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A Contribution to the Question of Marcin Siennik's Nationality

The aim of the article is to supplement the knowledge of the German origin of Marcin Siennik by, among many other things, the information concerning his Protestant denomination, which influenced the way in which some fragments of the originally Italian *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont* (Venice, 1555) were translated into Polish, and at the same time to present the views and doings of Sebastian Śleszkowski, the publisher of the second edition of the Polish translation of *The Secrets* (Kraków, 1620).

Key words: Marcin Siennik, mysteries, secrets, nationality, Protestant, Catholic, Sebastian Śleszkowski

Marcin Siennik is chiefly known as the author (or perhaps another editor)¹ of *Herbarz* (The Herbarium), and also the translator of the famous *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont* (*Sekrety Aleksego*

¹ The first Polish “herbarium” titled *O ziołach i o mocy ich* [About Herbs and Their Power] (Kraków, 1534) was compiled by Stefan Falimirz (the first half of the sixteenth century) who followed the example of Johan Wonnecky’s work titled *Hortus Sanitatis* (Mainz 1491). A modified version of Falimirz’s work titled *O ziołach tutecznych, postronnych i zamorskich i o mocy ich, a k temu ksiegi lekar-skie* [About the Local, Foreign, and Overseas Herbs and Their Power and the Medical Books about Them] (Kraków, 1542) was compiled by Hieronim Spiczyński (d. 1550). His unchanged work appeared again in 1556. Marcin Siennik was another editor of the text, also freely modified in relation to the versions of his predecessors.

z *Piemontu*).² Apart from that, not much is known about him: Jan Szostak supposes that Siennik was born “around 1540 at the earliest”,³ and, in Karol Estreicher’s opinion, he died around 1588.⁴ He probably was not an “outstanding physician and botanist”,⁵ because his name is not mentioned in that context in any, especially university, documents, which have survived. It has to be admitted though that he had some knowledge of medicine since, in addition to *Herbarz*, he compiled such books as *Lekarstwa doświadczone* (The Practised Medicines),⁶ *Nauka rządzenia ciał człowieka* (The Science of Rule of Human Bodies)⁷

² M. Siennik, *Herbarz, to iest ziół tuteicznych, postronnych i zamorskich opisanie, co za moc mają, a iako ich używać tak ku przestrzeżeniu zdrowia ludzkiego, iako ku uzdrowieniu rozmaitych chorób, teraz nowo wedle herbarzów dzisiejszego wieku i innych zacnych medyków poprawiony. Przydano Alexego Pedemontana księgi ośmiory Tajemnic o tajemnych a skrytych lekarstwach* [The Herbarium, that is a description of local, foreign and overseas herbs, their power and how to use them to protect human health and heal various disease, now improved according to the contemporary herbariums and other good physicians with the added books of the eight mysteries on the mysterious and secret medicines of Alexis of Piemont] (Kraków, 1568). The original title of that “appurtenance” is *Secreti dell reverendo donn Alessio Piemontese* [The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont] (Venetia, 1555). The form *Pedemontan* used by Siennik is the abbreviated Polish translation of Latin *Pedemontanus*, which in turn is the Latin form of Italian *Piemontese* (the Piedmontese). The old Italian name of Piedmont was Piedemonte (cf. the Latin form): Italian *piede*, i.e., foot; *monte*, i.e., mountain; *Piedemonte* (contemporary *Piemonte*) – areas located at the foot of the Alps.

³ J. Szostak, *Lekoznastwo i aptekarstwo na podstawie analizy szesnastowiecznych zielników Stefana Falimirza, Hieronima Spiczynskiego i Marcina Siennika*, vol. 1 (Wrocław, 1975, PhD diss., MS, Museum of Pharmacy, Jagiellonian University), p. 41.

⁴ K. Estreicher, *Bibliografia polska*, vol. 28 (Kraków, 1939), p. 47 (s.v. “Siennik [Heuwrecher] Marcin”).

⁵ “Marcin Siennik [–] a famous physician and botanist”; S. Kościński, *Słownik lekarzów polskich* (Warszawa, 1883), p. 455. Likewise – probably after Kościński – R. Rembaliński and B. Kuźnicka (cf. *idem*, *Historia farmacji* [Warszawa, 1972], p. 419).

⁶ *Lekarstwa doświadczone, które zebrał uczony lekarz P. Jana Pileckiego* (Kraków, 1564). The “learned physician”, according to A. Brückner (*idem*, *Dzieje literatury polskiej w zarysie*, vol. 1 (Warszawa, 1903), p. 225: “*Lekarstwa doświadczone* by Biernat Lubelczyk was published from an unfinished manuscript by Marcin Siennik without knowing the author”) was Biernat of Lublin, the author of *Żywot Ezopa* (The Life of Aesop). B. Górnicki, on the other hand, added that “it might be simply a copy of *Compendium sive collectorum artis medicae* authored by a certain Betrutti Lombardi”; *idem*, “Zarys piśmiennictwa pediatrycznego do roku 1600,” *Archiwum Historii i Filozofii Medycyny* 18 (1939–1945), p. 97.

⁷ *Nauka rządzenia ciał człowieka, tudzież sprawa używności ich, a iako się człowiek szkodliwym żądzom cielesnym sprzeciwić a bronić ma dla zdrowia* (Kraków, 1564).

or *Nauka, iako brzemiennie panie sprawiac się maią nosząc płód* (The Science How Pregnant Women Are To Behave while Carrying Foetus).⁸ Nevertheless, he should rather be considered a man of letters, because he mingled with printing and publishing circles, could speak foreign languages (German, Polish, Latin, “and even Hebrew”⁹), could translate from those languages into Polish “in a literary style”, meaning skilfully,¹⁰ at the request of one or another publisher, he knew how to edit such books as, for example, *Herbarz*, and even when he ran out of such orders, mediate between paper producers and printers in the sale of paper, which is the reason why, in some municipal documents, his name is sometimes accompanied by the honourable epithet *papirifex*.¹¹



Fig. 1. Title pages of Marcin Siennik's *Herbarz*, the first Italian edition of *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont* (see n. 2), and the German edition of *The Secrets* (see n. 20)

⁸ *Nauka iako brzemiennie panie sprawiac się maią nosząc płód, iako się też ku rodzeniu i przy rodzeniu rządzić. Też nauka pomocna ktemu iako po tym dziatki chować i choroby ich leczyć* (Cracoviae, 1568). This treaty is also the “seventh” book of *Herbarz* (“The seventh books include lessons how pregnant women are to behave carrying the foetus, how to approach the birth-giving, and also lessons helpful in bringing up children and treating their diseases”).

⁹ Szostak, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 42.

¹⁰ E.g., he translated from Latin: *Koncilium Trydenskiego wyroki i ustawy dla ludu pospolitego* (Kraków, 1565), an astrological work titled *Judicium abo rozsądek doskonały z gwiazdarskiej nauki* (Kraków, 1572); from German: *Sposób a porządek słusznego modlenia według nauki starych nauczycielów świętych* (Kraków, 1566) and a popular medieval romance: *Historia wdzięczna a szlachetna o pięknej Meluzynie* (Kraków, 1569).

¹¹ For more see ipsb.nina.gov.pl/index.php/a/marcin-siennik-heireicher-heureicher-pelczman (accessed: 18.07.2015).

Stanisław Kościński,¹² Karol Estreicher,¹³ and Maria Karpluk¹⁴ defended Siennik's German origin (Kościński: "Marcin Siennik [Heüwrecher] of German origin"). Karpluk explains that, in this way, Merten Heüwrecher – Siennik, signed the German "register" of herbs (see Fig. 2; apart from that, there are also Polish and Latin "registers" in *Herbarz*) and notes that, when translated to Polish, Merten Heüwrecher means exactly Marcin Siennik.¹⁵ As it is known, there is no such a name among Polish names derived from the names of performers of activities (in a given trade) maybe because a man working with hay was not such an institutionalized phenomenon in the Polish lands as it was in the German lands to "deserve" a separate name ("siennik" – a pallet in English), and later also a surname (Siennik). Szostak ardently protests against Kościński's, Estreicher's, and Karpluk's thesis (calling it "surprisingly cavalier" and "rash"). He justifies his attachment to Siennik's Polishness with a sentence from the preface to *Herbarz*, where Siennik wrote about the reasons for providing the work with numerous multilingual registers. He did it "to make our neighbours know that the Polish language [– –] is able to call every thing without neighbourly help", which, in Szostak's opinion, "unequivocally shows that Siennik was not only a Pole but also a true patriot".¹⁶ What can we say then about Samuel Linde, the author of an outstanding dictionary of the Polish language who was of foreign origin?¹⁷

Besides, there are also other reasons (and this is exactly the contribution mentioned in the title) encouraging reflection on whether Siennik's Polishness is as obvious as Szostak thinks. For example, the translation of the title of Alexis' book: why not *sekrety* (*secrets*, like in the Italian original and in the Latin base of Siennik's translation¹⁸),

¹² Szostak, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 42.

¹³ Estreicher, op. cit., p. 49.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Karpluk, "Kulturowo-antroponimiczne elementy w staropolskich nazwach ziół," in: *V Ogólnopolska Konferencja Onomastyczna. Poznań, 3–5 września 1985. Księga referatów*, ed. K. Zierhoffer (Poznań, 1988; Filologia Polska – Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, no. 34), p. 147.

¹⁵ "In German, the name Heüwrecher meant 'a man working with hay': *höuwe* – Heu, Gras (hay), *rèchen* – mit den Händen zusammen kratzen [to gather (hay) with one's hands]"; cf. *ibidem*.

¹⁶ Szostak, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 44.

¹⁷ Linde's father was a Swede, his mother a German, cf. F. Przyłubski, *Opowieść o Lindem i jego Słowniku* (Warszawa, 1955), p. 6.

¹⁸ "As for expensive wines, how to add spices to them, there is an order to be followed [– –]. However, if it is not to the liking of someone who would rather

(orig. *potione*) is *alcoholic beverage*²⁰ in Siennik's translation, which is naturally associated with "the ancient German word *Trunk* or *Trank*",²¹ just like *guts* (*flaki*, meaning red marks on the face)²² with the German *Flecken* (*mark*); *contraction* (*skurcz*, orig. *spasmo*) is *kurtz* in Siennik's translation, elsewhere (*Tajemnice*, 624 D) only after the word *colander* (*durszlag*) does Siennik give the Polish equivalent of that word ("durszlag or rzeszoto"); the Latin *Santalum* (*sandalwood*) is translated by Siennik "into Polish" as *Zandal*, and when writing: "Take cuttlefish shell"²³ he finds it appropriate to explain that: "the Germans call it Fischbeyn". The distance from the Poles may also be detected in such comments as: "There are also louse in the skin over the body, which the Poles call obscenely, and I call them skin louse. M.S." (*Tajemnice*, 502 C) or: "Take a live mother hen, and that place where the eggs cluster means the lower back in Polish" (*Tajemnice*, 543 H). Perhaps it is not by coincidence that wherever in the original there is: "Et mettilla nella cenere calda per quattro *miserere*" ("And having put it in hot ashes for four time *miserere*"²⁴), in Siennik's translation (*Tajemnice*, 542 C) there is: "put it into the embers (i.e., ashes), and then take it out;" and wherever in the original there is: "per lo spatio di due *miserere*" ("for the time of two *miserere*"), in Siennik's translation (*Tajemnice*, 560 B) there is: "until the oil soaked in", which could mean Protestant respect for the emergent word, or, in other words, reluctance to the Catholic, in fact, treatment of the emergent word as a clock.

things of the world, and of certaine effects caused of certaine Beastes (London, 1570). It is interesting though that in the German translation of *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont* the word 'secrets' was translated slightly more rationally as *künsten*, or 'the arts'.

²⁰ E.g., "When blended this will produce an alcoholic beverage which a (mentally) ill is to take when going to sleep [- -]. If the ill does not want to take such beverage, one has to try to swindle it into him"; *Tajemnice*, 500 B; "Take half a drachma of grated mouse's dung [- -] half a cup of herbal vodka (*wódka babczana*), a bit of sugar, stir, and you will get the drink"; *Tajemnice*, 521 A.

²¹ A. Brückner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* (Warsaw, 1985), p. 578.

²² "Redness and guts or red flaws are to be removed from face in this way"; *Tajemnice*, 512 C.

²³ Cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis*).

²⁴ I.e., Psalm 51, known as penitential, beginning with the words: "Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam". In Jakub Wujek's translation: "Zmiłuj się nade mną, Boże, w łaskowości swojej" (Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness).

Nevertheless, in this respect (i.e., Marcin Siennik's nationality), I would not be particularly bothered by the opinion of Sebastian Śleszkowski,²⁵ the "author" of the second edition of the Polish version of *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont*,²⁶ who noticed in the preface that:

First, I did not stick to Marcin Siennik's translation in respect of the Polish language, because his Polish is so crude that I have never read my own language that would be cruder, which shows that he either was a foreigner or was brought up in foreign lands when he was young.

What Śleszkowski had in mind here was not so much Siennik's origin (which he could have had some knowledge of) but first of all mercenary²⁷ and "personal" reasons, that is to appropriate the authorship of the Polish translation of *The Secrets* to make his "translation", which was copied almost word for word from Siennik, be considered better and binding since then (which he succeeded, as all the further

²⁵ He was a court physician of Szymon Rudnicki, Bishop of Warmia, and, after the latter's death, a personal doctor and secretary of King Sigismund III Vasa. He wrote several medical works, including: *Tetras operum medicorum* (Kraków, 1618), *Praxis phlebotomiae* (Kraków, 1615), and *O ustrzeżeniu i leczeniu morowego powietrza* (Kalisz, 1623).

²⁶ *Aleksego Pedemontana Medyka i Philosopha Tajemnice; Wszystkim obojga płci nie tylko ku leczeniu rozmaitych chorób poczawszy od głowy aż do stóp barzo potrzebne; ale i gospodarzom, rzemieślnikom zwłaszcza przedniejszych i subtelniejszych robót do ich rzemieś, i innym wielce pożyteczne. Z łacińskiego języka na Polski przelożone i w porządek dobry teraz uprawione; do których przydane są lekarstwa wyborne i doświadczone na rozmaite choroby, i innych rzeczy wiele* [The Mysteries of Alexis of Piemont, a Physician and Philosopher; Very useful for both sexes not only in the treatment of various illnesses head to heel; but also for farmers, craftsmen, especially more spiffing and subtle works for their crafts, and for others. From the Latin language into Polish translated and put into a good order; added to them are excellent and practised medicines for various illnesses, and many other things. Auctore Sebastiano Slescovio Doctore], in Cracow, at Franciszek Cezary's printing house, M.DC.XX; colophon: "Translated, ended and published by Sebastian Śleszkowski. In Cracow, at Franciszek Cezary's printing house, Anno Domini 1620".

²⁷ In 1625, Śleszkowski filed a complaint with a court in Kalisz against a Cracow's tailor claiming that the latter failed to fulfil the agreement under which he undertook to return 1033 copies of *Aleksego Pedemontana Tajemnice*, which were deposited with him, within a specified time limit, or to pay two Polish złotys for each unreturned copy, cf. F. Giedroyc, *Źródła biograficzno-bibliograficzne do dziejów medycyny w dawnej Polsce* (Warszawa, 1911), p. 731.

editions of *Tajemnice* were already reprints of his “compilation”²⁸) and, in general, to make the Polish version of *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont* be associated with him and not with Siennik since then.²⁹ He was also guided by “patriotic” reasons, which

²⁸ One more edition in 1620, at Maciej Andrzejowczyk’s printing house in Cracow, and another five at the Basilian fathers’ printing house in Supraśl (1737, 1750, 1758, 1786, 1788).

²⁹ The need of a new translation of *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piemont* was justified by Śleszkowski in his preface as follows. “This is what you need to know, my Reader, to better understand these books and also my intention which guided me when publishing them. First of all you need to know that I have never wished to publish those Mysteries, even though I kindly wished them for my Homeland: but seeing so many ask about them so often, and no Printer befitted to reprint them, even if he were to do it at his own cost, because they needed to be improved, which was not possible without much difficulty and skill in medical science; therefore, while not being able to see anybody who would take up this job constantly demanded by many people, I finally thought it would be good to meet that good and honest human demand, because this is what we are born for, and to give these Mysteries to our Homeland for ever. To this end, I took the following efforts: First, I did not stick to Marcin Siennik’s translation in respect of the Polish language, because his Polish is so crude that I have never read my own language that would be cruder, which shows that he either was a foreigner or was brought up in foreign lands when he was young [– –]. Then, I corrected many things omitted through negligence, not only in respect of *dosium*, that is Apothecaries’ weights, or rather Medical weights, but also the ingredients themselves, and I added many recipes and other useful things which are in those books of Mysteries of Alexis of Piemont published in Latin, and were not included in their Polish edition. Moreover I put those Mysteries into an order in which they have never been before, because I have put together all the medicines dispersed in all the books”. The individual theses of Śleszkowski’s disquisition deserve “honest” verification. First, Siennik’s translation might have not been so “crude” in terms of the Polish language, if Śleszkowski copied “entire cards, or even sheets from Siennik” (F. Bentkowski, *Historia literatury polskiej*, vol. 2 (Warszawa and Wilno, 1814), p. 451: “Since Marcin Siennik’s translation was older Śleszkowski curiously goes out of his way to make his Polish pure and reproaches Siennik in the preface for the crudeness of his language, whereas Linde says in his manuscript notes that Śleszkowski copied entire cards, or even entire sheets, from Siennik”). As a matter of fact, not so much “cards” and “sheets”, but simply everything, making only some small orthographic alterations here and there, which were only the result of the lapse of time, i.e., the fact that more than 50 years passed from the publication of Siennik’s *Herbarz* to the publication of *Tajemnice* edited by Śleszkowski. As for the correction of “many things omitted through negligence, not only in respect of *dosium*, that is Apothecaries’ weights, or rather Medical weights, but also the ingredients themselves”, apart from two cosmetic corrections, it is simply not true. As to “added many recipes and other useful things which are in

he probably understood as xenophobia (“which shows that he either was a foreigner or was raised in foreign lands when he was young”), extreme anti-Semitism,³⁰ and other products of the Counter-Reformation crusade.³¹

those books of Mysteries of Alexis of Piemont published in Latin, and were not included in their Polish edition”, it is true that each book was provided by Śleszkowski with an “appurtenance”, that is one or more new recipes, which most often do not come from *The Mysteries of Alexis of Piemont published in Latin* but from other sources, which Śleszkowski himself often and readily writes about (e.g., on p. 75 of F. Cezary’s 1620 edition: “I had this last [medicine] from a certain Frenchman, Piotr Bryndeus, an Ingolstad professor, my preceptor, who even now is very famous in those lands for his great knowledge of and experience in treating various difficult diseases”). Third, one can hardly say what Śleszkowski had in mind when he wrote: Moreover I put those Mysteries into an order in which they have never been before, because I have put together all the medicines dispersed in all the books”, since the order of recipes in Siennik’s edition and in Śleszkowski’s edition is basically the same, and in the case of medical and cosmetic recipes Śleszkowski also kept Siennik’s pattern *a capite ad pedes* (“from head to heel” which was the favourite method of arranging texts about diseases and medicines in the antiquity and the Middle Ages). It is even more difficult to understand the fact that Śleszkowski used this argument against Siennik who wrote in the preface to the eighth book of *Tajemnice* that: “These eighth books are not arranged in the order which we can see in the Latin [version – ed.]; but in this way, just like in the previous seven books, we gathered together into chapters the things which were united as medicines for individual parts of the body, even though in the Latin books they were dispersed here and there, we gathered them together into chapters and put into order”.

³⁰ Śleszkowski was also the author of such works as: *Odkrycie zrad, złośliwych ceremonij, tajemnych rad, praktyk szkodliwych rzeczypospolitej i straszliwych zamysłów żydowskich* [The Discovery of betrayals, malicious ceremonies, secret advice, practices harmful for the Commonwealth, and Terrible Jewish Concepts] (1621), *Dostateczna genealogia żydowska, a zatym i przedniejsze ustawy talmudu żydowskiego... o niewypowiedzianych złościach i niezliczonych zbrodniach żydowskich... prawda nieomylna* [Sufficient Jewish Genealogy, and, Therefore, Outstanding Laws of the Jewish Talmud... About Inexpressible Jewish Angers and Countless Crimes... Infallible Truth] (1622) or *Jasne dowody o doktorach żydowskich, że nie tylko duszę, ale i ciało w niebezpieczeństwo zginienia wiecznego wdają, którzy żydów, tatarów i innych niewiernych przeciwko zakazaniu Kościoła Świętego Powszechnego za lekarzów używają* [Distinct Evidence of Jewish Doctors that not Only the Soul but also the Body Expose to the Danger of Eternal Loss, Who Use Jews, Tartars, and Other Unfaithful against the Prohibitions of the Holy Catholic Church as Physicians] (1623). In the context of the appropriation of the translation of *Tajemnice* it really does show the superiority of Catholic morality over all others.

³¹ A peculiar kind of morality whose superiority, represented by Catholic Śleszkowski, strengthened by Counter-Reformation, especially in the context of his “authorship” of the Polish translation of *Sekrety*, is by all means obvious.

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Abstract

Marcin Siennik (ca. 1540 – ca. 1580) is mostly known for elaborating *Herbarz* (“Herbary”, a popular medical encyclopaedia) and translating the famous *Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piedmont* into Polish. Most historians (Kośmiński, Estreicher, Karpluk, etc.) are certain of Siennik’s German descent, pointing to the fact that the page of *Herbarz* containing the

index of German names was signed by him with his original name: Merten Heüwrecher, which was then translated into Polish as Marcin Siennik. There are also other arguments in support of this thesis (which is what constitutes the contribution mentioned in the title of the paper), for example the way in which he translated the title of Alexis of Piedmont's book (not *secrets*, as it is called in the original Italian version and the Latin base for the translation, but *mysteries*, which points to the influence of the German tradition), a number of words appearing in the text (e.g. Italian *potione* [beverage] is rendered in Siennik's version as *trunek* [drink], which proves similar to the German etymon *Trunk* or *Trank*), as well as phrases such as "And having put it into hot ashes for four *miserere*.." (in Siennik's translation: "put it into ashes and then take it out"), which serve as a manifestation of his reluctance to follow the Catholic custom of counting time with the Word of God. In this context, the least valuable is the opinion of Śleszkowski, the "author" of the second edition of the Polish version of *The Secrets of the Reverend Maister Alexis of Piedmont*, who wrote the following in the preface: "First and foremost I did not confide in the translation by Marcin Siennik when it came to the Polish language, as he is so inept in it that I have never read anything written in Polish quite so ineptly, which shows that he was either a foreigner or brought up in foreign lands in his youth..." – he focused not so much on Siennik's descent (on which he may have had some information), but primarily on pursuing his own ambition, appropriating the authorship of the Polish translation of *The Secrets* in order for his "translation", copied almost verbatim from Siennik's version, to be considered better and definitive. He was also motivated by "patriotic" premises, which for him meant xenophobia, extreme anti-Semitism, and other products of the Counter-Reformation crusade.

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