

# ACTS OF VANDALISM OR MEMORY COMMUNICATION? SOME THOUGHTS ON THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN GRAFFITI WRITING TRADITION

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**Summary.** *As a form of literacy, graffiti has existed throughout the ages. Many researches on epigraphy show that many examples of graffiti were left intact from the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, the purpose of their appearance was merely disputed in the scientific community.*

*The main aim of this research is to ascertain the motives of the habits of inscribing graffiti among Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealths citizens. This study is a qualitative research that seeks an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of writing graffiti. Basic material for the research was gathered from ego-documents that are focused on the personal lives and experiences of the writers. The research is based on a detailed contextual analysis of several cases (case study method).*

*This article examines several cases and gives some light on how and why graffiti were made. However, for more ample and accurate results, more extensive research must be done.*

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### **Vandalizmas ar atminties komunikacija? Keletas minčių apie lenkų ir lietuvių grafičių rašymo tradiciją**

**Santrauka.** *Grafičiai kaip literatūrinė forma egzistuoja šimtmečius. Daugybė tyrimų patvirtina, kad ir Abiejų Tautų Respublikoje išliko nemažai šio žanro kūrinių. Tačiau šių tekstų atsiradimo tikslo klausimas mokslinėje bendruomenėje keliamas iš esmės nebuvo.*

*Šio straipsnio tikslas yra ištirti grafičių rašymo įpročių motyvus tarp Abiejų Tautų Respublikos visuomenės narių. Šis tyrimas yra kokybinis, juo siekiama giliai išanalizuoti grafičių rašymo fenomeną. Pagrindinę tyrimo medžiagą sudaro ego dokumentai, kuriuose atsispindi asmeninis rašiusiojo gyvenimas bei patirtys. Tyrimas atliktas taikant atvejų analizės metodą.*

*Šiame straipsnyje aptariami keli grafičių užrašymo atvejai, identifikuojant ir ištiriant jų atsiradimo motyvus. Vis dėlto norint daryti tikslesnes išvadas reikalinga atlikti platesnio masto tyrimą.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *grafičiai, epigrafika, įrašas, Abiejų Tautų Respublika, Janas Chryzostomas Pasekas, Michał Tyszkiewicz, Janas Potockis, Juliuszas Słowackis, Franciszek Zabłockis, Henrykas Bogdańskis, Józefas Kopeć, Darja Menšikova.*

## INTRODUCTION

Objects of cultural value, especially those recognized as wonders of architecture, are often being marked by visitors with all sorts of inscriptions, e.g., their names, love proposals, dates, etc. But not only the favorite sights of tourists are covered with such writings. In the spring of 2019, a pair of visitors to a French zoo managed to scratch their names into the back of an endangered elderly rhino.<sup>1</sup> Their names – *Camille* and *Julien* – spread around the world.

Is it a natural inclination to devastate something beautiful or rather a tendency to create a memory? What is the real purpose of graffiti? Why do people

1 <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/outrage-after-vandals-carve-names-into-endangered-rhinos-back-at-french-zoo-a4219781.html> [accessed 2019 10 03].

not get satisfied with writing on materials created for writing? Who can understand the full meaning of graffiti?

Research by linguist Joana Gruodytė proved that the meaning of such inscriptions could be fully understood only when the writer and the reader use the same language.<sup>2</sup> In this case, language is not only recognized as a system of communication used by a particular country or community, but also as a “text of culture,”<sup>3</sup> consisting of personal, social, and cultural memories, emotions of that moment, etc. It would not make any sense to leave Camille’s and Julien’s names in a society that uses a different type of script. The message would not answer the purpose. Otherwise, Yuri Lotman proved that in some cases the author is an audience – they write a text for themselves to be read in the future.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, graffiti inscriptions are messages that travel through the times and encounter a multitude of audiences.

The main *aim* of this research is to ascertain the motives behind the habits of inscribing graffiti among the citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The following research *objectives* would facilitate the achievement of this aim:

- 1) To describe the essence of graffiti;
- 2) To find and identify graffiti writing cases among Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealths citizens;
- 3) To explore those cases in order to find the motives of inscribing such scripts.

*Object of the research.* In this study, the main emphasis is put on the motives of writing graffiti. Only carved inscriptions recognized as graffiti will be covered by the research because of their longevity (motives of such an approach will be explained further). The research covers graffiti born since 1569 till 1795 (these are the chronological bonds of the Polish-Lithuanian State). Despite that, a single case that extends these chronological limits was also included into the study, as there is solid explanation for its emergence.

The research is not linked to the geographical bonds of the Polish-Lithuanian State, because Lithuanians and Poles had a habit to travel (especially in the 17<sup>th</sup>

2 GRUODYTĖ, Joana. Pabradės tiltų užrašai: sociolingvistinis aspektas. *Lituanistica*. 2010. t. 56. nr. 1–4, p. 79.

3 VÓLKOVA AMÉRICO, Ekaterina. The Concept of Border in Yuri Lotman’s Semiotics. *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 12 (1): 6-21, Jan./April 2017, p. 8.

4 LOTMAN, Jurij. Apie du komunikacijos modelius kultūros sistemoje. In *Kultūros semiotika*. Vilnius, 2004, p. 39–58.

and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries)<sup>5</sup> or, in many cases, were constrained to peregrinate. That is why some cases of writing graffiti are linked to places on other continents or even with famous sights. Nowadays, only a few of the discussed graffiti remain.

*Methodology.* This study is a qualitative research that seeks an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of writing graffiti. The basic material for the research was gathered from ego-documents that were focused on the personal life and experiences of the writer. This way, the author himself could have noted more explanations regarding the reasons of writing graffiti. This research is based on a detailed contextual analysis of several cases (case study method).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a large number of articles and books dedicated to the topic of graffiti, suggesting graffiti to be a historical source of great value. The aim of this paper is not to discuss the whole body of literature on graffiti – that is why only some scientific tendencies will be introduced.

First of all, great discoveries of new archeological and epigraphical sources in Mesopotamia (e.g., the Library of Ashurbanipal, discovered in 1849, as well as the discovery of other ancient libraries) and the Latin world (several attempts to discover Troy since 1871) in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a massive rewriting of ancient inscriptions in order to preserve epigraphs. Several great initiatives, such as the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, later followed by the *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Poloniae*, etc., collected great compendiums of inscriptions (as well as graffiti) and in this way conformed with the philosophical theory of positivism in science. Positivism, in this manner, requires scientific statements to be proven with empirical evidence. That is why there is a great variety of research based on collecting inscriptions (finding new ones) and investigating them from a historical point of view, or rather using them as an auxiliary source of information. Such an investigation on newly found Egyptian graffiti was conducted by Susan Redford and Donald B. Redford.<sup>6</sup> More Ancient Egyptian graffiti were

5 ZIOBER, Aleksandra. Przyroda ujarzmiona na terenach Europy Środkowej w świetle dzienników podróży przedstawicieli elit Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w XVII i XVIII wieku. *Historyka*, 2016, t. 46, p. 79.

6 REDFORD, Susan, REDFORD, Donald B. Graffiti and Petroglyphs Old and New from the Eastern Desert. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 26 (1989), p. 3–49.

explored by H. E. Winlock.<sup>7</sup> The same point of view on newly found graffiti is found in Natalija Sinkewycz and Wiaczeslaw Kornijenko's research on newly discovered inscriptions on the main altar of the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev.<sup>8</sup> Although interesting insights are found in E.P. fon-Shtern's research on graffiti (the author here used the term *graffiti* to describe inscriptions that are inscribed or written with coal) found on ancient pottery unearthed in the former Russian Empire.<sup>9</sup>

There also appear some new studies on inscriptions found even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Elżbieta Jastrzębowska suggested new insights according to ancient graffiti from Ptolemais,<sup>10</sup> while James S. Pula revealed the authors of the graffiti left at the Blenheim Estate in Fairfax, Virginia, which served as a hospital for wounded soldiers during the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

From a sociological point of view,<sup>12</sup> research on graffiti was done by Rebecca R. Benefiel.<sup>13</sup> Her investigation could be a meaningful contribution to the history of writing and reading. The phenomena of the so-called "epigraphic habit"<sup>14</sup> was examined from a different angle by Peter Kruschwitz.<sup>15</sup> David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky recognize wall graffiti as the indicators of attitudes, beha-

- 7 WINLOCK, H. E. Graffiti of the Priesthood of the Eleventh Dynasty Temples at Thebes. *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Apr., 1941), p. 146–168.
- 8 SINKEWYCZ, Natalija, KORNIJENKO, Wiaczeslaw. Nowe źródła do historii Kościoła unickiego w Kijowie: graffiti w absydzie głównego ołtarza katedry św. Zofii. *Studia Źródłoznawcze*, 2012, t. L, p. 75–80.
- 9 FON-SHTERN, E.R. "Graffiti" na antichnykh yuzhno-russkikh sosudakh. Odessa: "Ekonomicheskaya" tip. 1897.
- 10 JASTRZĘBOWSKA, E. Church façade, religious symbol or exercise in masonry? The case of a relief from Ptolemais. *Światowit*, 2013, vol. X (LI)/A, p. 23–30.
- 11 PULA, James S. The Writing on the Walls: Badger Graffiti in Civil War Virginia. *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 86, No. 3 (Spring, 2003), p. 38–49.
- 12 More about social research on graffiti could be found: STOCKER, Terrance L., DUTCHER, Linda W., HARGROVE, Stephen M., COOK, Edwin A. Social Analysis of Graffiti. *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 85, No. 338 (Oct. - Dec., 1972), p. 356–366.
- 13 BENEFIEL, Rebecca R. Dialogues of Ancient Graffiti in the House of Maius Castricius in Pompeii. *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 114, No. 1 (Jan., 2010), p. 59–101.
- 14 For more see: MACMULLEN, Ramsay. The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire. *The American Journal of Philology*, 1982, vol. 103, No. 3 (Autumn), p. 246; MEYER, Elizabeth A. Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 1990, vol. 80, p. 74.
- 15 KRUSCHWITZ, Peter. Writing On Trees: Restoring a Lost Facet of the Graeco-Roman Epigraphic Habit. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bd. 173 (2010), p. 45–62.

vioral dispositions, and social processes in settings where any direct measurement is difficult.<sup>16</sup> In their research, graffiti are seen as markers of an area controlled by teenage gangs. A similar approach to this specific source of history was used in the research by David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky (graffiti as a gang marker)<sup>17</sup> or by Julie Peteet (graffiti of the Intifada).<sup>18</sup>

Despite that, it is still hard to find the answer to the question of why do people paint or inscribe graffiti in the first place.

## WHAT IS GRAFFITI?

**E t i m o l o g y.** Scientists describe *graffiti* as a message left on public or private property. Graffiti are words or drawings scratched or scribbled on walls. The word itself originates from the Greek term *graphein* (“to write”) and is the plural of the Italian word *graffito*.<sup>19</sup> However, epigraphy, as a science that investigates writings made on solid material without the usual writing tools<sup>20</sup> (a pen, pencil, brush, etc.), draws a line between inscribed markings and paintings on walls.<sup>21</sup> That is why one should take into account that the real purpose of graffiti could be revealed only through a semiotic perspective.

Why do we write on walls? *Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!* (Job 19: 23–24) – complained Job in Old Testament more than 26 centuries ago<sup>22</sup>. Wall, rock, tomb, monument, etc. – these are hardy objects that could remain through the times and save the message left on their surfaces for the future generations. These are the most corrosion-resistant materials ever used for writing! Moreover, because of the weight, these are also resistant to the human effect. That is why in cases when something important (a person,

16 LEY, David, CYBRIWSKY, Roman. Urban graffiti as territorial markers. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 1974, vol. 64, December, No. 4, p. 491–505.

17 *Ibid.*

18 PETEET, Julie. The writings on the walls: the graffiti of the intifada. *Cultural Anthropology*, 1996, 11(2), p. 139–159.

19 WHITEHEAD, Jessie L. Graffiti: The Use of the Familiar. *Art Education*, vol. 57, No. 6 (Nov., 2004), p. 26.

20 GUDAVIČIUS, Edvardas. Epigrafika. In *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*, t. 5, Vilnius 2004, p. 530.

21 For more, check: TOLKAČEVSKI, Kšištof. *Epigrafinio įrašo kultūra ir komunikacija: XIX a. Vilniaus memorialinių įrašų pagrindu*: daktaro disertacija, 2016, p. 18–20.

22 It is thought that Job’s case could have occurred in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. For more, check: RUBSYS, Antanas. *Raktas į Senąjį Testamentą*, 3 dalis, Putnam, 1985, p. 303.

event, or area) for the community needs to be given a sense (remembrance), a hard monument (statue, tomb, relief, mausoleum, pyramid, etc.) with a carved inscription is built. Texts on such objects have special meaning and are of great importance. That is why the script used to write on the solid material could be called the “epigraphic script.”<sup>23</sup> It could be thought that one finds it important to mark their names (or keywords to the event, story, etc.) on the walls – to leave graffiti as a testament to their existence and presence there.

On the other hand, graffiti should not be confused with ancient legal writings. In Ancient Greece, as well as Ancient Rome (Southern Italy used to be a colony of Greece in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, called *Magna Grecia*), laws, statutes, and reports were inscribed by the government on the walls of buildings that were at the centers of great social activity in order to inform the citizens<sup>24</sup> about state affairs and order.<sup>25</sup> All these texts of the legal genre later became legal documents, after the papyrus was adapted as a writing material, but graffiti writing remained present. So, what makes a particular text become graffiti is the absence of the owner’s permission to write on their property.<sup>26</sup>

Nowadays graffiti painted on walls does not hold up to its main principle of long-term preservation: it is easy to delete it by repainting the wall or by deep cleaning. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a number of scientific investigations on how to clean and remove graffiti arose<sup>27</sup> as well.

23 TOLKAČEVSKI, Kšištof. Rusiški epigrafiniai memorialiniai XIX amžiaus įrašai Vilniaus katalikiškose kapinėse. *Knygotyra*, 2016, vol. 66, p. 281–282.

24 MOATTI, Claudia. Translation, Migration, and Communication in the Roman Empire: Three Aspects of Movement in History. *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 25, No 1 (April 2006), p. 129–130.

25 In such a case, Greg Woolf speaks about “monumental writing,” taking into account official and non-official writings on solid material: epitaphs, dedications of buildings, honors paid to individuals, the fulfillment of vows to the gods, imperial and local laws, registers of magistrates and councilors, lists of permitted taxes, etc. For more: WOOLF, Greg. Monumental Writing and the Expansion of Roman Society in the Early Empire. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 86 (1996), p. 23.

26 WHITEHEAD, Jessie L. Graffiti: The Use of the Familiar. *Art Education*, vol. 57, No. 6 (Nov., 2004), p. 26.

27 E.g., GOMES, Vera, DIONISIO, Amelia, POZO-ANTONIO, J. Santiago, RIVAS, Teresa, RAMIL, Alberto. Mechanical and laser cleaning of spray graffiti paints on a granite subjected to a SO<sub>2</sub>-rich. *Construction & Building Materials*. 2018, vol. 188, p. 621–632; CAREDDU, N., AKKOYUN, O. An investigation on the efficiency of water-jet technology for graffiti cleaning. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*. 2016, vol. 19, p. 426–434; POZO-ANTONIO, J. Santiago, RIVAS, Teresa, FIORUCCI, M. P., LOPEZ, A. J., RAMIL, Alberto.



Modern scientists do not come to an agreement on the very definition of graffiti either. For example, the editorial team of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Poloniae*<sup>28</sup> describes graffiti as an amateur inscription done in order to memorize one's presence at a specific place. However, there is an opinion that graffiti could comprise any inscriptions made by non-professionals, including self-made inscriptions on tombs.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, book historians count inscriptions made in books too as evidence of graffiti,<sup>30</sup> even despite the fact that they are written using the usual tools (a pen, pencil, etc.) and are temporal, vulnerable.

Why do we **w**rite on walls? Modern graffiti (drawn in a short period of time in order not to be caught by law enforcement organizations) can be understood as an expressive art form but also as antisocial behavior performed in order to gain attention or as a form of thrill-seeking.<sup>31</sup> But psychiatrist Schuyler W. Henderson views the problem from an anthropological point of view: graffiti, as well as selfies, autobiographies, and confessionals – either in book form or on Snapchat and YouTube – each are some new way of saying “look at me, I'm really here.”<sup>32</sup> That could be the real motive – to be in the center of attention. Accordingly, Marshall McLuhan explains means of communication as a forms of human extension. In the Greek myth about Narcissus, the youth mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The point of this myth is the fact that humans tend to become at once fascinated by any extension of themselves.<sup>33</sup> The same could apply to how we view graffiti. Some graffiti cases from different periods discussed below may shed more light on this topic.

Effectiveness and harmfulness evaluation on graffiti cleaning by mechanical, chemical and laser procedures on granite. *Microchemical Journal*, 2016, vol. 125, p. 1–9., etc.

- 28 TRELIŃSKA, Barbara. *Corpus Inscriptionum Poloniae*, tom I, zeszyt IV. Red. Józef Szymański, Kielce, 1983, p. 16.
- 29 KOWALSKI, Waldemar. Przedzrobiorowe graffiti północnej Małopolski. *Studia Źródłoznawcze*, t. 34, 1993, p. 51–54.
- 30 LIŠKEVIČIENĖ, Jolita. Knygos ženklų marginalijos. *Knygotyra*, 2004, t. 42, p. 93–104; PACEVIČIUS, Arvydas. Senujų knygos nuosavybės ženklų tipologija. *Knygotyra*, 2004, t. 43, p. 50–57.
- 31 DECKER, H. Scott, CURRY, D. Glen. Graffiti. In *Britannica Academic*. <https://academic.oup.com/levels/collegiate/article/graffiti/343951> [access 2019 10 03]
- 32 HENDERSON, Schuyler W. Selfies. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2017, vol. 56, Number 9, p. 793.
- 33 MCLUHAN, Marshall. *Understanding Media*. London, 1994, p. 41



## SOME GRAFFITI CASES IN THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was established by the Union of Lublin in July 1569. The act declaring the union between the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was signed by Polish and Lithuanian noblemen that had gathered in the Lublin Castle. This had to be the event of the century, and it should have definitely attracted many visitors. Nobleman Piotr Jeżewski was also there. In the Holy Trinity Chapel of the Castle, on a rare and valuable Ruthenian-Bizantine fresco (dated back to 1418), he inscribed the following words<sup>34</sup>:

Original	Translation
PIO[TR] [Prus] JEZEWSKI 1569 <i>unia facta est cum ductus Lytwanie</i>	Piotr [coat of arm] “Prus” Jeżewski 1569 <i>[The] union with the Duchy of Lithuania [has]            become [a] fact</i>

This inscription bears his full name, the coat of arms of his house, that day’s date and a short sentence written in support of the information regarding the event that was intended to be memorized. Piotr Jeżewski was not among those that have signed the Act. He was not as important. Nevertheless, he might have been looking forward to the merger of Poland and Lithuania. What is more, more graffiti were found in the same rich chapel.

Seventy or more years later, in 1662, Polish nobleman Jan Chryzostom Pasek (c. 1636–1701) arrived in Vilnius in order to receive assignments from the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Jan Kazimierz Vaza (1609–1672) in the times of the Consilium of War commission. One could find it important to add that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1660 had become involved in a war with the Swedish Empire, yet was still at war with the Grand Duchy of Moscovia, which had been supporting the rebellion of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

During his visit to Vilnius, Pasek faced difficulties in accommodating himself and his companions – all the houses and hostels were full. They were thus

<sup>34</sup> The image of this graffiti could be found via: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Graffiti\\_signature\\_commemorating\\_Union\\_of\\_Lublin\\_03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Graffiti_signature_commemorating_Union_of_Lublin_03.jpg) [accessed 2019 10 05].

forced to stay in newly built house that was not finished yet – *without doors* – as he added. He placed guards beside the entrance, as robbery and scimmages occurred quite often those days. After some time, a drunk man, who pretended to be the owner of that house, came with his drunk companions and tried to drive Pasek away in rude manner. After a brawl, some of them were seriously injured. Pasek and his companions ran away, leaving a rude and inappropriate text on one of the house’s walls<sup>35</sup>:

Original	Translation
<i>Za coś mię, sk... synu, kukućca, napastował? Wszakżem boćwiny w Wilnie nic nie zakosztował, Bo to świńska potrawa, jeść się jej nie godzi. Widzę, Litwin a świnią w jednej sforze chodzi: Świnią, chceli co zwąchać, to chodzi po nocy, Litwin zaś na rabunek, jakby wybrał oczy . Atoż masz, Litwoś geras : pamiętaj rabunek, Gdyś wziął od polskiej szable po łbu podarunek”.</i>	<i>What for, you son of a bi***, did you beat me? I didn't taste chard in Vilnius at all Because that is food for pigs, not to be eaten [by me]. I see a Lithuanian and a pig act in same manner: A pig, if it finds something, returns at night. A Lithuanian goes to rob if he's got a target. So get what you deserve, Lithuanian geras*: remember the robbery, when you were struck with a Polish saber for a present.</i>

\* A Lithuanian adjective meaning “good.”

After he had left Lithuania, the locals identified Pasek and went to his cousin, who was an official at those times. He allowed them to write a text in response.

In 1787, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732–1798) traveled to the Eastern part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in order to meet the Empress of Russia Catherine the Great (1729–1796) to discuss trading policy. Poniatowski refused to travel straight to the meeting point on the river of Dnieper. He visited large and small towns on his way, staying for days and meeting the local noblemen as well as poor people, whom he gifted generously. During his visit to Nesvizh – the residence of the noble family of Radziwill – the King checked the foundry of the canon. At that moment, a massive, 24-pounder long gun was being successfully made.

35 PASEK, Jan Chryzostom. *Pamiętniki*. Z rękopisu wydał Jan CZUBEK. Warszawa–Kraków–Lublin–Łódź–Paryż–Poznań–Wilno–Zakopane, 1929 p. 129–130.

The King, after observing the process of casting the cannon, bestowed gifts on the craftsman. Due to this, the craftsman engraved that story on the cannon, adding the year, month, and the day of the event.<sup>36</sup>

## IN EGYPT

Egypt is famous for its pyramids, which are acknowledged to be among the wonders of the world. Fortunately or not, like many others ancient heritage sites, pyramids are covered with graffiti. Even more than a century ago, a Lithuanian collector of antiques, Michał Tyszkiewicz (1828–1897), during his voyage to Egypt in 1861–1862, noted in his diary that the pedestal of Pompey’s pillar “is all covered with surnames of foreigner interesants, who, while visiting ancient Egyptian monuments, never forget to carve their names for reminiscence on stone monuments, in this way destroying beautiful sculptures and hieroglyphs in pursuit of human stupidity and selfishness.”<sup>37</sup>

More information about the habit of carving words on ancient monuments is left by the famous Polish writer Jan Potocki (1761–1815), who wrote novel *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (*Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie*, 1847). Potocki became the first person in Poland to fly in a hot air balloon when he made an ascent over Warsaw with the aeronaut Jean-Pierre Blanchard, an exploit that earned him great public acclaim. He spent some time in France, and, upon his return to Poland, he became a known publicist, publishing newspapers and pamphlets in which he argued for various reforms. Potocki’s wealth enabled him to travel extensively about Europe, the Mediterranean, and Asia, visiting Italy, Sicily, Malta, the Netherlands, Germany, France, England, Russia, Turkey, Dalmatia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Spain, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and even Mongolia. He was also one of the first travel writers of the modern era, penning lively accounts of many of his journeys, during which he also undertook extensive historical, linguistic, and ethnographic studies. During his visit to Egypt in September 1784 – as Potocki writes in his letter – he entered a burial crypt and sat for several hours on the base of a pyramid, drawing landscapes for the sake of looking for inspiration for his novel. Arabs, knowing that tourists love to inscribe their names on the entrance to the pyramids, present-

36 *Pamiętnik o księciu Karolu Radziwille pisany podług archiwum Nieświezkiego*. Rękopis udzielony do druku ze zbiorów Wiktora hr. Baworowskiego. Lwów, nakładem Karola Wilda. 1864, p. 72.

37 *Egipt zapomniany czyli Michała hr. Tyszkiewicza Dziennik podróży do Egiptu i Nubii* (1861-1862), Warszawa, 1994, p. 59.

ed him with a spike. Potocki engraved a verse from the poem “Les jardins” by Jacques Delille<sup>38</sup>:

Original	Translation
Leur masse indestructible a fatigue le temps	Those unmoved buildings tired out the time itself

This fact proves the idea that people love to leave their mark on famous sights. In addition, Napoleon’s troops paid attention to this graffiti during the French campaign in Egypt. It is said that they were amazed to find the words of a great poet on the entrance to a pyramid.<sup>39</sup>

Other great monuments were covered with graffiti as well. Famous Polish-Lithuanian poet Juliusz Słowacki’s (1809–1849) letters attest to that as well (e.g., in October 1836, he found an inscription carved on the leg of the Colossus of Memnon in Latin, which states: *I hear Memnon*).<sup>40</sup>

## IN VIENNA

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Vienna, Franciszek Zabłocki (?) and Henryk Bogdanski (1804–1887) were students of law. Zabłocki was very keen on mathematics and history. He spoke modern as well as classical Greek, Italian, and English. He wrote drama in German. Because of a failed romantic relationship, he had moved to Vienna.<sup>41</sup> Bogdanski graduated from the University of Lviv in 1829 and was always a man of a patriotic soul. In 1831, he joined Lithuanian and Ruthenian military unit during the so-called “Autumn Uprising,” which was a military rebellion against the Russian Empire. He later took part in many other resistances, as well as in the “January Uprising” in 1863–1864.<sup>42</sup> In 1841, he was arrested for conspiring against the formal government (Russian) and convicted to the death penalty, which was later revoked. Instead, Bogdanski lost his nobleman’s status and was put to jail in Spielberg (Lviv). During their voyage, Bogdanski kept writing a diary, which was published more than a century later.

38 Jana Hr. Potockiego podróż do Turcyi i Egiptu z wiadomością o życiu i pismach tego autora. Kraków, w Drukarni D. E. Friedleina, 1849, p. 76.

39 TRIAIRE, François Rosset Dominique. *Jean Potocki biographie*. Paris: Flammarion, 2004, p. 103–104.

40 Juliusz Słowacki. *Dzieła*. Wydanie XIII: Listy do matki. Wrocław, 1959, p. 296.

41 BOGDAŃSKI, Henryk. *Dziennik podróży z lat 1826 i 1827*. Kraków, 1980, p. 7.

42 BOGDAŃSKI, Henryk. *Dziennik podróży z lat 1826 i 1827*. Kraków, 1980, p. 5–6.

In 1826, both Bogdanski and Zabłocki decided to join the Greek War of Independence (1821–1830) against Turkey. Before leaving, they together visited a monument erected in the memory of a meeting between Polish King and Lithuanian Grand Duke Jan III Sobieski (1629–1696) and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Leopold I (1640–1705) after Sobieski defeated (September 12, 1683) the Turks at the gates of Vienna, thereby saving Europe from Ottoman hordes. Bogdanski and Zabłocki were looking for graffiti made a year before on that monument: they had carved their names on it.<sup>43</sup> The monument – as Bogdanski noted – “was already blacken, pedestal overgrown with soil and it has a shape of obelisk with the cross on the top.”<sup>44</sup> However, they did not find these inscriptions. Their names were probably rubbed away by time.

They visited many monuments during their dangerous voyage to Greece (it was illegal to join Greek military units, and for that reason they were traveling with fake documents). Bogdanski gives no mention as to whether they had left any more graffiti, but it could be possible.

## IN SIBERIA

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was endangered to vanish from the political map because of many factors: the last few rulers were not successful ones; the noblemen had instigated a civil war inside the state, often promoted by foreign powers (especially the Russian Empire); as well as other unfavorable circumstances. This led to the three partitions of the State (1772, 1793, 1795): the country was divided amongst the Russian Empire, Prussia, and Austrian Empire. On the eve of the second partition, Poland and Lithuania were in a state of war with Russia. Lieutenant Józef Kopeć (1762–1833) was in command of the Lithuanian squadron in 1791–1792. Before the third partition, he took part in the uprising led by Tadeusz Kościuszko – a failed attempt to liberate the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from Russian influence. In 1794, Kopeć was defending Warsaw together with Kościuszko. However, they lost the battle and were captured. The wounded Kopeć was transported to Saint Petersburg, where his trail took place. He was condemned to exile to the Kamchatka Peninsula. The verdict had been implemented immediately; that is why Kopeć was soon put into a *kibitka* – a Russian type of carriage, a wooden box with no windows, with a hole in the floor

43 BOGDAŃSKI, Henryk. *Dziennik podróży z lat 1826 i 1827*. Kraków, 1980, p. 33–34.

44 BOGDAŃSKI, Henryk. *Dziennik podróży z lat 1826 i 1827*. Kraków, 1980, p. 34.

that served as a toilet – and driven through the Siberia. His voyage was long and awkward, with rare stops. On the way to Irkutsk, the crew with the prisoner stayed at a house in Kirensk. Kopec received a spacey apartment. At that part of Russia, windows were made of mica – group of sheet silicate minerals. As Kopec pointed out in his diary, it was possible to write on that sort of windows with a flint or even skinflint. When his guards got drunk and fell asleep, it was safe for Kopec to come closer to windows. On one of the windows, he noticed a carved poem with seemingly heart-breaking verses. According to him, the poem was written by Duchess Darja Menshikova<sup>45</sup> (Дарья Михайловна Меншикова) – in those times, the wife of the most influential man<sup>46</sup> in the Russian Empire, Prince Aleksander Danilovich Menshikov (Александр Данилович Меншиков, 1673–1729). Two years after the death of Emperor Peter the Great (1672–1725), Menshikov was imprisoned and condemned with his family to exile to Beryozovo in Siberia. During the voyage, he had to stay at the same house as Kopec did. It is known that Darja died shortly afterward (1728). Unfortunately, Kopec did not recite the poem in his diary. But it is known for sure that Darja Menshikova had left her name on that window.

### Conclusions

1. Humans have a natural tendency to be in the center of attention. This could be one of the reasons why people leave marks on objects. A mark or a sign becomes a message only when it has a meaning that could be decrypted by an audience. That is why, in an educated and literal society, humans usually leave written marks. A spontaneous mark left on public or private property without the owners' consent is usually called a *graffiti*.
2. *Graffiti*, as a form of literacy, had existed throughout the ages. Researches on epigraphy show that intact examples of graffiti can be found in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, although the purpose of their appearance was disputed in scientific community. This article sheds some light on how and why these graffiti were made. However, a wider study should be conducted for more extensive and accurate results. Still, it should be mentioned that

45 *Dziennik Józefa Kopcia brygadiera wojsk polskich. Z rękopisu Biblioteki Czartoryskich opracowali i wydali Antoni Kuczyński i Zbigniew Wójcik. Warszawa-Wrocław, 1995, p. 91.*

46 Aleksander Danilovich Menshikov was a Russian statesman whose official titles included Generalissimus, Prince of the Russian Empire and Duke of Izhora, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, and Duke of Cosel. A highly appreciated associate and friend of Tsar Peter the Great, he was the *de facto* ruler of Russia for two years.

- graffiti, during the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, usually included: (1) information that would help identify its author (full name, coat of arms); (2) a description or keywords related to a fact or event that was intended to be remembered; (3) a date of when the mark was made.
3. All the mentioned and revealed stories of writing graffiti in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's society show that those marks were usually left as expressions of human emotion: astonishment, anger, sadness, etc. This means that those inscriptions were made on the spot, often without having proper writing tools. Moreover, a carved message lasts longer, that is why it stands its purpose. That is why such a writing tradition remained despite that new writing materials (papyrus, parchment, paper) and tools were invented and used for writing. Nowadays, graffiti that are painted on walls could be understood as a genre of writing that is deeply rooted in the need to express something in order to stay in remembrance.

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