

**Polish Reflections: The Reception of the Defeat of  
Athens in the Works of Gottfried Ernst Groddeck and  
Joachim Lelewel**

Maciej Junkiert

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# KTÈMA

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## Polish Reflections: The Reception of the Defeat of Athens in the Works of Gottfried Ernst Groddeck and Joachim Lelewel

**ABSTRACT**–. This article describes how the Polish intellectuals G.E. Groddeck (1763–1825) and Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861) referenced and analysed events connected with the fall of Athens in the Peloponnesian War. It aims to show how treatments of ancient Athens changed after 1795, when the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to be an independent country and disappeared from the map of Europe. This transition resulted in the promotion of Greek history as a model for Poland’s modern national identity, but only in the period after Poland had already been defeated. The defeat of Athens was therefore a topic of great interest for Polish scholarship, and scholars such as Groddeck and Lelewel disagreed fundamentally about its significance for Poland in this situation.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**–. Der Artikel zeichnet nach, wie die polnischen Intellektuellen G.E.Groddeck und Joachim Lelewel politische Geschehnisse analysierten, die sie mit Athens Niederlage im Peloponnesischen Krieg verknüpften. Anhand dieser Beispiele kann die Veränderung im Umgang mit dem antiken Athen gezeigt werden, die in der polnischen Literatur und Kultur nach 1795 erfolgte, nachdem die Königliche Republik der polnischen Krone und des Großfürstentums Litauen ihre Unabhängigkeit verloren hatte und von der europäischen Landkarte verschwunden war. So erklärt sich der Übergang hin zur Interpretation der griechischen Geschichte als eines Modells für Polens nationale Identität in der Moderne, allerdings erst, nachdem Polen bereits besiegt war. Die Niederlage Athens war somit von hohem Interesse für die polnische Wissenschaft, und Gelehrte wie Groddeck und Lelewel bewerteten ihre Bedeutung für die neue Situation Polens grundlegend verschieden.

### I. GRODDECK, LELEWEL, AND THE FALL OF POLAND IN THE LATE–18TH CENTURY

Polish independence ended in 1795 when the ‘third partition’ took place. At this time, Russia, Prussia, and Austria absorbed Polish territory and gained control over all peoples residing there. Immediately afterward, members of the intellectual elite attempted to explain how one should react to the dissolution of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, a multinational nation with a unique political system that was related to the solutions of Roman republicanism.

Two tendencies appeared. Members of the older generation who had fought for Polish independence and were acutely affected by the fall of their own country and its ensuing political degradation usually attempted to express their despair at the loss of their country and disbelief in what had happened. Like the protagonists of this paper, their representations of difficult questions about the future of Poland echoed classical authors and themes. Unlike the protagonists of this paper, many were forced to abandon writing and to undertake different forms of activity, especially

in the face of oppressive policies that were discriminatory towards the nobility.<sup>1</sup> A contrasting attitude was represented by the generation which did not remember Polish independence, or remembered it only partially and incompletely. Representatives of this new generation openly expressed eagerness to renew the fight at any price, including the happiness of their families or their own lives.

This paper focusses on two important intellectuals who attempted to address the historical situation of Poland in this period by means of recalling the history and literature of ancient Greeks. One of them, Groddeck, was a classical philologist, the other, Lelewel, was a historian who was interested both in classical antiquity and in the history of western Slavic areas.

Gottfried Ernst Groddeck (1763–1825) was German, although he was born in Gdańsk, a multi-ethnic harbour city on the Baltic Sea with a complex history and intense relationships with the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, to which it had belonged since 1457. Owing to its role as a major trading port, Gdańsk was a city with numerous tax privileges and far-reaching independence from the Polish royalty. Groddeck himself descended from a noble family with scholarly traditions. Very early on, he gave evidence of his unusual talents, owing to which he decided to study in Göttingen after graduating from high school in Gdańsk. He studied theology and philology, and attended the famous seminars of Christian Gottlob Heyne. Despite his German origins and German education, Groddeck spoke Polish, as did his entire family, a fact which displayed their deep attachment to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. This attachment probably explains why he accepted the position of home teacher to the sons of Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734–1823) once he had finished his doctoral thesis.<sup>2</sup> He took up residence in Puławy, a town that was in those times an important intellectual and artistic centre of the Czartoryski family, who were in favour of the idea that Poland should cooperate with Russia. In 1804 he became a professor of philology at the rebuilt Vilnius University.

It should be emphasised that both the estate in Puławy and the university in Vilnius were key institutions of Polish culture and education. After the first partition, the Czartoryski family had supported important Polish writers and intellectuals and taken to collecting historical artefacts which documented the centuries-old history of Poland, aiming to preserve the diverse character of the Polish heritage. When the Russian Tzar appointed Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, the son of Prince Adam Kazimierz, custodian of the Vilnius educational district, he compelled the reformed college to comply in every detail with the model set by German enlightenment universities.<sup>3</sup> Groddeck, educated in Göttingen, was therefore well-suited for the projects of the wealthy aristocratic family.<sup>4</sup>

Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861) was Groddeck's student. Groddeck taught him the contemporary methods of historical research, read his thesis, and continued to offer guidance until Lelewel reached research independence. Lelewel then became a professor at the universities in Vilnius and Warsaw. Lelewel's family was from France, but they were forced to leave it after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. They moved to Austria and later to the northern-eastern parts of Poland. As Lelewel himself emphasised, his family had chosen Polish identity and nationality. Lelewel's father

(1) On this issue see PRZYBYLSKI 1983.

(2) Groddeck's doctoral dissertation remains a point of discussion, though the prevalent opinion is that he was awarded the title on the basis of *De Hymnorum Homericorum reliquiis commentatio* from 1786. See ROTHE 2014, p. 2. About Groddeck's works see also SZANTYR 1937; MEŻYŃSKI 1974.

(3) See BEAUVOIS 1977.

(4) When Groddeck began working in Vilnius it was a university without classical philology. The task of the German scholar was to build the syllabus from scratch, as well as to collect appropriate staff and library resources.

obtained Polish knighthood in 1768; according to the son, this was an important turning point in the lives of the Polonised family.<sup>5</sup>

Lelewel's life and work is divided into two parts. On the one hand, he tried to analyse Slavic and Polish history. On the other hand, he engaged in patriotic activity. After taking part in the November Uprising (1830–1831), which was an attempt to end Poland's dependency on Russia, the Russians threatened him with prosecution and he was forced to flee Poland. He emigrated to Brussels and was considered an important figure of the emerging democratic left, which championed the rebirth of a Poland that would not be monarchical or class-based, as before the partitions.

## II. THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ROMANTIC POSITIONS AFTER THE FALL OF POLAND

Groddeck and Lelewel differing decisions illustrate the choices of the two generations that were confronted with the necessity to redefine their opinions and attitudes in the face of the fall of Poland. The older and the younger scholar were similar in terms of their intellectual background and attitude to knowledge and education: The search for knowledge was their tool for widening the area of people's freedom, and they thought of education as the only way to create responsible citizens. Nevertheless, the fate of Poland set them a challenge which they answered in different ways.

Groddeck assumed that a change in the political situation, even a drastic one, should not influence his research aims and didactic methods. Research and teaching were his invariable priorities. The younger Lelewel was of a more romantic opinion. He understood both research and teaching as patriotic tasks. His search for knowledge about the oldest history of the Poles aimed at making students aware of how their ancestors had dealt with the problems of their country and played a role in the history of Europe. His analysis of Poland emphasised the politic and social factors that lead to its fall, especially serfdom and the forced labour of peasants for the nobility. Thus, while Groddeck remained a representative of the Enlightenment till the end of his days, Lelewel became a patron of the birth of the romantic movement in Poland.

The difference of opinion that arose between such representatives of the two generations is referred to as the conflict between the classicists and the romanticists. Seen in a wider European perspective, it is another form of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. After the earlier Italian and the French versions of the *querelle*, late 18th and early 19th century intellectuals reevaluated the role of ancient authorities in the shaping of modern aesthetic and cultural questions.<sup>6</sup> German philosophers, especially Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel were important for the Polish reception of this reevaluation, particularly in respect to their emphasis on the model offered by ancient Greece.<sup>7</sup> According to Anthony Andurand:

[...] Ce n'est que dans les années 1790, en réaction à la Révolution française, que le mythe grec européen fait place à un mythe grec *allemand*, spécifiquement national, fondé sur l'idée d'un rapport particulier entre Grecs anciens et Allemands modernes. Si la Révolution française avait cherché ses références et ses modèles surtout dans l'Antiquité romaine, l'Allemagne faisait, elle, dans le sillage de Winckelmann et par l'intermédiaire de Humboldt, le choix de la Grèce.<sup>8</sup>

The so-called *Griechenmythos* that emerged in Germany in the first two decades of the 19th century was important in Polish culture because it referred to the Greek road to perfection as the ability to

(5) See ZAWADZKA 2013, p. 89–91.

(6) See FUMAROLI 2001, p. 24–27.

(7) See JAUSS 1970 and CIECHANOWSKA 1924/1925.

(8) See ANDURAND 2013, p. 49.

adapt, and could therefore become an operative point of reference for Polish artists and the larger Polish nation. This was particularly the case as there were some similarities between Germany and Poland in regard to their relationship to classical antiquity. Since the late Middle Ages the ancient traditions had constituted an integral part of the Polish culture and politics. Especially Latin as the language of the noble elites was valued. Moreover, some Polish state institutions related directly to the Roman tradition of republicanism. However, the fall of Poland had triggered a crisis of the attachment to *latinitas*, so that, like the members of the German elite described by Andurand, the Polish elite was turning away from Rome in search of new models for an emerging national identity. The Polish turn toward ancient Greece thus mirrored German interest in the *Griechenmythos*. Crucially, according to Andurand, Polish intellectuals and artists focused on the early “European” version of this myth.

### III. UNDERSTANDING GREECE IN POST-PARTITION POLAND

In post-partition Poland, Greek antiquity was understood either as a period characterized by the existence of free and competitive individuals who broadened the horizons of their artistic creativity (understood as the romanticist way after Winckelmann) or as a reservoir of eternal aesthetic and political norms which were negative towards revolutionary changes that might undermine the social order in the name of an uncertain fight for independence (an attitude derived from French classicism, and reinforced by the experience of the Enlightenment in Poland).<sup>9</sup>

These differing approaches to classical antiquity are reflected in the work of Lelewel and Groddeck. Lelewel looks at antiquity from the perspective of emerging romanticism in Poland, whereas Groddeck’s approach is more cautious and conservative. Groddeck discussed his opinions on studying ancient literatures and languages in *Programme du cours de littérature ancienne à l’Université* (1810), which was a recapitulation of his first years of work and also of an earlier and much more theoretical publication called *Briefe über das Studium der alten Literatur* (1800).

According to Groddeck, studying antiquity helps to promote human freedom and maturity. First, getting to know the ancient cultures helps the student to experience the early history of mankind. When students analyse ancient texts, they experience the difference between the beginning of history and the present. Second, the effort required to study antiquity favours the mobilisation and perfection of the students’ intellect. Third, the accumulated knowledge and the thoughts revolving around it encourage human creativity and inventiveness, so that analysis of the past creates new ideas, concepts, and works. The study of the ancient world thus becomes useful for social life, but only indirectly.

Lelewel defined the applicability of studying ancient history differently, and also defined human freedom differently. Ancient history was for him an illustration of the development of freedom among different nations. He described this approach in the theoretical *Historyka tudzież O łatwym i pożytecznym nauczaniu historii* (*History or On the easy and Useful Teaching of History*, 1815). According to his view, the Greeks had achieved the greatest development of human freedom. This scholarly direction responded to the political situation: during his lectures, Lelewel talked about the

(9) Cf. J. Axer: “In the early nineteenth century, German Neohumanism began to dominate the region’s reflections on antiquity. Its characteristic philhellenism harmonized with Romanticism. Hybrid forms of the reception of antiquity emerged, stemming from new stimuli merging with domesticated Latin culture, which reached deep into social structures, and with French elite culture.”

historical freedom of ancient nations to Poles who had lost their freedom. It was a painful topic, but of great importance for the young and patriotic students.

As Jerzy Axer wrote:<sup>10</sup>

In western European literature, art, and journalism, the classical tradition consolidated the positive attitude of the citizens toward their state and strengthened its position in disputes with other powers (e.g., “Latin” France vs. “Hellenic” Germany). In central–eastern Europe, antiquity served to express attitudes of indifference or hostility toward foreign authority.<sup>11</sup>

Axer’s scholarship addresses complex issues that cannot be addressed here, however certain bases should be mentioned. On the one hand, the rebirth of the fascination with Greece which took place in Germany was also a discovery for Polish writers and intellectuals. On the other hand, the advent of romanticism assumed a break with the parroting of ancient authorities and subsequent followers. Thus, Polish romanticists took over the German delight with Greek art and literature but they made sure that the fascination did not conflict with their appeals for originality in artistic expression. Moreover, for Polish intellectuals, the classical tradition had a political use. However painful they may have been for the discussants or the audience, discussions of the ancient traditions were relatively safe, serving as a code that allowed intellectuals to communicate with the readers or listeners without attracting the attention of the censor. This is one reason why antiquity appears in both Groddeck’s and especially Lelewel’s lectures and research. While Groddeck treated ancient Greece as an important topic for the world of research and as a means of educating young people, for Lelewel ancient Greece was only a vehicle for commenting on contemporary reality. This is why his lectures in Warsaw and Vilnius attracted large crowds of people who were not so much interested in the distant past as about the relation between the old freedom and its lack in the present.

#### IV. POLAND, GREECE, AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

According to Axer, the end of Polish independence triggered changes in the paradigm that governed Polish attitudes towards antiquity. The necessity to create the Polish nation as an *imagined community* redefined these attitudes and made them evolve faster. The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth had been a political commonwealth in which a variety of nations and religions were represented. After the fall of the country, the processes owing to which this multinational political commonwealth was superseded by a monoethnic community became more powerful. The Poles searched for new historical paradigms in the history, paradigms that would allow them to verbalise their belief in Polish national identity. Athens took the place of Rome in the imagination of the elite, and Poland appeared as the new Greece, though only temporarily. Thus the importance of the German *Griechenmythos*. Polish artists and intellectuals were watching closely the creation of the German *Kulturnation* and wondering whether national consolidation was not possible for Poland, as well. Though they had lost their country, they nevertheless tried to rebuild their identity on the basis of the language, literature and the fascination with a broadly understood folk culture.<sup>12</sup>

Classical models were also important, however. A good example of a person who found Polish identity by referring to ancient models can be found in the works of Kazimierz Brodziński, a poet, literary critic and theoretician, who was connected with the German language and culture since his

(10) A synthetic description of Axer’s views can be found in: AXER 2010.

(11) *Ibidem*, p. 150–151. See also KALINOWSKA 2013.

(12) Cf. JUNKIERT 2013, 2014.



early years.<sup>13</sup> In 1818 Brodziński initiated a dispute between the classicists and the romantics in Poland. The ‘classics’ included ancient Greeks and Romans and also French culture. The romantics referenced the Middle Ages and the German culture. Brodziński defined the basic difficulty for the Poles. To parrot one side of this dispute and decide in favour of either French or German models would be a trap. Brodziński appealed for Poles to search out a Slavic originality that was independent from alien ideals. However, his ideal of Slavic attachment to folk culture, freedom and life according to nature was actually modelled on German neohumanism and philhellenism.

Brodziński used a carefully planned strategy to avoid mentioning the sources of his thoughts or their adaptation to the conditions of the Polish political and social life, in order not to seem to be promoting foreign models, but rather representing the distinctive way in which the Polish “spirit” should evolve. The *Griechenmythos* played an important role in his imagined Polish community. Shunning the Roman model, he strove to verify whether the Polish, like the Germans, could play the role of “modern Greeks”.<sup>14</sup>

#### V. POLAND AND FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL

Schlegel had an especially important influence on the Polish reception of antiquity. Schlegel belonged to the most avidly read German thinkers and he played an immense role in the shaping of early Romanticist aesthetics in Polish literature.<sup>15</sup> In Schlegel’s view, only three events in the history of ancient Greece deserved to be called decisive. The conflict with Persia allowed the Greeks to believe in their own political power and independence. The Peloponnesian War broke the power of the Hellenes, who turned against themselves mainly due to the destructive conflicts between the Athenians and the Dorians, who included the Spartans and their allies. Towards the end, Alexander the Great’s campaigns popularised Greek literature and language over extensive lands in Asia. The magnificence of Greek history, as Schlegel repeats after Winckelmann, was possible owing to the full and unhampered freedom that had engendered cultural originality and greatness.

Schlegel’s teachings decidedly favoured Athens over Sparta. In Schlegel’s view, Athens did not lose the Peloponnesian War to Sparta. Instead, the Athenians defeated themselves due to a lack of control over the devastating intellectual forces which blew Athens apart from the inside. Schlegel referred mainly to the activity of the Sophists, but the main message was crucial. The defeats suffered by Athens cannot be viewed as a historical catastrophe, since they were inflicted by the Athenians themselves.<sup>16</sup> Although a temptation to perceive similarities between Polish history and the fate of Athens surfaced soon after partition, Polish writers, scientists and thinkers initially hesitated to adopt Schlegel’s views: they were afraid to affirm that the reason for Poland’s problems potentially resided in the country itself. However, several decades later influential historians, including Lelewel, explained Poland’s fall along these lines: like Athens, Poland had defeated itself.

Groddeck also worked toward Schlegel’s view that Athens had defeated itself, but the process took over 30 years. Two of his works should be mentioned. An early book comparing ancient and

(13) Brodziński belonged to the first generation who began their education in post-partition Poland in which in fact Poland did not exist any longer. The future soldier in Napoleon’s army and later university professor began his education in schools in which the Polish language was only used during religion classes: all other subjects were taught in German or Latin. The young poet knew none of these languages before he started school.

(14) See FUHRMANN 1979; RÜEGG 1985; LANDFESTER 1996; BRUHNS 2005; ANDURAND 2013. On the culture of classical studies in Germany in the 19th Century, see MOST 2001, p. V–XII; MARCHAND 1996.

(15) Cf. MUHLACK 2011; SÜSSMANN 2012; MORLEY 2014; MEISTER 2013.

(16) See Rood in this volume on Plato’s *Menexenus*, which is an important source for the idea that the Athenians defeated themselves.

contemporary literature,<sup>17</sup> written in 1788, immediately after starting working for the Czartoryski family, and a synthesis of the history of Greek literature,<sup>18</sup> whose final version was edited in 1821, some years before the death of the philologist.

In his early work, Groddeck surprisingly assumed that no historical event from Homer to Lucian of Samosata required particular rethinking. As also in Schlegel's early works, Groddeck described Greek history as a thousand-year period of greatness marked by literary and intellectual achievements, to which he compared the unimportant achievements of contemporary German literature. In his view, the Greek intellectual achievement was beyond comparison:

Wo aber auch ein Volk, das unter den mannigfaltigsten politischen Revolutionen, in einem gleich langen Zeitraum von wenigstens tausend Jahren, eine so ununterbrochene Reihe von außerordentlichen Menschen aus seiner Mitte hervorgehen ließ, die nicht allein durch ihre Taten, sondern auch und fast noch mehr durch die in ihren Schriften aufgestellten unsterblichen Denkmale ihres Geistes, die bewunderten Lehrer, Beispiele und Muster für alle kommenden, der Kultur sich entfaltenden, Geschlechter wurden.<sup>19</sup>

For Groddeck, the centuries-old durability of the Greek culture is the antonym of the German culture which is not resistant to even the slightest intellectual or philosophical novelty. The best example of the degeneration of German literature under the influence of philosophy was the popularity of Kant and his students. In this aspect Groddeck represented a group of German university elite which opposed the new philosophy and, as a consequence, a new vision of the society, education, and culture.

In contrast, Groddeck's textbook of 1821 gave Athens defeat by Sparta an immense role. Here he wanted to show the history of the Greek literature in accordance with the already prevailing historicism:

Historia Graecorum et Romanorum *litteraria*, artium ac doctrinarium, apud utramque gentem sermone scriptivae traditarum, exponit *initia, processus, incrementia, regressus, defectum*, additis causis, quibus quaeque ex alio in aliud vicissitudine atque mutatio effecta sit [...].<sup>20</sup>

Such a plan for the history of literature, which compares the fate of cultures to living organisms could not avoid Athens as the place where Greek culture flourished to its greatest extent, and therefore could not avoid the fall of Athens in the Peloponnesian war. He referred to the fall as the key turning point that divided the era of Greek greatness from the period of decline and slow downfall. His description of the career of Aristophanes furnishes an example:

*Aristophanes*, civis Atheniensis, veteris Comoediae princeps, belli Peloponnesiaci maxime temporibus floruit: quo profligato, et populari reip. Atheniensis forma in paucorum dominationem, a Lacedaemone victore constitutam, abeunte, vetus in mediam transitit comoedia; unde ad utramque vulgo refertur. [...] Sed exstant fecundissimi ingenii aeterna monumenta, fabulae Aristophaneae, quasi adeat, quicunque Athenarum, qualis tunc erat, statum, popularis regiminis effrenatam licentiam, civium perditissimorum mores corruptos, potentiorum flagitia, arrogantiam, avaritiam, fraudes, Sophistarum vaniloquentiam ac disciplinam perniciosissimam, plebis insanientis summam levitatem et inconstantiam [...].<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, since he believed that European culture since the Greeks had not equalled the Greek achievement, for him the fall of Athens ended the era of cultural greatness not only of Greek civilisation, but of Europe as a whole, forever. Groddeck understood Europe before and after the fall of Athens as two different civilisations.

(17) GRODDECK 1788.

(18) GRODDECK 1821.

(19) *Ibidem*, p. 5.

(20) *Ibidem*, p. 1.

(21) *Ibidem*, p. 168.

Groddeck's main task at the university was to teach future junior high school teachers in Polish schools, and he seems to have understood teaching about ancient literature to his students as a mission. He argued that ancient Greeks developed knowledge and skills with which they strengthened human nobility and sagacity—until the fall of Athens. Thanks to classical education, the Poles could belong to this earlier Mediterranean civilization. He thus assumed the role of antiquarian and depositor of the Greek greatness. This is where I notice a difference between the opinions of Groddeck and Humboldt. For Groddeck, knowledge about antiquity was not taught in order to shape characters and minds, but as knowledge for its own sake, knowledge that authenticates one's belonging to a particular civilisation—this is how Groddeck attempted to transfer the German model of education to Poland's universities, which were completely under Russian control.

In case of Joachim Lelewel, it is relevant to examine *Dzieje starożytne*<sup>22</sup>, a history of ancient Greece he prepared for his students in 1818. Among his sources we encounter key 18th century English and French Enlightenment historians, for instance John Gillies, William Mitford, and Charles Rollin. He was slightly less interested in Mitford, according to whom the democratic blindness of the Athenian masses caused the Peloponnesian War. Mitford had noticed a similar process in revolution-stricken France. As Jennifer Tolbert Roberts said:<sup>23</sup>

Greek and French politics cast light on the another, Mitford maintains, and show that neither state is alone in atrocity. Although the parallel Mitford draws between the tribunal of the Committee of Public Welfare in Paris and the Thirty Tyrants at Athens might seem at first to cast no shadow over the Athenian democracy, in fact Mitford [...] blames the democracy for the rise of the Thirty and sees Critias himself as the inevitable product of democratic excess. Not surprisingly, however, Mitford reached his conclusions about the evils of Athenian democracy prior to the revolution in France. Aware that readers might suppose his work to be influenced by the revolution, Mitford takes pains to assure them that his aversion to Athens is based entirely on the ancient evidence.<sup>24</sup>

Lelewel, by contrast, saw Athenian democracy in a positive light. When considering the differences between Athens and Sparta, he decided that the latter had the qualities of an ominous empire whose aim was to destroy the freedom of Athens. Lelewel looked for patterns in ancient history that would allow him to talk directly about contemporaneity and avoid the lurking danger of censorship. By means of reminding his readers of the character of these earlier powers, he figured Sparta and Rome as imperial Russia and Athens as a direct model of Poland.

It is worth retracing the character of Lelewel's historiographic narration on the example of two issues in the Spartan history. The first pertains to explaining Lycurgus' role in defining the Spartan system. The second refers to the characteristics of the reasons for the Peloponnesian War. Lelewel's ideas are best understood by comparing them to those of Rollin, the author of *Histoire ancienne*,<sup>25</sup> who reconstructed in a detailed way the importance of Lycurgus' activity for the fate of Sparta. Rollin appreciated the Spartan balance of power, effective and capable of quick action as a result of the experience and status of aristocracy, but also—thanks to the Ephorate—restrained by the citizens. Rollin also approved of the republican, that is, equalitarian, quality of Lycurgus' reforms: his limitations on the ominous influence of the desire for wealth and status, or the institution of respect for elders and an education model in which children belong more to the state than to their parents.

(22) LELEWEL 1966.

(23) ROBERTS 1994, p. 203–206.

(24) *Ibidem*, p. 205.

(25) About Rollin's works and his reception in France see GRELL 1995.

Rollin did not see Sparta as completely good, analysing the drawbacks of the Spartan system in order to eliminate them and adapt Spartan principles to contemporary politics, Rollin was decidedly opposed to the dehumanising aspects of the Spartan life: the killing of disabled children, lack of respect for the development of the human mind, and numerous slaves working for the benefit of the legal citizens. This aspect of Rollin's reflections is definitely anti-Spartan in character.<sup>26</sup>

Lelewel's views were quite different from Rollin's. He argued that exploitation and violence were the foundations of Sparta. He stigmatised the power of a state which was established to take away the freedom and life of others. Nothing could speak on its behalf. This was because for him and his readers, Sparta was identified with Russia.

In respect to the second issue, namely how to describe the causes of the Peloponnesian war we may refer to the contrast between Lelewel and another of his sources. In Gillies' work *The history of ancient Greece, its colonies and conquests; from the earliest accounts, till the division of the Macedonian empire in the East. Including the history of literature, philosophy, and the fine arts* (1786), which Lelewel knew thanks to the French translation, the reasons for the Peloponnesian War were analysed in accordance with Thucydides, and show the multifarious image of the conflict and the rivalry between Athens and Sparta. On the basis of the fates of Corcyra and Potidaea, Gillies described two parallel causes for the war. First, he described the increasing tension between the rivalling empires, Athens and Sparta. Second, he presented the process of reevaluating the traditional relations between the metropolis and its colonies. As a result of the accumulation of these processes, Hellas was headed toward the war without which Sparta would not be capable to stop Athens' increasing economic and political power. Its traditional influence was decreasing and its controversial attitude towards the conflict with Persia favoured the ongoing isolation of Sparta and its allies.<sup>27</sup>

Lelewel tended towards a similar view, but puts the figure of Pericles in the centre. Pericles was a great individual who answered for the success of the community. The Athenian democracy turned out to be sensitive to the loss of Periclean authority, without whom the people succumbed to the influence of the demagogues and the competing parties. Lelewel emphasised that the free and wonderful Athenian people, who were ready to undertake the boldest of challenges, thus became a ruthless ruler towards the rest of the Greek world.<sup>28</sup> Lelewel's contemporary reference is to the Polish political system, referred to as "noble's democracy". It had been to a similar extent sensitive to the competition between the different political factions which weakened the position of the king in the country. Thus, his description of the reasons for the fall of Athens could be interpreted as an analogy from the distant past which aptly described the causes of the catastrophe of the Polish state.

At the end, I would like to go back to the concealed source of Lelewel's work, that is, Schlegel. The Polish historian repeats Schlegel's argument about the ominous influence of the Sophists on the political and social life of Athens. Lelewel claims that:

The Sophists visited different Greek cities, they were received with hospitality in Athens. Their mouths ready for gain, smooth-spoken with persistent issues and syllogisms, proving contrary arguments, accepting both virtue and transgressions, nothing more serious or holy in human relations could be found that they did not taint with blasphemy.<sup>29</sup>

In Polish conditions, this statement, transferred nearly mechanically from the Viennese lectures, meant something entirely different than in the original Austrian context, since it refers to the period before partition when Polish governmental institutions had included a range of mechanisms

(26) See ROLLIN 1822.

(27) GILLIES 1787, chapter 15.

(28) According to Lelewel, "the Athenians were tyrannical" in relations to others. LELEWEL 1966, p. 132.

(29) *Ibidem*, p. 135.

that allowed the nobility to limit the king's executive power and the aristocracy's political influence. In the late 17th century these mechanisms led to Poland's final incapacitation, since the patriotic part of the nobility could not carry out reforms that had become necessary due to devastating wars and the economic situation of the country continuously worsened. In the eyes of his readership, the sophists from Lelewel's work became similar to the opposing aristocrats, whose selfish arguments and policies led to the fall of the country.

#### CONCLUSION

Groddeck and Lelewel's significance stems from the fact that each of them initiated a new understanding of classical philology and historiography. They remained important for a long time, since the increasing hostility of the occupying powers meant that their actions were not directly mimicked. Other researchers who could be equalled with them in terms of the level of research and talent appeared only in the second half of the 19th century. Their books were therefore for many decades basic reading for Poles who wanted to explore the fates and literatures of the ancient nations.

Lelewel's new approach to antiquity had therefore a significant influence. While Groddeck was convinced that knowledge of ancient literature allowed students to approach the human ideal, Lelewel treated the history of the Greeks as a source of knowledge about the present. Lelewel substituted Groddeck's academic distance for emotional engagement, and described the fall of Athens as a result of excessive freedom, especially freedom of speech, which was appropriated by a group of people who ignored the well-being of the entire country. Lelewel told the Poles: you were Athenians and before the defeat, you had an empire. However, he avoided expressing a clear answer to the question who they should be at present.

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