

At the source of Vilnius Altaic studies

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Abstract. This paper presents the life and achievements of three Polish Orientalists connected with Vilnius: Mongolist Józef Kowalewski (1801–1878), Turkologist Antoni Muchliński (1808–1877), and Altaist and Mongolist Władysław Kotwicz (1872–1944).

For the beginning a remark—perhaps unnecessary: Altaic studies have nothing to do with mountains, they are not some Asian variety of alpinism, but the study of languages: Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic, constituting together the so-called Altaic league. The first to call these languages Altaic was M.A. Castrén (1813–1852), who assumed the Altai Mountains to be their cradle. The interest, however, in these languages is much older.¹ Thus, Altaic studies have had a long history. Some of this history's important pages were written by Poles.

This article will tell the story of three of them: Józef Kowalewski, Antoni Muchliński and Władysław Kotwicz. The first one, Kowalewski, was a Mongolist. The second is mostly known as a Turkologist, while the domain of the third was Altaic languages in general, but particularly Mongolic and Tungusic. Together their interests embrace the entire Altaic world, which justifies combining their biographies. And, as we shall see, they are all quite similar: in all of them a major part is played by Vilnius.

Kowalewski was the oldest: he was born on 9 January 1801 (or 28 December 1800, according to the old style calendar). As for the place of birth, there is no absolute certainty. Most sources mention the village Brzostowica Wielka, but Kowalewski himself regarded Lewkowo as his native place. These two spots are approximately 40 km apart. The former belongs to Belarus (Grodno Oblast), and the latter lies on the Polish side of the border. (Pl. 1)

The father of the future scholar was a Uniate priest from a Polish (or Polonised Belarusian) gentry family. As many other representatives of this background, he had an understanding for academic studies and he guaranteed his children a solid education. Józef Kowalewski first learnt at home and subsequently in a gymnasium founded by the Tyszkiewicz family in Świsłocz. At that time it was one of the better Polish

¹ One of the first heralds of interest in Altaic studies is the grammar of Manchu by Ferdinand Verbiest (1668).

schools. It was run under the protectorate of Vilnius University, whose professors were responsible for the curriculum and at times taught there themselves.

After graduation—slightly postponed due to Napoleon's invasion—Kowalewski joined Vilnius University. He chose classical philology as his field of studies. The



Pl. 1. Portrait of Józef Kowalewski by Josef Mukařovský. *Světovzor*, 11 October 1878, no 41

talented and diligent young man soon caught the eye of professors. As a result he was granted a scholarship and was admitted to the Pedagogical Institute belonging to the university (1819). In 1821 Kowalewski obtained the degree of Candidate of Sciences in philosophy and one year later published his first work, *Wiadomości o życiu i pismach Longina* (News on the Life and Writings of Longin) (Kowalewski 1882). His academic position seemed stable. There were rumours that he might become head of the department, succeeding Professor Groddeck.²

And at this point of his career there came a dramatic turn. Like most of the young Vilnius academics, Kowalewski actively participated in student life, which revolved around some more or less official groups.

Two of these, the Philomaths and Philarets, seemed suspicious to the authorities. An investigation was started, and as an outcome some of the young people were arrested and sent to the interior of Russia.

Kowalewski was among them. He and his two colleagues, Kóřakowski and Wiernikowski, were sent to distant Kazan (December 1824), where Kowalewski was supposed to take up studies in Eastern languages at the local university. He started with Arabic, Persian and Tatar. Four years later he was told to take up Mongolian. As there was no one in Kazan who knew the language, Kowalewski was sent to Irkutsk. And there, tutored by the autodidact Igumnov, he made his first steps in Mongolian.

His Siberian adventure lasted five years (1828–1833)—Siberian or rather Asian, because Kowalewski had the opportunity to visit Mongolia (1828) and Beijing (1830–1831). These travels enabled him to get to know better not only the language but also the customs of the Mongols and to penetrate the mysterious world of Lamaism. Moreover, in Beijing he met two influential *khutugtus*,³ Minjul and Nomun Khan. The meeting elevated his prestige in the eyes of the Mongols.

² Gottfried Groddeck (1762–1825), classical philologist, author of the first ever synthetic manual of Greek literature.

³ High ranking lamaist clergymen.

It is no overstatement to say that Kowalewski returned a different man from the journey. He had discovered a world which he, a classical philologist, had never dealt with before, nor had he even been aware of its existence. Paraphrasing Adam Mickiewicz, one can say *obiit latinista, natus est mongolista*.⁴ And this, I suppose, was not the only change he experienced. Close contacts with the Russians and first-hand experience of the vastness of the empire of the tsars—all this must have influenced the exiled man's views. And what a shock it must have been to him to realise the enormous defeat of the November Uprising (1830–31), which was probably not well known to him when he was still in Asia. Who knows, but perhaps it was at that time that he decided to be obedient to the tsarist apparatus. For this he was later frequently criticised.

But these are all merely suppositions. Let us return to the facts. In 1833 Kowalewski went to Saint Petersburg to pass the state exam in Mongolian. Having successfully passed it, he returned to Kazan and became head of the Mongolian department at the local university. The department was created especially for him. It was the first such department in the world. He presided over it until 1854, when it was closed down after being taken over by Saint Petersburg, the leading position as the centre of Eastern studies in the empire. His activities were not limited to university only. In 1844 he became head of Gymnasium No. 2 in Kazan and of the guberniya's high school administration board.

Kowalewski—*professor extraordinarius* since 1834, and *professor ordinarius* since 1837, spent more than 30 years at the university in Kazan. Several times he was the dean of the Faculty of Neo-philology. For some time he was rector. He left the university in 1860. Some say he wanted to quit the job, and others claim it was almost a disciplinary dismissal,⁵ because, as rector, he was dangerously soft towards the much talkative students. Perhaps he remembered his own youth in Vilnius?

After quitting the university in Kazan, Kowalewski found himself at a crossroads. His publications, especially the *Mongolian–Russian–French Dictionary* (Kowalewski 1844–1849), had brought him fame and membership in several academic associations.⁶ Thus, theoretically he could try his luck in many places in the world. But in reality

⁴ Allusion to a well known sentence illustrating the spiritual transformation of the hero of Mickiewicz's drama entitled *Dziady* (Forefathers).

⁵ 'По сообщению министра народного просвещения от 9 февраля 1860 г. Действительный статский советник О.М. Ковалевский по высочайшему повелению был уволен от должности ректора в связи с известными студенческими волнениями в Казанском университете' (Tulisov, Valeev 2004, 120), whereas e.g. Kałużyński thought that Kowalewski voluntarily withdrew (see Kałużyński 1968, 527).

⁶ Kowalewski was a member of (among others) Société Asiatique in Paris, Society of History and Russian Antiquity in Moscow, Vilnius Archeological Committee, and the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences (however, due to his political past, only a correspondent).

the scope of opportunities was much narrower. If he still wanted to pursue Oriental studies, he had to move to Saint Petersburg or leave the country, which, considering his political past, would have been equally difficult. It was easier to find job as a classical philologist or a historian. The greatest opportunities in these fields were seemingly given by Warsaw and Vilnius.

There is no doubt that his heart drew him more to Vilnius: he was linked with this city in his memories, and he still knew people there and had books there because he had to leave them when going to Russia.⁷ Vilnius was also closer to his native soil. He however decided in favour of Warsaw because from there he received a formal invitation. The authorities of the newly established Szkoła Główna (Main School)⁸ offered him the department of general history and the post of the dean of the Faculty of History and Philosophy.⁹

If Kowalewski was looking for a peaceful haven in Warsaw, he was terribly disappointed. One year after his arrival, the January Uprising broke out in Poland, and a wave of repression and an intensified Russification policy started. Unfamiliar with the situation in Poland, the newcomer from Kazan found himself in an extremely difficult position. On the one hand, he was aware of the expectations they had of him in Warsaw and did not want to let them down,¹⁰ and on the other he had been politically tamed for too long and had no boldness to stand up against the administration. As a result, in the eyes of many he became a sort of collaborator. He did not cause harm to anyone directly, but he did—as part of the repression—take part in closing down the Szkoła Główna and creating in its place a Russian university in 1869. Moreover, he accepted the Tsar's medal 'For pacifying the Polish uprising'. This in particular hurt many. In his own opinion, by acting this way he at least achieved one thing: his past as an exile was erased from his acts.

⁷ During his studies and then work at Vilnius University, Kowalewski collected a considerable library. Leaving on exile he had to abandon his library and he often regretted that in Kazan (Frolov 1958, 169). It is not known what happened to Kowalewski's library. Books and notes of Kowalewski which are preserved in the collection of Vilnius University have nothing to do with it since they were brought to Vilnius after Kowalewski's death (see Kotwicz 1948, 170).

⁸ **Surrogate of a higher education school, established in 1861 to replace the University of Warsaw, which was closed in 1831.**

⁹ His decision to move to Warsaw may also have been influenced by family issues. At that time in the city, there lived a Karol Kowalewski, owner of a printing house that also served the Main School. The names may be a coincidence, yet the fact that both men were linked to the Warsaw school suggests they may have been related. What is more, in the final years of his life, J. Kowalewski lived in the building in which the printing house of K. Kowalewski was. If then, and it seems so, the printer saw to the professor's comfort, it is possible he had convinced him to come to Warsaw earlier.

¹⁰ In 1862, the same year in which he took up work in Warsaw, Kowalewski wrote to one of his friends: 'I must think it over and put it down on paper in such a way that I do not disappoint the listeners and do not harm much my, already exaggerated, reputation. Because the press proclaimed on and on...'

As for academic work, this period was lost. Kowalewski initially had some plans connected with Oriental studies,¹¹ but after his archives were destroyed in a well known incident,¹² he abandoned them forever. During the whole period of his work at the Main School and later at the university, he gave lectures—but without any commitment—on history and worked in the school's administration. He died on 7 November 1878 in the university library.

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As for A. Muchliński, to whom I am devoting this next part, he was born in the Novogrodek area, on Sosnowo estate, to a poor gentry family. His birth date is not certain. The one most often quoted is 1808. However, sources also give the years 1803 and 1810. Nevertheless, one can say he was Kowalewski's peer, though slightly younger. (Pl. 2)

Muchliński received his basic education in Mołodeczno, at the Trinitarian Order's school. Like the gymnasium in Świsłocz, the school was a protectorate of Vilnius University and had a well deserved reputation. Muchliński graduated with a profound knowledge of Latin and perhaps along with it, a drive to learn languages.

After graduating, he registered at Vilnius University. If this happened sometime in 1822 or 1823—these dates are not certain yet—it means he was about 15 then! At first he studied at the moral-political faculty and later, already as a candidate of law, he entered the faculty of literature. He did not stay there for long, since in 1828 he found himself in Saint Petersburg. This happened due to the tsar's policy of 'recruiting the Janissaries'—the talented youth not only of Russian origin—to serve the state apparatus. So actually the same thing happened to Muchliński as had happened to Kowalewski before him. Yet, there



Pl. 2. Photo of Antoni Muchliński. Kotwicz, Kotwiczówna 1935, front flyleaf

¹¹ Just before the January Uprising, Kowalewski had the plan to publish memoirs from his travels in the East. He had even started negotiations on this with the publishing house of J. Zawadzki in Vilnius.

¹² On 19 September 1864, someone fired a bullet at the Tsar's Governor FF Berg from a window of the house in which J. Kowalewski lived. In retaliation the house was ransacked by the army.

was one significant difference between them: Kowalewski was sent to the east as a disloyal exile, while Muchliński's acts were fine.¹³

In Saint Petersburg he took up studies in the Eastern section of the university. He studied Arabic, Persian and Turkish (Ottoman). This last language was studied under the guidance of J. Sękowski and Mirza Jafar (a.k.a. Topchibashev). He received his diploma in 1832. Along with it, he was granted a scholarship to travel for three years in the East (1832–35). Most of this time Muchliński spent in Istanbul, Turkey. The remaining part was devoted to trips to Egypt and Syria. For him it was an extremely valuable experience, a practical school of Oriental languages and affairs.

When Muchliński returned to Saint Petersburg in 1835, a job at the university was already waiting for him. First he was an adjunct, but in 1839 he became *professor extraordinarius*¹⁴ and took over the Department of Ottoman Philology, created especially for him. Except for the years 1845–49, when he willingly left the post, he stayed at the department until 1866, that is until his retirement. He gave lectures on the history of the Turkish language and Tatar dialects, history of Ottoman literature, history and geography of Turkey, as well as many other subjects, not always in connection with Turkology or Ottoman studies. He was also very active in organising. He was, as his biographers emphasise (e.g. Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935, 25), the organiser of Turkic studies in Saint Petersburg, and even in Russia, since the departments in Kazan and Odessa (1854) were closed down, Saint Petersburg became the centre of Russian Oriental studies. His achievements were followed by honours. In 1853 Muchliński became *professor ordinarius* and between 1859 and 1866 he occupied the post of the dean of the faculty.¹⁵

In 1866 Muchliński retired. He settled in Warsaw but spent much of his time travelling abroad. Unlike his travels in the 1830s, these had no scholarly aims, and it seemed that Muchliński was at this point somewhat tired of his academic career. Of all the tasks he performed in his Warsaw period, only his description of the Cufic coins given to him for examination by Józef Kowalewski is worth mentioning here. As it turned out, this was his last publication. Muchliński passed away in Warsaw on 13/25 October 1877.

The legacy of Muchliński is for many reasons hard to evaluate. First of all, he was interested in many fields, including the history of the Church and the writings

¹³ Documents of this period showed Muchliński as a 'reliable man' (Rus. надежен), cf. Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935, 12.

¹⁴ Muchliński held only the lower title of candidate, bestowed on him by Vilnius University, so when in 1863 a law was announced demanding from professors higher academic degrees, he found himself in a difficult situation. He was, however, exempted from the law by the Tsar's decree (Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935, 27–8). It is worth mentioning that a similar exception was made at that time for Kowalewski, who also held the title of candidate received in Vilnius.

¹⁵ In 1854 the former department became a faculty.

of Długosz.¹⁶ Secondly, and more importantly, he published little, and what he did publish has not always been preserved. As for his extant Turkologic publications, these are:

1. *Исследование о происхождении и состоянии литовских татар, Санктпетербургъ: В типографии Эдуарда Веймара, 1857;*
2. *Zdanie sprawy o Tatarach litewskich, przez jednego z tych Tatarów złożone sułtanowi Sulejmanowi w r. 1558, z języka tureckiego przełożył, objaśnił i materyałami historycznymi uzupełnił... [A report on the Lithuanian Tatars, given by one of them to the Sultan Suleiman in 1558, transl. from Turkish, annotated and supplemented with historical materials by...], Teka Wileńska 4 (1858): 241–72; 5 (1858): 121–79; 6 (1858): 139–83;*
3. *Выборъ турецкихъ статей для начального перевода с грамматическимъ разборомъ, с присовокупленіемъ facsimile историческихъ документовъ для упражненія в чтеніи официальныхъ бумаг, Издад..., Санктпетербургъ, 1858.*
4. *Османская хрестоматія для университетского преподаванія, ч. 1 и 2, Санктпетербургъ, 1858–59.*

Partly Turkologic is also *Źródłostownik wyrazów, które przeszły, wprost czy pośrednio do naszej mowy z języków wschodnich, tudzież mających zobopólną analogję co do brzmienia lub znaczenia. Z dołączeniem zbiorku wyrazów przeniesionych z Polski do języka tureckiego* [*The Source Dictionary of the Words Which Passed Directly or Indirectly to Our Language from the Languages of the East, or Which Have Common Analogies in Sound or Meaning. Additionally: the collection of words passed from Poland to the Turkish Language*], St Petersburg, 1858. Despite its advanced age, this work is still valuable.

As for the unpublished works of Muchliński—meaning his Turkologic works—we can say something about his sketch of the history of Turkey and about his Turkish grammar. Excerpts from these works were preserved in the Vilnius University Library.¹⁷ We can also find some materials from the two-volume dictionary of Turkish dialects there.¹⁸ Why those works remained unpublished is difficult to say. As for the dictionary, it is possible that Muchliński decided not to publish it when he found out that Budagov planned the same (see Budagov 1869–71).

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¹⁶ Jan Długosz (1415–1480), an outstanding representative of the early Polish Renaissance and author of the monumental work *Historia Polski* (History of Poland).

¹⁷ According to Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935, 58, it is manuscript no. 287.

¹⁸ Manuscript no. 286 (see Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935, 57).



Pl. 3. Władysław Kotwicz (sitting third from left) and Professor Popov (sitting second from right) with students of Oriental studies, Petersburg, May 1912 (Archiwum Nauki PAN I PAU, sygn. K III-19, j.a. 151, fot. nr 20229). *Courtesy:* Archive of Science of Polish Academy of Sciences and Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences

The last of the three scholars, Władysław Kotwicz, was born in 1872,¹⁹ making him two generations younger than the former two. What he had in common with them was his place of birth; his native Ossowo (in Lida District) lies not very far away from Muchliński's Sosnowo and the land where Kowalewski saw the world for the first time.

Kotwicz attended gymnasium in Vilnius (1882–90). After graduation he went to Saint Petersburg with a wish to study at the university there. His choice was the Faculty of Eastern Languages, once organised by Muchliński. At the time we are talking about, the faculty had one of its best periods and such famous people as Sinologist Georgevski and Mongolist Pozdneev were part of it. As his specialty, Kotwicz chose Mongolian and Manchu studies. He also grasped basic Chinese and probably Japanese.²⁰

Having graduated (1895), Kotwicz took up work at the Third (Eastern) Department of the General Chancellery of the Ministry of Finance. This did not mean quitting his academic career. We know that he stayed in touch with the university (Kałużyński 1972, 104). This might mean that he was doing some work for it or perhaps even conducting classes. In 1900 Kotwicz became a *privatdozent* (private docent) and obtained *veniam legendi* in Mongolian and Manchu philology.

¹⁹ More precisely 20 March 1872.

²⁰ In his book collection, there are Japanese language manuals.

As the Mongolian Department had no staff at that time, he *de facto* became its head. A short while later, responsibility for the Manchu Philology Department also fell on his shoulders.

Combining work at the university with his duties at the ministry was certainly tiring, though it had positive sides: Kotwicz could use his knowledge in practice, follow the events in the East and sometimes even influence them;²¹ he could also broaden his circle of acquaintances, which provided him the same as travelling gave to others.²² We must emphasise that this was beneficial not only to him. As a representative of the ministry, Kotwicz held a special position in academic circles, using it quite often to support other people's initiatives.²³

It is hard to say definitely what preoccupied Kotwicz more: work at the university or his career in administration. Judging by the fact that he was swiftly promoted in the ministry, one could say it was the latter. In the administration, he reached the position of head of the department. At the university, he was still *privatdozent*. The situation changed in the historic year 1917. On the wave of revolutionary changes, Kotwicz quit the ministry and devoted himself solely to scholarly research, from then on quickly climbing the steps of the academic hierarchy. In the very same year, 1917, he became a permanent *dozent*, and six years later (1923) professor. Bestowing on him the title of professor was certainly also recognition of his organising activities: Kotwicz had not only run the Mongolian and Manchu departments at the university but also taken part in re-organising the faculty and creating two new academic institutions: the Institute of Comparative Research and Developmental History of Languages and Literatures of the West and the East, and the Petrograd (later Leningrad) Institute of Eastern Living Languages. We should also mention here that the first director of the Institute of Eastern Living Languages was he himself. (Pl. 3)

If we add here that in 1924 the Russian Academy of Sciences selected him as a member-correspondent, then his decision to go to Poland seems strange. But Kotwicz, though being so close to the Russian people, considered himself a Pole, and when after WWI Poland regained independence, he decided it was his duty to opt for his country. We might assume that this decision was influenced by the fact that his native land was now part of Poland. And he was also aware that he might be useful to his country.

²¹ Kotwicz had a role in the liberation of Mongolia. In 1911, as an official of the Russian Ministry of Finance, he held talks with the Mongols concerning help for their independence attempts.

²² Many interesting materials were sent to W. Kotwicz by Russian consuls in Kulja (N.N. Krotkov and A.A. Dyakov), A.V. Burdukov (a merchant settled in Mongolia), and others. Kotwicz himself did not travel much. He went to Mongolia once, in the summer of 1912.

²³ For example in the Russian Committee for Studies on Central and Eastern Asia, where he sat as the representative of the Ministry of Finance.

That is because, after years of occupation, Polish academic life—including Oriental studies—was being revitalized. Some revival in this field had already started during the war; the first volume of *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* (Yearly Journal of Oriental Studies) was published in 1914–1915, and even earlier (1914) an idea to organise annual meetings of Polish Orientalists was conceived. And as soon as the guns went silent, there came an idea to create an Oriental department at one of the universities. The most serious candidate for its head was Kotwicz, who at that time was still in Russia but was well known in Poland e.g. as a co-editor of the aforementioned *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*.

The prospect of becoming head of the department was the final impulse which caused him to decide in favour of going to Poland. Kotwicz received actual offers from two universities: Jagiellonian University in Cracow and Jan Kazimierz University in Lvov. After some hesitation Kotwicz chose Lvov. At Jan Kazimierz University he became head of the Far Eastern Department, the name of which was a bit of an exaggeration since the teaching programme did not cover Chinese or Japanese philology. What Kotwicz taught was Mongolian and Manchu philology, as well as the history of the steppe peoples, with special reference to their contacts with Europe. But owing to the erudition of the lecturer, the classes provided very wide knowledge. This was proven by the subsequent careers of two participants of these classes: Prof. M. Lewicki and Prof. O. Pritsak.²⁴

In his Lvov period, Kotwicz did not limit himself solely to didactic activities, not to mention that not only was he doing his own research, but he also presided over the Polish Oriental Association and edited the *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* and the *Collectanea Orientalia* series. What is more, he used to go to Prague with lectures for the Kalmyk diaspora. These are his well known affairs and only loosely connected with our topic here, so I am only mentioning them. I would like to, however, point to Kotwicz's fate during WWII.

Where was Kotwicz at the time when war broke out? This I cannot say, but if he was in Lvov, he quickly left it, which perhaps saved his life.²⁵ In the early 1940s, we see him in Vilnius, or rather outside Vilnius in Czarny Bór, where he had a home. What life was at that time is obvious. It was especially hard for the old professor, who was a widower and had support only in his daughter Maria and his secretary L. Wygonowski. The latter recollected years later that during winter, when the temperature in his unheated house fell to about +4 C, Kotwicz 'used to sit on his bed

²⁴ Marian Lewicki (1908–1955), Altaist, professor at the University of Warsaw, author of valuable works in Mongolian studies and a commentary to Marco Polo's text; Omeljan Pritsak (1919–2006), Ukrainian Orientalist and historian, professor at Harvard.

²⁵ A group of Lvov University professors were executed by the Nazis after they had occupied the city in 1941.

with his legs crossed in the Oriental fashion, covered his back with a plaid and his cap on, [and] dictated to his secretary or listened to what he read to him'.²⁶

The old scholar remained astonishingly brave in the face of hunger, cold, and other consequences of the hostilities. As Wygonowski recollects, Kotwicz showed lively interest in current events, listened clandestinely to the radio, and worked assiduously. Active to the very end, he still succeeded in giving final form to several studies he had commenced earlier, in conceiving new papers, and even in publishing such an unexpected item in his bibliography as a grammar of Lithuanian (Kotwicz 1940). 'I wrote it' he explained in a note dictated to Wygonowski 'after the occupation of Vilnius by the Lithuanians, when there seemed to be a possibility of a Polish–Lithuanian understanding, and in any case there was the necessity of becoming acquainted with the language of the new authorities'.²⁷

Kotwicz died on 3 October 1944. His body stayed in the Rasos Cemetery in Vilnius, and his works were brought by Maria Kotwicz to Poland. Personal documents, notebooks, letters, notes, etc. can be viewed today in Cracow in the Archiwum Nauki Polskiej Akademii Nauk i Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności (Archives of Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences). As for the library, the heiress gave it as a present to Warsaw University. So many generations of students have already made use of Kotwicz's books!

Here we should say something about his scholarly legacy, but this is not easy, as in the case of Muchliński, for different reasons though. Kotwicz published a lot. The number of his printed works amounts to 136.²⁸ We will find among them a contribution to the history of nomads (see Kotwicz 1925; Kotwicz 1933), sketches of the history of Polish Oriental studies,²⁹ editions of Tungusic materials (Kotwicz 1932), and an entire series of works devoted to the Oirats (Kotwicz 1919), with a Kalmyk language grammar on top (Kotwicz 1929). A separate place in his legacy is occupied by his studies of Altaic languages.³⁰ This important work was carried out in the aforementioned wartime conditions and published after the death of the author (Kotwicz 1953).

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²⁶ The Archives of Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cracow. Materials left by W. Kotwicz, j.II.35.

²⁷ The Archives of Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cracow. Materials left by W. Kotwicz, j.II.17.

²⁸ Not counting those published posthumously.

²⁹ For example, written together with his daughter, a biography of A. Muchliński; cf. Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935.

³⁰ Published in sequence since 1931 as *Contributions aux études altaïques* in the *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* and the *Collectanea Orientalia* series.

As we can see, our researchers rarely lost Vilnius from their view: they learnt there (Kotwicz), studied (Kowalewski and Muchliński), left their bones there (Kotwicz) and sometimes also part of their legacy (Kowalewski, Muchliński). Thus, Vilnius is the pivot of their biographies. Or more precisely, it is one of the pivots, since the other one is the study of the languages called Altaic.

And by the way, it is interesting why they chose precisely this group of languages and, more broadly, Oriental studies, as the field of their interest. And this is not clear. The researchers themselves usually skip the issue and others do not even try to dig into it, perhaps assuming that what is important is the outcome of the work and not the motive for which it was undertaken. However, in this case this does not seem right. If three biographies are alike in their core moments, it is worth considering why.

The reason why Muchliński became an Orientalist—this we know. It happened out of necessity: not doing well in German, of all the courses they offered to him in Russia, he could choose only Oriental studies (Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935, 12). Perhaps some influence came also from Münnich, his Vilnius professor, who apart from being a specialist in classical philology, took an interest in Arabic and Persian. But this is not certain, because, as Muchliński himself wrote, ‘you could not learn much’ (Kotwicz, *Kotwiczówna* 1935, 11) from Münnich.

In the case of Kowalewski, things are much more mysterious. Some sources say that he, along with Kółakowski and Wiernikowski, expressed his desire to study Eastern languages when still in Vilnius, before the authorities launched the investigation against them.³¹ This looks, however, to be a rumour spread to justify a decision made without him, because there is nothing suggesting the East fascinated him at that time at all. Young Kowalewski lived with classical philology, and his only contact with the East could come from Herodotus or Lelewel’s lectures,³² yet this was a different East than the one which preoccupied Orientalists at that time.

And one more thing: was going to Kazan supposed to be a punishment or a reward? The sources which maintain that the defendants themselves wished to study Eastern languages also claim that there was a plan to employ them in diplomacy! That would have been, let us admit, a strange way to deal with the rebels. Frankly, it is unbelievable. We should assume rather that the sentence was exile and all the suggestions concerning the course of studies and a possible future career came later under somebody’s pressure.³³

³¹ This was maintained by N.N. Novosiltsev in his report submitted to Grand Duke Constantine, see Shamov 1983, 29; Tulisow, Valeev 2004, 106.

³² Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861), an outstanding historian and professor at universities in Warsaw and Vilnius.

³³ As I already wrote (Tulisow, Valeev 2004, 106–7), inconsistencies concerning Kowalewski’s legal suit seem to point to disputes of influential forces, fought somewhere in the background. One of these forces was hostile towards Kowalewski, and the other was favourably disposed towards him. We might risk the statement that the latter was Prince Adam Czartoryski. If, as we know, he had

Of course, this is all speculation. One thing though seems to be certain: Kowalewski took up Eastern studies under pressure, a pressure even greater than the one exerted on Muchliński, and we might even be surprised that he actually came to like the East and was successful in his research on it. Kotwicz was a completely different case. He probably made up his mind about studying Eastern languages, and in particular Eastern languages, already in his gymnasium days, but we do not know why. Was he inspired by some books he read? By some events? Since he never wrote about this anywhere, it will remain an unsolved puzzle forever. We can only assume that the choice of his course in life was influenced by Muchliński. Of course, it was not a direct influence, since at the time of Muchliński's death Kotwicz was not yet five, but in his home Muchliński might have been a topic of conversation. That is because they not only came from neighbouring places but also might have been somehow related. Anyhow, that the Muchliński family and the Kotwicz family have the same coat of arms is significant.

It is probable then that Kotwicz heard something about Muchliński in his childhood, about his quite unusual interests and academic successes, and that this was the nudge that caused him to take up Oriental studies. This supposition may well be supported by the fact that later in his life Kotwicz was very interested in Muchliński and even wrote, together with his daughter Maria, Muchliński's biography (Kotwicz, Kotwiczówna 1935). On the other hand, things might have as well been completely different. After all, there are so many paths leading to Oriental studies! For example, myself: I have no connection with Kotwicz, and even less with Muchliński, yet I am an Orientalist and even an Altaist. Oh, I am sorry; there is something: I was born in Vilnius, the city so close to both of them. Perhaps then there is something in the city's atmosphere which compels one to take interest in the East?

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supported Kowalewski earlier, he quite possibly did it at a moment even more difficult for him and opted for possibly the most favourable sentence.

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