, N. 842.

¹¹ Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), MS Arsenal 828: 136-137.

¹² Note, however, that Russia Alba (White Rus') is mentioned in one place in the manuscript and Russia Alta (Upper Rus') in another. Because the geographical terminology of that time was not standardized, it is difficult to determine the precise meaning of these terms. It is possible that one of these versions is the result of a scribal error.

was a summary of his conclusions about the significance of the lunar eclipse of July 4, 1479, based on observations he had first made in the treatise on the solar eclipse of 1478. Of special interest is the information about the location of the moon during the eclipse. This treatise illustrates George Drohobyč's geographical knowledge. Many lands were mentioned: Armenia, Armenia Minor, Spain, England, Bohemia, Moravia, Dalmatia, Croatia, etc.¹³

From 1480 until 1482, George Drohobyč lectured on astronomy in Bologna while, at the same time, studying medicine. For the year 1481-1482 he was elected rector of artists and medics and lectured on medicine on feast days¹⁴.

On February 7, 1483, his only printed book *Iudicium prognosticon anni currentis* was published in Rome at the press of Eucharius Silber (Frank)¹⁵. This incunabulum is preserved in two copies. One is in the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow, Poland. The other belongs to the Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart, but is kept in the library of the Theological Faculty, University of Tübingen. George Drohobyč's knowledge of medieval Arabic scholarship is apparent in this book, too. The author to whom he referred most frequently was the above mentioned Arabic astronomer Abu Mashar al-Balkhi. Along with the usual astrological forecasts, George Drohobyč gave geographical information. He provided the geographical longitude of many towns including Drohobyč, L'viv, Moscow, and Vilna (Vilnius). In the poetic dedication to Pope Sixtus IV, he expressed the conviction that man could come to know the universe:

Et si semota est oculis dimensio caeli
Non tamen humano distat ab ingenio.

Not later than 1487, George Drohobyč returned to Cracow¹⁶. There he set up a medical practice, earning the honorary title of "royal physician"¹⁷, and also lectured on medicine and astronomy at the university. He found humanist tendencies among professors and students to be very strong during this second stay¹⁸. All the available evidence supports the hypothesis that Drohobyč/Kotermak, having visited Western European centers of humanist culture, had opportunities to meet such humanists as Callimachus and his milieu. Besides official lectures, George Drohobyč gave also informal lectures that were held in the student dormitories and paid for directly by the students. Humanists used this means in order to circumvent university authorities and teach the classics in a humanist spirit. In 1490, George Drohobyč wrote a treatise, *De significatione*

¹³ See Archivio di Stato, Milano, "Archivio Visconti-Sforzesco-Potenze Sovrane", Cart. 1569; also Gabotto 1890: 28.

¹⁴ Dallari 1888: 107, 112, and 115.

¹⁵ See *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, VII (Leipzig, 1938), Sp. 691, N. 9060; and Hellmann 1917: 213.

¹⁶ See Archives of the Metropolitan Consistory in Cracow, *Acta episcopalia*, III: 378.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, *Acta officialia*, XV: 83.

¹⁸ *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w latach 1364–1764*, I, Kraków 1964: 200.

*eclipsium*¹⁹. Unlike in other works of his where he applied laws of astrology to predict specific events, in this treatise he attempted to set forth a general theory for evaluating the effects of eclipses.

During the years of George Drohobyč's tenure in Cracow, both Nicholas Copernicus and the German poet-humanist Conrad Celtes were students at the university²⁰. They studied under George's colleague Wojciech Brudzewski and probably heard Drohobyč's lectures as well. The assumption that the young Copernicus knew George Drohobyč is very likely to be true, since Copernicus studied astronomy before he arrived in Cracow under Nicholas Abstemius (Wodka) who had studied simultaneously with George Drohobyč in Bologna. Celtes may also have known of Drohobyč before arriving in Cracow, since he met with Hartmann Schedel in Nuremberg. Quite possibly it is due to the influence of George Drohobyč that Conrad Celtes became interested in the first Cyrillic books published at the Cracow press of Schweipolt Fiol.

From a note in a Cracow incunabulum found in the Jagiellonian Library, it is known that George Kotermak died on February 4, 1493 at approximately 11:00 P.M.

Since the 17th century, several lists of *rettori e lettori* were published in Bologna, and since the 1830s *Georgius de Drohobicz* was mentioned in the studies on the University of Cracow. His only printed book was listed as late as 1898 in an above mentioned catalogue of antiquarian firm²¹. The general catalogue of incunabula records two its copies: one is in the library of Cracow University and another belongs to the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek but is permanently kept in the collection of Theological Faculty, University Würzburg. The first fully scholarly article combining various types of sources devoted to George Drohobyč (archival records, manuscripts and imprints) was published by the Polish historian and philologist A. Birkenmajer²² and the first article devoted entirely to Drohobyč's printed book (at least first known to me) was produced by the Ukrainian historian Ivan Krevec'kyj (Krevec'kyj 1932).

Since then many short popular essays were published in Ukrainian periodicals and even in some textbooks. Unfortunately, most of their authors misread and exaggerated my assertions and honored Georgius as a great Ukrainian scholar. These publications resulted, finally, in the erection of the monument to a "famous fellow-countryman" in the centre of Drohobyč. So, by now Jurij Drohobyč has become one of the symbols for the desire of contemporary Ukrainians to adhere to the common European heritage. On the other hand, some historians of medicine and journalists, mostly in Moscow and St. Petersburg, began to popularize the idea that a scholar from Galicia was "the first Russian doctor of medicine".

Despite the growing publicity around his name, there are only three books devoted to George Drohobyč. In 1968 my book *Юрій Дрогобич* was printed by

¹⁹ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS 7443c, folios 309v-333v.

²⁰ Zwiercan 1993: 67-84.

²¹ *Bücherkatalog XVI: Enthaltendes seltene und wertvolle Bücher*, München 1898.

²² Birkenmajer 1926: 18, 19, 21, 40, 41, 45, 60-62, 113, 129.

the publishing house "Molod'" specialized in literature for youth. On the editor's request I included several fictional heroes into the part devoted to his childhood and youth, but at the end of the book there was included a "List of Biographical Events" based entirely on documentary sources. As late as 1986 Mrs Haissa Pessina Longo sent a letter to the rector of the L'viv university asking him to deliver some information on Jurij Drohobyč, confessing that she knows about him only from the *Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia* (!) When her book published by the Bologna University Press two years later (Pessina Longo 1988) reached me, I discovered that her text and even illustrations with a single exception were 'borrowed' from my book of 1968. The exception consists of three fragments of the timetables of lectures (*i rotuli*) referring to George Drohobyč; one of those *rotuli* was already fully reproduced in my book. There was no mention of my name except the title of one article which the author had not seen because she did not mention the title of the periodical where it had been published. The number of factual mistakes was enormous.

Finally, facsimile reproductions of Drohobyč's astrological treatises, and their misread Latin texts accompanied by totally erroneous translations into Russian and/or Ukrainian were published in 2001 in Drohobyč and with the identical text in 2002 in Xarkiv²³. The compiler, Dr. Valerii Vandyšev claims in his comments that Jurij Drohobyč was a great thinker because using only astrological methods he discovered rules by which God governs the world. These two publications were ignored by the academic community but unfortunately they contributed to the further mythologizing of Drohobyč's image.

Although born in Ukraine, George Drohobyč worked almost all his life abroad. Yet his writings did reach Ukraine. In the so-called Xolm manuscript²⁴, there is an astrological article that corresponds literally to a paragraph of George Drohobyč's 1490 treatise. This article is a Ukrainian translation of George Drohobyč's Latin text or, less probably, is based on a common source.

University of Bologna had (and has) many famous professors, who contributed greatly to the development of world culture and scholarship. The hero of my essay certainly does not belong to them. He taught astronomy and medicine in the Studio Bolognese but was not at all an eminent scholar. On the contrary, he was rather a rank-and-file representative of the late Quattrocento scholarship. The University of Bologna had thousands scholars at his level and perhaps hundreds who were much more brilliant but are not so popular in Ukraine as Giorgio di Drohobyč. Still, for contemporary Ukrainians, Jurij Drohobyč became famous for two reasons: because he was the first known author from Ukraine of a printed boo and because he was elected for a year as rector. His career as well as careers of some his fellow-countrymen illustrate the various ways of spreading of West European and Arabic scholarship in Eastern Europe.

²³ Vandyšev 2002.

²⁴ Paslavs'kyj 1983: 104. Though found in Xolm at the end of the sixteenth century, Dr. Paslavs'kyj assumes that it was probably copied at the Academy of Ostrih, the first Ukrainian institution of higher education.

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