

# Case-Studies from Earliest Baltic Linguistics (16th Century)

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*Dar 1954-aisiais metais Giuliano Bonfante užsiminė, kad labai mažai turėtų stebinti tas faktas, jog baltų kalbų nėra seniausiuose Europos kalbų aprašymuose. Taip jau atsitiko, kad ankstesnių laikų filologai baltų kalbų nemokėjo ir ilgai jas ignoravo. Praėjus penkiasdešimčiai metų po Bonfante's teiginio, vadinamosios "premokslinės" kalbotyros (ir ypač Renesanso epochos paleokomparatyvizmo) tyrimai gerokai pasistūmėjo į priekį, išsiplėtė, tačiau baltistika nepateko į jų akiratį. Ankstesnių laikų sampratos bei teorijos apie baltų kalbas iki šiol netapo sistemiško mokslinio susidomėjimo objektu. Kadangi subrendęs mokslas negali neskirti dėmesio savo praeičiai, tai baltistikoje dabar jau yra padėti teoriniai pagrindai lingvistiniams istoriografiniams tyrimams. Toliau vertėtų atkreipti dėmesį į kai kurias šios specifinės lingvistikos šakos bruožus. Tokio pobūdžio tyrimams svarbiausias yra istoriografinis, o ne istorinis momentas; be to, jų prigimčiai būdinga orientuotis į teoriją, o ne į faktus. Šio straipsnio tikslas – rekonstruoti lingvistines baltų kalbų sampratas, vyravusias Humanizmo ir Renesanso epochose, didžiausią dėmesį skiriant Renesanso paleokomparatyvizmo periodui. Tuo metu apie baltų kalbų kilmę ir jų genealoginį priklausymą buvo paplitusiosios kelios lingvistinės sampratos: slaviškoji, romėniškoji ir "pusiaulotyniškoji", "keturių kalbų", ilyriškoji, graikiškoji (tik apie prūsų kalbą) ir dar kitos. Įdomiausia yra tai, kad visos šios sampratos "gyvavo" tuo pačiu metu. Dažnai daugelis autorių laikėsi ne vienos sampratos ir jas sąmoningai ar nesąmoningai sujungdavo.*



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## INTRODUCTION

The Lithuanians, Latvians (and many other historical and pre-historical stocks such as Curonians, Prussians, Jatvingians and many more) are called Balts. The Baltic languages are traditionally divided into West Baltic (essentially Prussian) and East Baltic (Lithuanian, Latvian and Curonian).

On the basis of intensified hydronymic investigation carried out during the last half century and that continues today, we are able to attribute to the Balts a huge prehistorical area of expansion and to put two other Baltic subgroups, the so-called Dnepr-Balts at the very east, and the so-called Pomerania-Balts at the far west of the prehistorical Baltic area.

Only after 1845 was the name *Baltic* given by the scholar Max Nesselman to this Indo-European family of languages. The Baltic languages belong to the Indo-European language family (i.e. the group including Germanic, Slavic, Greek, Italic, Celtic and so on). With a few exceptions, the first texts written in Lithuanian, Latvian and Old Prussian date from the mid-16th century when some (more often than not Lutheran) Catechisms were translated into these languages.

The Baltic languages as a whole are an interesting group within the Indo-European family of languages. As a matter of fact, in spite of their relatively recent attestation, these languages are very archaic, i.e. they conserve old linguistic forms, and therefore deserve the attention of historical linguists.

This is the general background to be kept in mind when reading this chapter, which focuses on some case-studies on the very first phase of Baltic Linguistics. It is interesting to see which theories on these languages were generally known and circulating in Europe even before the first printed texts in a Baltic language appeared.

Accordingly I intend to deal with three aspects and to answer at least three questions: first, what kind of investigation are we going to carry out? Second, what kind of linguistic interest prevailed during the 16th century for this European region? Third, are we able to present some case-studies to illustrate the state-of-the-art in that century? Finally I shall attempt to draw some general conclusions.

## INVESTIGATION

The first is a methodological question: what kind of investigation are we going to carry out? Baltic Linguistic Historiography is obviously only a part of a more general inquiry on the theme of Linguistic Historiography. This specific field of linguistics devotes itself, within Baltic Linguistics, to historiographic (and not to historical) research. It is probably appropriate to repeat the well-known formula that Linguistic Historiography does not write the history of a language but the history of linguistic ideas. It is therefore necessary first to distinguish between Linguistic Historiography and History of Languages: this difference is based on the distinction that exists between historiography and history. The main interest of Linguistic Historiography is in theories on languages.

During the last fifty years or so, much progress has been made in the study of the history of so-called pre-scientific linguistics, including Renaissance Paleocomparativism. There is a clear and useful tendency to broaden research in this sector. But the Baltic field has remained neglected. As Giuliano Bonfante said: “Both Dante and Rodericus distinguish themselves for their almost total ignorance concerning eastern Europe – neither of them seems to know anything about any of the three Russian languages, not to speak of Baltic languages or of the many others to the east of these”. This statement is still valid today, for within the area of Baltic studies itself the inquiry into linguistic conceptions and theories (particularly those of Renaissance Paleocomparativism) is still rather uncommon.

## METALINGUISTICS

This second question is metalinguistic. How did the linguists of the 16th century reflect on languages?

To answer such a question it is necessary to keep in mind that an inquiry that intends to move in this direction must face some problems of a different kind. For instance, one frequently finds oneself forced to work with very little informative material, or even sometimes with fantasies (not to speak of “errors”) passed on by authors of past centuries, who could not have a clear knowledge of the ethno-linguistic characteristics of the Balts. But errors and fantasies constitute a part of knowledge and science and hence must not be excluded from our inquiry. Moreover, because of the lack of literature it is often necessary to work directly on sources that are written in Latin, German, Ruski-Ruthenian, Polish, Italian and sometimes in other languages as well.

These ideas concerned principally the genealogical relations among the languages and were widespread during the 16th century.

## CASE STUDIES

The third question may be answered very differently. Already during the 16th century the Baltic languages became an object of interest not only in Eastern, but also in Western Europe.

More than one linguistic theory was in circulation during that century. In the following part of this chapter I shall deal with some of them: the Slav Theory, the Roman Myth and the related Roman Theory, the Greek Theory and the Fourfold Theory (*linguagium Lithuanicum Quadripartitum*). Thus, I shall present and comment on the reciprocal relationships between the different ideas on the Baltic languages. In this sense this chapter is a report on the earliest stage of Baltic linguistics from a historiographical point of view.

## THE SLAV THEORY

It is useful to start with the linguistic theory that I call the Slav Theory. This theory of the Baltic languages was very popular in Western Europe during all this century and even later. It found its first and greatest theoretician in Æneas Sylvius de’ Piccolomini, even before he became pope Pius II. Although Æneas Sylvius was not mainly interested in linguistic description, the importance of his work for the diffusion of ethnic, geographic and also linguistic information on the Eastern Baltic area in Italy (and in the whole of Europe during the Renaissance) was remarkable and lasting.

Æneas Sylvius was laconic with regard to the Baltic languages; he mentions neither the Lithuanians nor Lithuanian, but he does speak of Lithuania as a territory and as a state. The language of its population is thus defined: “Sermo gentis Sclavonicus est; latissima est enim haec lingua et in varias divisa sectas”. This brief phrase contains at least three important pieces of information: first, the language of the population of Lithuania is conceived as a Slav language (*Sermo... Sclavonicus*); second, the linguistic space of this language is very extensive (*latissima... lingua*); third, this language appears divided in itself (*lingua... in varias divisa sectas*) or rather it is linguistically heterogeneous.

With this last sentence Æneas Sylvius probably wanted to emphasise the great polyglossy that existed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. But according to his ideas, all those languages belonged to the Slav family. Piccolomini’s view greatly influenced several other contemporary and subsequent authors.

To complete the picture, I should mention that a reaction against the linguistic ideas inaugurated by Æneas Sylvius de' Piccolomini, who always considered the Baltic languages as belonging to the Slav group, is found for the first time at the end of the 16th century in the work *Polonia* (published in Bologna in 1574) by Crassinius (his real name was Jan Krasinski). In this book Crassinius stated quite clearly: "valdè mihi erraffe videntur illi, qui Lithuanos omnes Slauonica lingua vti scripserunt". And some lines after that: "Verùm quidem est nobiliores viros Polonicum, & Roxolanicum sermonem vsurpare; sed plebs peculiare Lithuanicum idioma habet". So Crassinius introduced a sort of sociolinguistic division: the aristocracy speaks a Slav language (Polish or Ruski), but the common people uses a unique Lithuanian language. It is worth noting that this conception – that one has to listen to the language spoken by common people in order to get an idea of the characteristics of the Lithuanian language – had success during this century and even later.

I must add here something more on the topic of the Slav Theory, to stress that the reaction against Crassinius' theory was not successful. On the contrary, the Slav Theory remained quite strong and spread further over a long period of time, although it was mixed in various ways or contaminated with the so-called Illyric Theory. Here one can probably distinguish the earliest embryo of the so-called Baltic-Slav problem. But that is another matter.

In the intellectual circles of western Europe the Slav Theory was the most widespread linguistic idea concerning the Baltic languages. A completely different situation can be seen instead in eastern Europe, where other theories were very widespread and associated with linguistic considerations. I shall discuss the Myth of the Roman origin of the Lithuanians (which includes references to the so-called Palemonas legend) and the linguistic ideas of Jan Długosz.

## THE ROMAN MYTH

It is generally little known that the Lithuanians should also be included within the multitude of peoples that during the Renaissance traced their ancestry back to Rome to give lustre to their origins. Better known is the typology of the cultural operation underlying such an appeal: typical of the 16th century, in western as well as in eastern Europe, it answered the demand, differently perceived, of emancipation and ennoblement of languages and nations. Mythical events are common to all versions of the story: a group of Romans guided by a leader variously named in the sources, left Italy to escape persecution by the government. Those Romans eventually found themselves, in their wanderings, navigating on the waters of the Baltic sea. They then entered the mouth of the river Nemunas and went up the river up to a place they liked and where they decided to stay. It is from that group of Romans that the stocks of Prussians and Lithuanians originated.

It is on this myth, widespread among Lithuanian humanists, that the so-called Palemonas Legend is based, i.e. the myth of Lithuanians' and Prussians' Roman origin. The sources of the myth, however, also recur among Polish historians (such as Długosz, Miechovita, Guagnino, Strykowski), but the legend played a major role particularly in the theorization of the Vilnius Latinizers.

## THE ROMAN THEORY

In the second book of his *Historiae Polonicae* – a work which greatly influenced the other historians of the Polish humanist circle – Jan Długosz mentions three stocks and three Baltic languages (pre-

cisely, Prussian, Jatvingian and Lithuanian with Samogitian), but other stocks and/or languages are not mentioned. Długosz does not consider these languages to be at all related to the Slav, and the two groups are treated separately. According to his thinking, the three languages mentioned were also different among themselves with respect to the pronunciation of some sounds, but they were similar insofar as many words were similar. He wrote that those peoples: “in (pro)latione pronuntiatione verborum differunt... Nihilominus in multis [verbis] conveniunt”. There seems to be a phonetic difference but a lexical concordance.

The Polish historian's main concern was, however, was that of the reciprocal relations between the three Baltic languages, although there are uncertainties or incoherencies in his thought. A further quotation from Długosz is especially enlightening. He wrote: “Non unius tamen stirpis et linguae fuisse aestimantur: sed Pruthenis alia fertur fuisse, quam Lithuanis et Samagitis, origo”. On the one hand Długosz indicates that in the past there was a certain community between Prussians and Lithuanians (excluding the Jatvingians), while on the other hand he adopts the opinion that the ethnic and linguistic origins of the Prussians and of the Lithuanians/Samogitians were different. Another quotation deals with the differences within the Baltic languages. Specifically with regard to Prussian Długosz wrote: “Pruthenorum gens... speciale habens idioma, a Latino tamen aliquantulum derivatum et quod cum Lithuanico habet concordantiam aliquam et paritatem”. This final point in Długosz' linguistic view is linked to specific historical events (for example, the civil war in ancient Rome) or rather with invented events (like the arrival of Prusias, king of Bithinia, in the Baltic). According to this idea, Prussian is to be distinguished from Lithuanian not only because of the different degree of its Latin component, but rather by the presence of a Greek component, which was completely foreign to Lithuanian. In other words, the motivation of the difference between Prussian and Lithuanian consisted, according to Długosz, in the fact that “...nonnulli Prutheni priscae linguae retinentes oracula [verba] ab Aeolicis Doricis, Atticis et Ionicis populis competenter intelliguntur”; this is to say that the Prussians (*nonnulli Prutheni*), in distinction to other Baltic peoples, had incorporated and conserved some Greek words in their language.

Such was the opinion of Jan Długosz whose ideas influenced many other scholars of that time. They developed a further linguistic theory concerning the Prussian language alone, which I proposed calling the Greek Theory.

## THE GREEK THEORY

Let us look briefly into the Greek Theory. This theory on Prussian language did not have a long life. As I have been able to establish, after Długosz, it found some support in the work of the East Prussian humanist Jodocus Willichius; in his comment to Tacitus (*In Cornelii Taciti quibusdam romanis Germaniam commentaria*, Francforti ad Viadrum 1551) where he writes as follows:

junt veri in illis partibus [i.e. non longè à Regiomonte] Boruſi, quorum lingua non est Vandalica & admodum peregrina ſed Græca deprauata, ſicut Gallica & Hiſpanica ex Latina corrupta ferè nata eſt, ſicut ipſe ufu comperi, quoties Græciſſando illis locutus ſum, ut qui patriæ meæ uicini ſunt.

It is worth pointing out that, according to Willichius' opinion, the Prussian language originated from the corruption of Greek: Prussian was only *lingua Graeca deprauata*. Willichius explains this fact by introducing a parallel with the relation between Latin and the Romance languages (French

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Fig. 1 Marcin Cromer, 1555. *De origine et rebus gestis polonorum*, Basilea Frontispiece.

and Spanish). Unfortunately, Willichius does not discuss possible causes for such a corruption, but states that he himself actually spoke Greek with those Prussian people (*Græciffando illis locutus sum*)! Now, such reciprocal understanding between Prussian and Greek speakers around the middle of the 16th century (1551) was of course entirely a figment of Willichius' imagination. Nevertheless this matter was frequently discussed later too. One of the last echoes of this theory appears in the *Istoria d'Europa* by Pierfrancesco Giambullari, a work written in Italian (and published in Venice in 1564), but that is yet another question.

## VARIATIONS OF THE ROMAN THEORY

Jan Długosz's linguistic ideas – the Roman Theory on the Baltic languages – gave rise to some original interpretations.

A first variation is to be found in the work of Marcin Cromer, *De origine, & rebus gestis Polonorum* (1555). Cromer prefers to speak about nations and only implicitly about languages; he considers all these languages very different from the Slav languages, which are almost identical with each other and mixed up with many corrupted Latin words (which seem to be Italian or Spanish rather than Latin); thus in the passage: “*fed eadem è inter fe lingua uulgò adhuc utentes, Slauicè prorfus difsimili, fed què non paucas habeat admixtas Latinas uoces, corruptas ferè, & magis Italica uel Hispanica nota signatas q; Latina*”.

Beyond this, Cromer's argumentation is quite interesting on account of the introduction of a Roman guide, Publio Libone, and because he gives great importance to this figure. According to Cromer, the Roman Theory is enough to explain the origin of all the nations and languages of the Baltic area, so that the Greek Theory is rejected as unnecessary. Differently from Jan Długosz, in his opinion the crucial role is no longer to be attributed to the Lithuanians, but to the *Liuoni*, that is to say the Latvians. The evidence for this is the name of the Roman leader, Libone, from which in his view the name itself of the Livonian people derived. Thus the global picture we obtain differs substantially from Jan Długosz' ideas.

A second very popular variation was represented by the linguistic ideas of the Vilnius Humanists, the so-called Latinizers of Vilnius. They appealed directly to the ancestry myth of Palemonas previously mentioned. The Latinizers in particular cultivated a variation of the Roman Theory, which I suggest calling the Semi-Latin Theory.

Michalo Lituanius (his real name was Vaclovas Mikolajevičius) donated a work in 1550 to King Sigismondus Augustus; a fragment of it was published later (in Basel in 1615) under the title *De moribus Tartarorum, Lituaniarum et Moscorum*. We can illustrate the Semi-Latin theory by referring to this text, as Michalo Lituanius formulated a linguistic argument that supported the origin of the Lithuanians from the Romans.

Michalo Lituanius claimed that “*idioma Ruthenum alienum sit a nobis lituanis, hoc est italianis, Italico sanguine oriundis*”; that is to say, the language of the Ruthenians is alien to us Lithuanians, which means Italians, descending from Italian blood.

Michalo also presents a version of the ancestral myth which is more finely constructed from a philological point of view. He continues by saying, “*Quod ita esset liquet ex sermone nostro semi-latino et ex ritibus Romanorum vetustis, qui non ita pridem desiere apud nos...*”. That is to say, that



*MICHALONIS LITVANI,*  
 DE MORIBVS TARTARORVM,  
 LITVANORVM ET MOSCORVM,  
 fragmina decem, multiplici  
 Historia referta.

FRAGMEN PRIMVM.



AMETSI Tartari, barbari & inopes habeantur à nobis, gloriantur tamen continentia vitæ, & antiquitate gentis suæ Scythicæ, asseuerantes eam semen esse Abrahæ, & nemini seruiuisse vnquam, licet vexatam interdum ab Alexandro, Dario, Cyro, Xerxe alijsque Regibus & populis potentioribus: & varias nunc diuisam in Ordas, id est, nationes. Siquidem vltra vicinos nobis Precopenfes, complicesque eorum Belhorodenses, & Dobricenses Moldauicæ finium aecolas, Orde sunt potentes, Precopenfisbus infensæ, Orientem versus. Alia Nahai, alia Chastorakani, alia vltra amnem Tanaim, qui Volha appellatur, Zavvolzca, Cæsaris Bati Vngariæ vastatoris patria, Molchorum olim & omnium Ruthenorum dominatrix, Nahaiensibus nunc adhærens, alia Kozanij, alia Kazaczka, item Buchar, Samarchan, & alia dicuntur plures, xii. Imperatoribus dispartitæ, vt promiserat Dominus progenitorum eorum Ismaëlem Genes. 17. duodecim duces generaturum, & euecturum in magnam gentem. Ex omnium autem nationum Tartaris soli tenuiores, sed regionibus nostris citimini Precopenfes, infesti sunt nobis, cum ignauia freti nostra tum vicinitate, locorumque opportunitate receptaculi sui. Habent verò Precopenfes receptaculum, suapte natura mu-

12. Orde  
Tartarorū.

A

Fig. 2 Michalo Lituanius, 1555. *De moribus Tartarorum, Litanorum et Moscorum*, First page.

it is so can be seen from our Semi-Latin speech and from the old Roman rites, which started to disappear among us (in our country) not long ago.

Michalo reinforces his view by comparing in quite a modern way over seventy Latin words with their Lithuanian equivalents. Many of these equivalences became famous, for example: Lat. *ignis*:: Lit. *ugnis*, Lat. *unda*:: Lit. *vanduō*, Lat. *aer*:: Lit. *oras*, and many other pairs of words like these. We must stress the importance of these equivalences in sustaining the entire mythical setting to which Michalo Lituanus was committed.

This means that the linguistic argument superseded every other argument adopted to confirm the Roman origin of the Lithuanians. The examination of other original sources shows that this kind of linguistic argument had priority among other Renaissance authors too.

Furthermore, we must keep in mind the particular importance of this point for the entire mythical construction, i.e. the priority that it reserved for the linguistic element in the arguments in favour of the Lithuanians' Roman origin. More than one author shared these ideas.

## THE THEORY OF THE *LINGUAGIUM LITHUANICUM QUADRIPARTITUM*

I shall continue by considering another important theory on the Baltic languages of that time: the Theory of the *linguagium Lithuanicum quadripartitum* proposed by the Pole, Miechovita.

I have already mentioned that Crassinius referred to the linguistic Theory of the *linguagium Lithuanicum quadripartitum* formulated by Miechovita in order to respond to the arguments of the Slav Theory of the Baltic languages. This is really a very interesting and I would say “modern” theory.

In his treatise *De duabus Sarmatiis* (the first edition was published in Cracow 1517; later it was reprinted several times) Miechovita (his real name was Maciej z Miechów) claims literally that in Lithuania there is a predominant *Linguagium Lithuanicum* which he terms “fourfold” (i.e., distinguished in four elements).

He writes:

linguagium Lithuanicum est quadripartitu, primum linguagium est laczuingorum, ut horum qui circa castrum Drohicin inhabitarunt, & pauci superjunt. Alterum est Lithuanorum & Samagitharum: Tertium Prutenorum. Quartum in Lothua seu Lothihola, id est Livonia, circa fluuium Dzuina, & Riga ciuitatem. Et horum quanquam eadem sit lingua, unus tamen non plene alterum intelligit, nisi curjiuus et qui uagatus est per illas terras.

This shows that Miechovita recognized one “fourfold” language, the first element being the Jatvingian, the second that of the Lithuanians and of the Samogitians, the third that of the Prussians and the last that which is spoken in Livonia, near the river Daugava and the city of Riga. After this, Miechovita writes that in the churches of Lithuania Polish is used and finally he adds that no one is able to understand the *linguagium Lithuanicum quadripartitum* if he or she has not lived for some time in those lands. I think it is important to point out that Miechovita uses the term *linguagium Lithuanicum* as a general term, as a hyperonym; in fact, such a *linguagium Lithuanicum* differs markedly from the *linguagium Lithuanorum & Samagitharum*, which is considered in another point of his work.

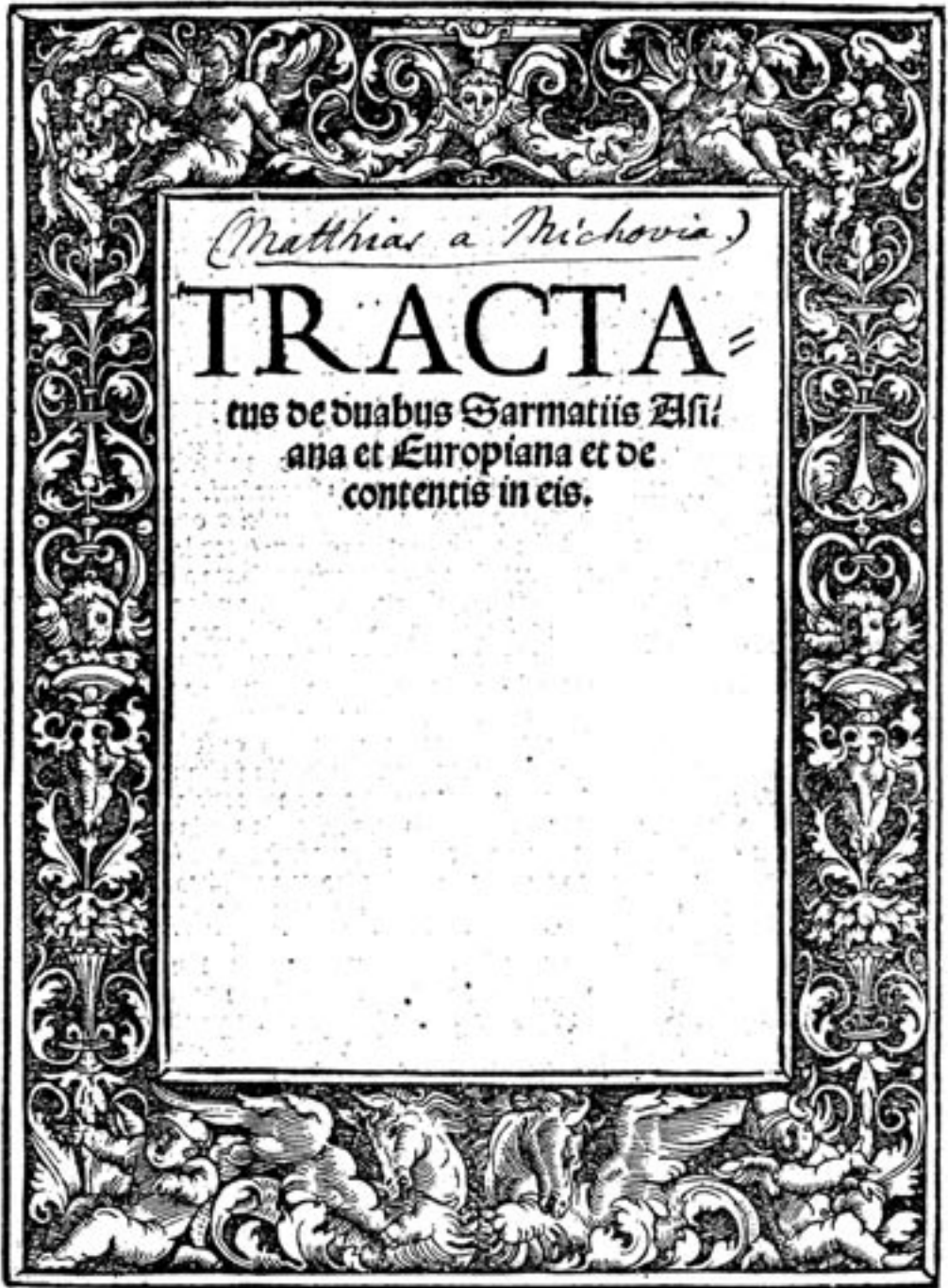


Fig. 3 Miechovita (Maciej z Miechów), 1518. *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis...*, Cracoviae. Frontispiece.

This aspect is essential, in my view, in order to understand Miechovita's original linguistic theory correctly. This is the situation: four *linguagia* are recognizable; they constitute, however, one language. It is not by chance that the need to travel widely in those lands in order to become aware of their linguistic unity is emphasized. The fundamental characteristic of Miechovita's *linguagium Lithuanicum quadripartitum* is precisely that of being "unitarily different": simultaneously "unitary" and "different" (where "different" means being "fourfold").

This linguistic idea was widespread in western Europe at first in the second half of the 16th century and later was frequently reiterated, sometimes with partial variations. But the central core of the linguistic idea, that is, the "different unity" of the Baltic linguistic domain, was never acknowledged and was always misunderstood by Miechovita's followers, so that the differences between the subordinate languages rather than their unity was emphasized. Miechovita's book was very successful. His linguistic ideas were repeated in many other books during the 16th century but were often misunderstood (as for instance in the work of the Pole, Ludovicus Decius, and of the German, Sebastian Münster).

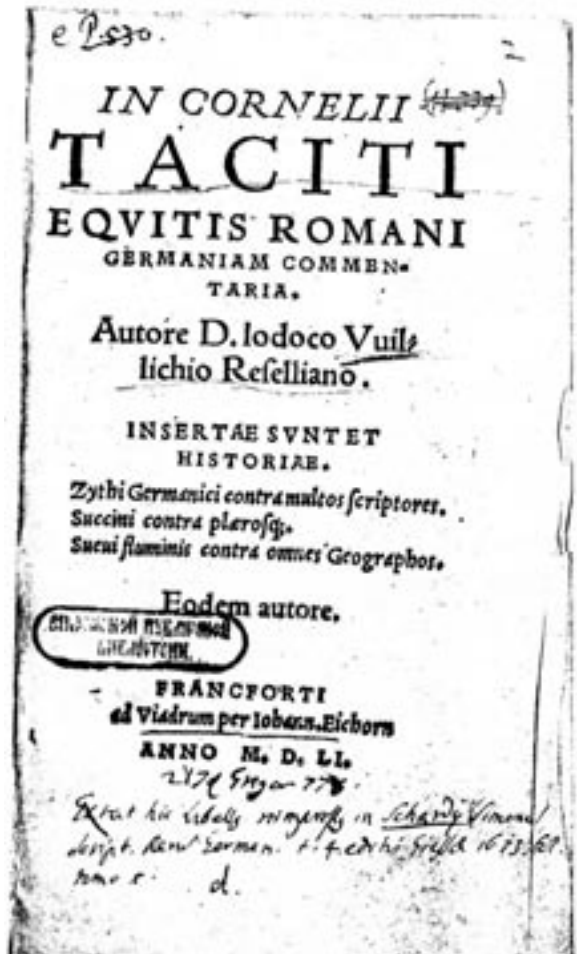


Fig. 4 Jodoc Willich, 1551. *In Cornelii Taciti equitis romani Germaniam commentaria*, Francforti ad Viadrum. Frontispiece.



Fig. 5 Michalo Lituano, 1555. *De moribus Tartarorum, Lituaniarum et Moscorum, Epitome Fragminis Quinti*. Pages containing the 74 latin words that Michalo Lituano thought were comparable to Lithuanina words.

**CONCLUSION**

At this point I will stop illustrating case-studies. I think what we have already seen will suffice to show how differentiated the linguistic ideas on the Baltic linguistic domain were during the Renaissance.

In order to attempt a closer definition of the whole formed by these linguistic theories, I propose using the following three categories: ignorance, prevailing genealogical interest, variety of theories. Each will be briefly commented on.

**Ignorance of the Baltic Linguistic Group**

The analysis of the most widely known classifications of languages of western European extraction shows that in the best of cases ‘confusion’, but often also pure ‘ignorance’, are terms suitable to describe the knowledge of the time about the Baltic languages. Ignorance characterises

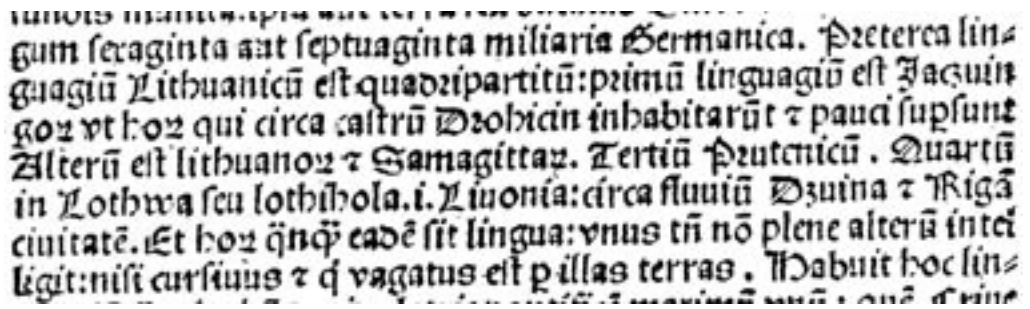


Fig. 6 Miechovita (Maciej z Miechów), 1518. *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis...*, Cracoviae. The page containing the definition of the *Linguagium quadripartitum*.

linguistic classifications (such as those of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Dante Alighieri, André de Poza, Genebrardus and Justus Scaligerus) at least up to and including that of Eduard Brerewood (1614). The lack of consideration of Baltic as an autonomous linguistic group is the norm for all the other authors and all the theories we have examined. The unique, noteworthy exception is Miechovita and his theory of the *linguagium Lithuanicum quadripartitum*. It should be added that this state of things persisted for a long time, until Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro (1787) rediscovered Miechovita's ideas.

### Prevailing genealogic interest

Interest in linguistics and linguistic reflection concentrated largely on genealogical relations between languages at the time. This can be seen well in the case of the Baltic languages: during the pre-scientific period they found themselves again ascribed to different linguistic groups. Thus, using the multiple linguistic theories available – Slav, Roman, Greek, Latin, Illyric and others too – linguists attempted to offer a genealogical explanation that was sufficiently plausible for the knowledge of the time.

### Simultaneousness and syncretism in linguistic theories

To circumscribe better the 'confusion' mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is useful to consider the variety of linguistic theories. We must point out that all these theories about the same object (Baltic languages) circulated contemporaneously, and often emerged reciprocally contaminated even in the work of a single author. It is also easy to observe a phenomenon which was typical of the Renaissance: the 'flux and reflux' (that is to say, the circulation) of single linguistic theories between one author and another.

Finally one must point out that the two truly original linguistic theories on Baltic remained without a real continuation: that of the Semi-Latin and that of the *linguagium Lithuanicum quadripartitum*.

Michalo Lithuanus' linguistic ideas continued to be completely isolated during the 16th century, but it is still possible to find some repercussions of them in the next century, e.g. in the works of Thuanus (his real name was Jacques Auguste de Thou) and most of all in the book by Pierre D'Avity. Now, even more than the fact that many of the equivalences proposed by Michalo Lithuanus are still held valid by contemporary science, the persistence in time of the comparative tradition inaugurated by Michalo Lithuanus should be noted. It is easy to observe that some of the terminological couples he identified persisted across the whole Renaissance period, returning in the *Betrachtung der Littauischen Sprache* by Philipp Ruigh (published in Königsberg in 1745) and occurring again in the first comparisons proposed at the dawn of Comparative Linguistics. It is therefore reasonable to stress the undoubted value of the comparative operation that was a premise for Michalo Lithuanus' Semi-Latin theory. His remarkable theoretical effort justifies giving him an important place in the picture of Renaissance Palaeocomparativism and of so-called pre-scientific linguistics.

Finally, Miechovita's linguistic ideas represented a kind of counter-weight to the Slav theory introduced by Æneas Sylvius de' Piccolomini and which counted many supporters. In spite of their modernity, Miechovita's ideas were undervalued or misunderstood by his contemporaries (e.g. Ludovicus Decius, Sebastian Münster, Paulus Iovius and still others); and as we mentioned above,

we can claim that Miechovita's theory fell into oblivion until the 18th century when it found renewed interest thanks to Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro – two centuries later!

And so we come to end of this (of course only partial) *excursus* into the earliest Baltic linguistics. Everything that has been said up to now is only a drop in the ocean in comparison with the work that remains to be done. The reconstruction of the linguistic ideas that in various ways concern the Baltic languages in the long period from the Renaissance to Franz Bopp remains an objective for future research <sup>1</sup>.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank my friend Rafael Morawietz very much for the revision of the English text.



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