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TRES FAMOSIORES RESPUBLICAE, OR KASPER SIEMEK ON ANTIQUITY

Tres famosiores Respublicae, Atheniensium sapientia;
Lacedaemoniorum fortitudine, Romanorum utroque:
Diversis initiis exitum similem habuere:
valetudine Athenienses senio Romana: Spartanoque concidit.[1]

(Kasper Siemek, *Lacon*, 1635)

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania was developing under special conditions. All around, absolutisms were springing up which, in the form of Prussia, Russia, and Austria, would consume the Commonwealth towards the end of the eighteenth century. That endeavor would prove successful owing to their military superiority, but also to their making extensive use of corruption, preying on the weaknesses of the Commonwealth's republican system, and spreading slogans of tolerance and the rule of law at home and in Europe. In the seventeenth century, however, all that was still *in statu nascendi*. Having escaped the carnage of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) and

[1] "The three most famous Republics, the Athenians' for wisdom, the Lacedaemonians' for valour, the Romans' for the one and the other, had different beginnings but a similar end; the Athenian one declined because of health, the Roman and Spartan, because of age" (*Lacon*, Dial. III (174–175). Further on in this article, excerpts from the Latin text will be cited in the footnotes (translator's note – Klaudyna Michałowicz).

defended itself against external threats (and actually becoming an external threat itself by intervening in Muscovy, whose capital it captured in 1610, with a Polish prince failing only by a hair's breadth to be crowned the tsar of Russia, Poland continued to be, at least until the middle of that century, a superpower.

The citizens of the Commonwealth living in the seventeenth century, who, seeking an ancient affiliation, called themselves Sarmatians, were well aware of the uniqueness and value of their statehood. Political writers, however, while they took pride in the Commonwealth, were also aware of its shortcomings and the lurking dangers. The contemporary world did not provide them with many analogies to debate these issues, and as a result, they sought a more distant point of reference, finding ancient examples to which the Commonwealth could relate in recognizing its own strengths and weaknesses.

Vae victis

In Polish historiography, however, even up to the present day, the "Sarmatian times" are viewed as a period of decline, and the "Sarmatian" political thought is rarely a subject of interest. The reasons for this are undoubtedly complex, but – leaving aside the issue of values – what lies at the root of the criticism is indeed a grievance, a regret at the ineffectiveness of a state which, at decisive moments of its eighteenth-century history, repeatedly failed to stand the test of clashes with the neighbouring absolutist empires.

This ambiguity of feeling has been expressed by Zbigniew Rau in terms so apt that his observations merit being quoted in full:

> There is no doubt that such a radical difference in the perception of Sarmatism cannot be entirely explained by the temporal perspective of its view alone. For while it is understandable that the Sarmatians, despite ideological disputes or even differences of rank and status, unanimously perceived the Commonwealth's system in an affirmative manner, the fact that critical commentators on Sarmatism showed similar unanimity in their condemnation and rejection of it is much less understandable. After all, they were often separated by centuries in time perspective and located on antipodes in the ideological spectrum. It is therefore difficult to resist the impression that they must have been united by a certain common canon of experience, radically different from that of the Sarmatians, which not only made it impossible for them to understand the Sarmatians, but also, as a result of this inability to understand them, commanded them to condemn them. And indeed: when a critic of Sarmatism evaluated this historical phenomenon, he did so from the position of his own present; and this present constituted an opposite of the Sarmatians' present. A Sarmatian was a citizen of a state which he still had the right to treat as a sovereign power. A critic of Sarmatism was often a subject of a foreign power, a citizen of a state that was not sovereign or at least one threatened in its sovereignty. For the Sarmatian, politics meant a domain determined by the needs and will of the citizens of the Commonwealth. For the critic of Sarmatism, politics most often constituted a margin of activity, the framework of which was

> determined by the foreign power of which he was a subject, or by the non-sovereign state of which he was a citizen, or even by the state that was sovereign but concurrently particularly sensitive to the canons of its own geopolitics. The Sarmatian could most often be proud of his state and his position within it. By the same token, he by no means felt handicapped when he compared his state and himself with other European states and their subjects. The critic of Sarmatism could not derive any pride from such comparisons; on the contrary, he had every right to feel handicapped by them.[2]

Antiquity in seventeenth-century Polish political thought

The above will suffice for a general introduction. The purpose of this text is not to analyze the situation of Poland, but rather to examine the place of Antiquity in Polish political thought in the seventeenth century. During the Old Polish period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), the ancient tradition played a major role in Polish political and constitutional thought, which almost entirely belonged to the republican current.[3]

Scholars have written extensively about the fundamental influence of ancient writers' reflections on the way of thinking and writing about the state, as present in the Commonwealth, as well as on the Sarmatians' adoption of basic concepts from ancient writers, especially Cicero, that describe the civic system and civic values. In addition to being familiar with the works of Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon (*Constitution of the Lacedaimonians*), Plutarch (an educated Sarmatian was brought up on Plutarch[4]), and Herodotus, Polish political writers were readers of and influenced by many of their contemporaries – writers of the Renaissance cultural turn towards the ancient past, who vividly analysed the texts of ancient authors. Already, sixteenth-century republican thought in the Commonwealth was emerging in contact with the classical republican tradition, which comprised the ancient and early modern Western traditions.[5]

The exemplars to be invoked were, first and foremost, the Roman republic and 'Roman models of civic language', viewed through the eyes of Cicero. Jerzy Axer states that it was "Latin antiquity that was a component of the cultural identity of the Commonwealth";[6] the Greek originals, as Axer goes on to write, were known to a Polish nobleman through Roman copies. In general, continues this expert on the reception of antiquity, "Old Polish intellectual culture was imbued with *latinitas* (language, legal and constitutional system, literature in Latin);

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[2] Rau 2018,16–17. All quotations, originally in Latin or Polish, have been translated into English solely for the purpose of the current publication (translator's note).

[3] Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2012, 81.

[4] Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2014, 33.

[5] Pietrzyk-Reeves 2012.

[6] Axer 2014, 479–506.

the use of Latin was widespread, it was a living language, spoken (and often thought in); fluency in two languages (a *sui generis* bilingualism) of the privileged strata participating in culture persisted for a very long time, until the beginning of the eighteenth century".[7] Greek texts were known in much more elite circles; but some elements, due to their distinctiveness and "otherness" against the background of the ancient republics, surfaced on their own, albeit in a stereotypical form (*vide* the strict Spartan upbringing).

In the political writings of the Old Polish period, the Commonwealth was presented as a continuator of, or even an heir to, the "old commonwealths," as described by the historian and writer of the Baroque period, Szymon Starowolski (1588–1656).[8] An anonymous writer active in the period of the first interregnum, author of the book *Naprawa Rzeczypospolitej do elekcyi nowego króla* ['The repair of the Commonwealth for the election of the new king'], believed that the construction of the Commonwealth exceeds the penetration of those wise lawgivers of republics, as they write about Lycurgus, Solon, and Romulus.[9]

Kasper Siemek

Polish political thought comprises the work of many authors.[10] The focus herein is that of Kasper Siemek, author of the treatises *Civis Bonus* and *Lacon*.[11] In the preface to an edition of the first of these, Zbigniew Rau comments: "This treatise represents a genuine opening, a *sui generis* starting point for political discourse in seventeenth-century Commonwealth".[12]

An undoubted originality of thought characterises both works. The first of them, a treatise *titled Civis bonus (1632),* contains a systematic lecture on the state, law, and the citizen, and at the same time an apotheosis of the status quo in the Commonwealth, rooted in the experience of success in the 1630s. Three years later,

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[7] Axer 1995, 76, 77.

[8] Starowolski 1650, 160 (quoted after Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2014, 29).

[9] *Naprawa Rzeczypospolitej* 1573 (quoted after Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2014, 29).

[10] Marcin Kromer (1512–1589) – Kromer 1578; anonymous author of the 1588 book *Philopolites*; Wawrzyniec Goślicki/L. G. Goslicius (ca. 1530–1607) – Goślicki/Goslicius 1568; Krzysztof Warszewicki (1543–1603) Warszewicki 1579; Warszewicki 1598; Ł. Górnicki (1527–1603) – Górnicki 1616a; Górnicki 1616b; Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro (1620–1679) – Fredro 1664a; Fredro 1664b; Aaron Alexander Olizarowski (1618–1659) – Olizarowski 1651; Piotr Mieszkowski (d. 1652) - Mieszkowski 1637; Łukasz Opaliński/Paulus Naeocelius (1612–1662) – Opaliński 1659; Jan Sachs – Sachs 1665; Krzysztof Hartknoch (1644–1687) – Hartknoch 1678.

[11] Little is known about the life of Kasper Siemek (d. 1642); see Kulesza 2026. He came from an impecunious gentry family. Like many other young men of his generation, he studied at the universities of Cracow (1610) and Bologna (1620). He worked as a preceptor to the sons of wealthy noblemen.

[12] Rau 2018, 19.

Kasper Siemek published a work entitled *Lacon seu de Reipublicae rectae instituendae arcanis dialogus* (1635).[13] Paweł Sydor describes it as follows: "The past meets the future in a conversation between two wise men and practitioners, so to speak, one of whom [Augustus] represents a political organisation that is the state, while the other [Lacon] presents the point of view of a citizen and is a champion of freedom".[14] In Lacon's nine conversations with Octavian Augustus concerning the political systems of Sparta and the Commonwealth, Siemek emphasises the role of the Senate: comprising members of the social elite, this body watches over the king's power, preventing the threat of tyranny (*Non potest esse princeps malus, si senatus bonus est*), stabilises the system, and upholds order and the rule of law.

Unlike *Civis bonus*, which takes the form of a continuous lecture, in the second of his treatises Siemek points to a specific historical moment in the history of the Roman republic when the interlocutors, Octavian Augustus and the Spartan exile Lacon,[15] meet: "I shall present the matter as if in a stage play, that is, I shall explain it in a conversation most like a true one; combining Augustus, *princeps* of the Romans, with Lacon, one of them more favourable to the Republic, the other to liberty" (Introductory Dialogue, 110–111).[16]

It is mainly Lakon who speaks. In Dialogues II to IX, his statements occupy ca. 75 percent of space, while those of Augustus no more than 25 percent. Those proportions fluctuate, however. In the two later chapters, i.e., VII and VIII, the statements of Augustus occupy about 30 to 35 percent of the text, while in the last dialogue, IX, 44 percent of the text belongs to Augustus.

ANTIQUITY IN BOTH TREATISES

Sources of information

In *Civis Bonus*, the author makes overt references to Herodotus, Aristotle, Plutarch, as well as Cicero (*Cato*) and Caesar (*Anticato*). In addition, he betrays familiarity with Thucydides, Aristotle (*Politica*) and Plutarch (*De vitioso pudore*; *Vitae parallelae*; *De defectu oraculorum*), as well as Roman authors: Cicero (*Tusculanae disputationes*; *De re publica*; *De officiis*; *In Catilinam I*; *Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino*; *De senectute*), Caesar (*Commentarii de bello civili*), Livy (*Ab urbe condita*), Virgil (*Aeneis*), Ovid (*Ars amatoria*), Tacitus (*Annales*), Seneca (*De providentia*; *De ira*) and Valerius Maximus (*Factorum et dictorum memorabilia*).

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[13] Siemek 2021.

[14] Sydor 2021, 29.

[15] Sydor 2021, 28

[16] Rem narrabo quasi fabula, vel colloquio expediam, proximo veri. Principem Romanorum Augustum, Laconi componendo, alter Reipublicae impensius cupiebat, alter libertati.

Key numbers

In *Civis Bonus*, Greece is referred to 99 times (of which 24 are references to Sparta), and Rome is referred to 124 times.

Four specific Spartans are mentioned by name: Lycurgus (4 times), Agesilaus (4), Lysander (1), and Machanidas (1). Similarly, four Athenians are mentioned: Solon (2), Alcibiades (2), Peisistratus (1), and Plato (1).

There are also 19 other Greeks: Dion of Syracuse (referred to 5 times), Pyrrhus (5), Alexander the Great (4), Plutarch (4), Dionysius the Younger (3), Philip (3), Pelopidas (2), Timoleon of Corinth (2) and Perseus (2); Eumenes, Antigonus, Demetrius, Herodotus, Aristotle, Charon of Thebes, Synon, Protous, Callimachus and Cineas are each mentioned once.

Romans are far more numerous, with a total of 48. The ones to appear with the greatest frequency are Caesar (16 times), Cato the Younger (13), Pompey (9), Cicero (9), the two Bruti, the Younger and the Older (10), Tarquin the Proud (6), Metellus (4), Hannibal (3), Scaevola (3), Emilius Paulus (3), Porsenna (3), Cassius (3), Scipio Africanus (3), Fabius Maximus (3), apart from those, Marius, Manilius, Cornelia, Catiline, Tiberius, Cremutius Cordus, Regulus, Vitellius, Avilius, Nero, Romulus, Seneca, Camillus, Coriolanus, Sextus Roscius, Titus Cloelius, Lucrece, Sulla, Trajan and others.

Heroes from outside the ancient world are considerably fewer in number: 40 from the history of Poland and 8 from other countries.

NON NUMERANDA SED PONDERANDA SUNT TESTIMONIA

Civis bonus

Siemek's references to Ancient Greek history are somewhat fewer in number than those to Roman history; many, as exemplified by the motto to this article, occur in conjunction with Roman history. Thus, there is the double stereotype of the brave Spartan and Roman woman, compared with an example from the author's own period: "For in our times, husbands often do not leave their homeland, in those days, women never did, but at the risk of their own lives they repelled the incursions of enemies no less bravely than husbands resisting with the edge of their weapons. This often happened in Rome, not infrequently with the Lacedaemonians" (Cap. V, 152–153). Siemek compares this with the Turkish siege of the city of Eger in Hungary, where eighty women "arranged a sortie from the besieged fortress and made a great slaughter among the Turks" (Cap. V, 154–155). A quite trivial, and certainly irrelevant, story from his Italian journey,

where a seat at table in an inn was given up in favour of his high-born companion, is illustrated with a reference to the esteem in which the Spartans were held in the world: "And the Lacedaemonians, each and every one of them, because of their freedom and lofty spirit were regarded as kings and were held in great esteem throughout the world" (Cap. II, 106–107).[17] Another example, possibly meant only to provide an intellectual decoration to the text, is: "Who shall express the integrity of Cato, the virtue of Seneca, the valour of Pelopidas, the courage of Dion? (Cap. XII (286–287).[18]

Relatively little space in *Civis bonus* is devoted to Athens. Alcibiades, a restless spirit and a warmonger, makes an appearance (Cap. IV (138–139), juxtaposed with the history of Poland's war against the Turks (140–141). Further on, it is recounted how Solon saw through the designs of Peisistratus: "As soon as Solon noticed him, still stained only in thought, for he was contemplating the crime: 'Have you read,' he said, 'o son of Hippocrates, the Ulysses of Homer?', thus indicating that he too acted by means of the same contrivances" (Cap. VI (186–187). Additionally, Plato is summoned to Syracuse by Dionysius (Cap.). XII (300–301).

At first glance, Siemek seems to say surprisingly much about Sparta. However, a closer look at his views on the republic reveals his interest in Sparta and Rome (especially obvious in the *Lacon*) but the detailedness of his knowledge of Sparta is by no means a given. What is evident is not only understanding, but also curiosity, arising, in part at least, from critical reading. *The Life of Lycurgus* by Plutarch of Cheronea, *The Life of Agesilaus*, and probably also *The Life of Lysander* have obviously been read with much attention.

Siemek is interested, for understandable reasons, in Lycurgus as the founder of the Spartan system. He follows Plutarch's argument closely, although he writes from memory, as is evident from his substitution of a perpetrator (a single one, as in Plutarch) for perpetrators of the gouging out of Lycurgus's eye:

> To Lycurgus, who was gifted enough to put the republic in order, divine tributes were paid by means of erecting a temple in his honour, where he was worshipped like a god, as attested by Herodotus and by Plutarch, citing Aristotle. Festive days were also established in his honour, which were called Lycurgidae, or the days of Lycurgus. Lycurgus was certainly not a god, but a man, but because men, through benefactions, as if by imitation, become like the god who is the greatest benefactor, Lycurgus was considered a god, because he had never harmed anyone and had benefited everyone by establishing the most just laws, for the reason of which he lost one eye. He had it gouged out by those whose way to wickedness and crime had been closed (Cap. X, 250–251).[19]

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[17] Et Lacedaemonii, quouquot erant, propter eorum libertatem, et animum excelsum pro regibus habebantur, magnaeque per orbem authoritatis.

[18] Integritatem Catonis, sanctitatem Senecae, virtutem Pelopidae, Dionis fortitudinem quis edicet?

[19] Licurgus, quia ingenii satis habuisset ad rempublicam ordinandam, omnium rerumpublicarum glorisissimam, humanas laudes superavit. Non homo, sed Deus habitatus est et divini honores illi habiti extructo eius honori templo, ubi pro Deo colebatur, ut Herodotus testis est et Plutarchus

Siemek's references to Sparta are selective; a phenomenon which, incidentally, is characteristic of the reception of Sparta in all times and places. There are the aforementioned references to the brave Spartan women, and of course to the love of freedom exhibited by the Spartans themselves. There is even (unless it is a general ascertainment) a hint of awareness regarding the famous Spartan inspection of infants: 'The Lacedaemonians were commanded by law to scrutinise the shapes of the body, in order to use them as signs of virtue and to bring up more carefully those who seemed by birth more capable of virtue" (Cap. VII (200–201).[20]

In vain would Siemek's work be searched for references to Spartan society, the perioeci, the helots, the crypteia; this is understandable. However, Sparta's political system is absent as well. Instead, there is a focus on the fall of Sparta during the reign of King Agesilaus (Agesilaus II):

> A very famous king of the Lacedaemonians, Agesilaus (for even a king does not make a kingdom, but with the senate forms a republic; and no one ever used the name of the kingdom of the Lacedaemonians, but everyone spoke of the commonwealth), he, I say, received from the august senate the rule of a commonwealth in the fullness of happiness and in the bloom of fame; but after the death of Lysander, a man of ancient virtue, the spirit declined in the people, as a result of which the fame and happiness of the commonwealth declined as well. Therefore the Thebans, ravaging the lands of the Lacedaemonians, reached as far as Sparta. And then, for the first time, one could see from Sparta the enemy at the walls of the republic and the smoke stirred up by the enemy. Thereupon each member of the senate rushes to the king and scolds him: 'Give us back,' he cries, 'the republic in the same state as you received it' (Cap. III, 130–131).[21]

Siemek saw (through the eyes of the sources and/or his own) the downfall of Sparta under Agesilaus – something that Xenophon, whose views have been adopted by today's scholarship, tried to hide from his readers. In Siemek's perception, Sparta's misfortunes had been the ruler's fault: "Agesilaus, king of

ex Aristotele; diesque festi eius honori dictati Licurgidae vocabantur sive dies Licurgi. Non Deus certe, homo fuit Licurgus, sed quia beneficiis homines aliquatenus similitudine similes redduntur Deo, qui summus benefactor est, Licurgus pro Deo habebatur, quia neminem iniuria, omnes beneficiis affecit constitutis rectissimis legibus, propter quas tanquam propter beneficjum alterum amiserat oculum, ab illis effosum, quibus ad nequitiam et scelera fuit praeclusa via.

[20] Lacedaemoniis inspiciendi certa corporum lineamenta lex fuit, ut iis indiciis virtutis uterentur diligentiusque educarentur illi qui ad virtutem magis nati esse videbantur.

[21] Agesilaus, gloriosissimus rex Lacedaemoniorum (neque enim rex facit regnum, sed cum senatu respublica est et nemo unquam regnum Lacedaemoniorum, sed rempublicam omnes appellaverunt), is, inquam, cum a senatu amplissimo intergerrima felicitate et summa gloria recepisset rempublicam regendam hominumque interea immutata virtute post fata Lysandri, viri antiquae virtutis, et gloriam felicitatemque reipublicae immutari oportebat. Itaque Thebani terras Lacedaemoniorum vastantes Spartam usque progressi sunt. Et tum primum et hostis in pomoeriis reipublicae et fumus ab hoste excitatus Sparta videri potuit: „redde – inquit – nobis talem, qualem accepisti rempublicam."

the Lacedaemonians, was blamed for the unfortunate fate of the republic, and in our country, too, various kings were often reproached for the same reason" (Cap. VIII, 214–215).[22] Agesilaus bribed the gerousia:

> By means of this subterfuge, as has passed into memory, the senate of the Lacedemonians was tempted at first. When it became known that Agesilaus was doing too many favours to the senate, he was not only forbidden to do so, but was punished, because he gave too much to a few and almost nothing to all. There should be a measure in giving, there should also be a measure in taking. I remember reading in Cicero that Philip wrote to his son Alexander: 'Do not spoil with generous gifts those who are ready to take, lest you be called a supplier instead of a king' (Cap. X, 256/258–259).[23]

The final collapse of the Spartan system occurred, according to Siemek, at the end of the second century BC: "The Lacedaemonians survived free, with their laws unchanged, for eight hundred years. Finally, oppressed by the tyrant Machanidas, serving him, they succumbed" (Cap. X, 254–255).[24] Siemek is evidently sure that the final collapse of the laws occurred during the reign of the tyrant Machanidas (c. 211–207 BC), for in the following chapter he restates: "The Lacedemonians survived eight hundred years, establishing and observing one hundred and fourteen laws" (Cap. XI, 279–280).[25]

As to Roman history, Siemek's attention is clearly drawn to the overthrow of kings. He recalls the expulsion of Tarquinius the Proud by Brutus (Cap. V (160–161; see also Cap. IX, 240–241); he is familiar with the story of the rape of Lucrece (Cap. V; 162–163); he has heard of the threat of intervention by the Etruscan king Porsenna (Cap. VI, 178–179). He writes: "Romulus had established a free republic for the Romans. The Romans thought that it should be governed by kings; but some time afterwards, when the arrogance of this office was clearly revealed to them in the person of Tarquinius the Proud, they drove the kings out, establishing a pure form of republic, in which they lived not only for a very long time, but also very meritoriously, and surpassed all kingdoms in immortal fame, which under kings they would by no means have attained" (Cap. X, 254–255).

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[22] Lacedaemoniorum Agesilao regi imputata et apud nos saepe diversis regibus adversa reipublicae fortuna exprobrata fuit.

[23] Hac machina primo Lacedaemoniorum senatum tentatum fuisse memoriae proditum est, cum Agesilaus senatui nimis benefacere deprehensus est et non modo prohibitus, sed etiam punitus fuit, quia paucis nimis multa, omnibus nihil paene dedisset. Sit modus dandi, sit et accipiendi. Memini me legisse apud Ciceronem Philippum, Alexandro filio scripsisse: „Non corrumpas largitionibus, qui accipere sunt parati, ne praebitor non rex appelleris."

[24] Lacaedemonii octingentis annis immutatis legibus perstiterunt liberii; tandem a tyranno Machanida oppressi eidem servientes perierunt.

[25] Lacedaemonii octingentis perstiteruntannis centum quatuordecim institutis et observatis legibus.

Siemek refers to Camillus and Scipio Africanus (Cap. V, 154–155; see also Cap. VII (200–201), Fabius and Cato the Elder (Cap. VII, 200–201), Marius and his victory over the Cimbri (Cap. VII, 200–201). The period of the Empire is perhaps the least represented. A perfunctory reference to Nero serves only as an example of a transformation from a good man to a criminal (Cap. X, 260–2610). *Traianus imperator* appears only in juxtaposition with the king of Poland, *Stephanus rex noster* (Cap. VIII, 214–215), by implication probably a military commander, an *imperator* par excellence, perhaps even *optimus princeps*. The *lex trium liberorum* appears as a marginal reference (Cap. IX, 230–231); the fact that it was introduced by Augustus is not mentioned. Siemek has the most to say about the decline of the Roman Republic; apart from other considerations, this is an obvious result of reading Plutarch, Cicero and Caesar.

Siemek's heroes are Cato the Younger, Brutus and Cassius. He calls Cato "the most zealous defender of liberty" (Cap. II, 112–113) and "Free Cato" (*Liber Cato*) (116–117); he writes that "Cato could not endure Caesar's ambition, Pompey's hubris, Metellus's faithlessness, because they were harmful to the republic" (Cap. IV (144–145).[26] The twenty-seven conspirators against Julius Caesar were, in his view, "the best citizens" (*optimi cives*) (Cap. IX, 236–237). Elsewhere, Siemek adds that Brutus was a Stoic, Cassius an Epicurean (Cap. XII, 302–303), while Cato drew on Stoic philosophy (Cap. VII, 206–207). By way of contrast, he juxtaposes Zamoyski, whom he considers a *civis bonus*, with Catiline, who was "a wild beast acting to the detriment of the community of citizens" (Cap. II, 101–102, 102–103). He writes: "I will not call Catiline an evil citizen because, as I have already said, he was an enemy" (Cap. III, 126–127).[27] He appreciates Scaevola, who was "a good citizen, and can even be called the best, because he risked his own life for the love of the fatherland" (Cap. IX, 234–235). He also appreciates Cicero, although he places him lower than Cato: "Cicero, who devoted the strength of his talent to the benefit of the republic, was a good citizen. Cato was better still, since he was motivated by nothing but love for the republic, and he flattered no one. Cicero sinned in this one thing, the belief that preference should be given to Octavian" (Cap. III, 128-129).[28]

Cicero is referenced again, perhaps in connection with Siemek's own reading of the speech *Pro Sextio Roscio Amerino*: "I remember that the illustrious man [*summo viro*], Cicero, in his defence of Sextus Roscius relates that Titus Cloelius, a man of great renown, had been killed in a room at night, the assassin

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[26] Cato non sustinuit ambitionem Caesaris, superbiam Pompeii, perfidiam Metelli, quia ista reipublicae erant nociva.

[27] Catilinam non appellabo malum civem, quia hostis fuit, ut iam dictum est.

[28] Bonus civis, Cicero, vim sui ingenii utilitati reipublicae accommodans, melior Cato, quia nullus studio, sed tantum reipublicae amore ducebatur ac memini adulatus est. Qua in re una Cicero erravit Octavium praeporendum ducens.

leaving no traces, and the suspicion of murder could not fall on anyone else but two young men sleeping together" (Cap. IV, 144–145). Also, Siemek owes much to his reading of Caesar, which he seems to signal when he writes: "Julius Caesar overcame the violence of the Gauls by means of procrastination, as he himself wrote in his Commentaries. It was not Marcellus by fighting, but Fabius Maximus by refraining from fighting in the camp, who proved that Hannibal could be defeated" (Cap. IV, 142–143).

Lacon

In *Lacon*, the author demonstrates his familiarity with Aristotle (*Metaphysica*, *Politica*), Posidonius, Plutarch (*Vitae parallelae*) and Roman writers: Cicero (*De officiis*, *Pro Tito Annio Milone*, *De legibus*, *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, *Pro rege Deiotaro*), Velleius Paterculus, Martial (*Epigrammata*), Suetonius (*Vitae Caesarum*), Sallustius (*De coniuratione Catilinae*), Valerius Maximus (*Factorum et dictorum memorabilia*), Seneca (*Epistulae*, *De tranquilitate animi*, *De brevitate vitae*, *De beneficiis*) and Tertullian (*Apologeticum*).

Greece is referred to 211 times (including Sparta 94 times), and Rome, 218 times.

Nine Spartans are mentioned by name: Lysander (11 times), Agesilaus (5), Cleomenes (2), Agis (2), Clearchus (1), Callicratidas (1), Lycurgus (1), Gylippus (1) and Nabis (1). Twelve Athenians are mentioned: Temistocles (3 times), Cimon (3), Alcibiades (3), Pericles (3), Thucydides (son of Melesias) (1), Anaxagoras (1), Niciasz (1), Aristides (1), Solon (1), Plato (1), Peisistratus (1) and Aspasia (1). There are also nine other Greeks: Aristotle (3 times), Epaminondas (2), Philopoemen (2), Alexander (1), Philip (1), Pyrrhus (3), Perseus (1), Epicure (1), Posidonius (1), Pitagoras (1).

Some forty Romans are mentioned: Caesar (18 times), Pompey (13), Sulla (7), Crassus (5), Agrippa (5), Octavian Augustus (4), Marcus Lepidus (4), Aemillius Paulus (4), Maecenas (4), Numa (3), Varus (3), Romulus (2), Scipio (5), Tarquin the Proud (1), the Curiuses (1), Camillus (3), Cato (1), Agrippa (1), Atticus (2), Catullus (1), Gaius Atilius Regulus (1), Mark Antony (3), Quintillus (1), Lucullus (1), Marius (3), Marcellus (3), Clodius (2), Catiline (3), Quintus Metellus (1), Scipio (1), Brutus (3) and others. According to the index, there are 6 heroes from the history of Poland and 1 from elsewhere.

Siemek is aware that "wretched traces of the ruins of Ilion lie on hillocks" and knows that all things pass away like Troy did, only fame remains (Dial. IV, 188–190). He mentions the Greek lawgivers, Solon and Lycurgus (Dial. IV, 222–223). His focus is, however, not on regimes they created, but rather on the practial aspects of their functioning and, in essence, on political history. Thus, *Lacon* contains a summary of the history of Athens under Pericles:

> The Republic was being torn into pieces, involuntarily going in various directions, as the populace fruitlessly repented of the deed, in times of prosperity [having been] uncontrollable; so public folly wasted the wisdom of individuals: the rest was lost with Pericles. He was in himself worthy of love and reverence; he knew how to win the populace; he was distinguished by his education and innate ability; the immoderate inclination of the populace towards him caused his downfall. Excessive power corrupts a man so that he cannot bear an equal when he has no superior. [Pericles] adapted the future to the present, lest the ancient nobility of others should stand in the way of the newness of the nobility of his sons. He first oppressed the sons of Cimon, a man whose glory was still freshly remembered. Then he attacked Thucydides, a man inferior to himself, superior to the others, but better than all. And Pericles had no shortage of corrupt commoners. They attributed that intention to the philosopher Anaxagoras; it is the usual vice of the commoners, to call their own faults another's wickedness. In fact, as virtues grow weaker, so vices grow stronger as a result of imitation. Alcibiades, worse as an example, shone in a war abroad. And since the conditions of the Sicilian war were disgraceful, it was believed that the public disgrace of Nicias could be removed by a man whom the people regarded more kindly. Ostracism, the only remedy against might, is abolished; it is now safer [to practise] tyranny and wicked scheming. He made this growing hatred between the commoners and the optimates complete, with ultimate doom for the state; for to himself he attracted as much power as all had had before. When he went into exile, he made the Republic empty, as if the head and the more important part were missing, because the others had no experience (Dial. III, 174–177).[29]

Siemek embellishes his vision of democracy, in which Pericles leads the populace and thus destroys his opponents, with details that demonstrate considerable general knowledge. He mentions first Cimon as a rival of Pericles, then Thucydides (son of Melesias), and finally Pericles's collaborator Anaxagoras of Klazomenai. The passage betrays familiarity with the Sicilian expedition, and of Nicias's association with it. There is also a reference to ostracism and its alleged abolition. Alcibiades, already mentioned in *Civis bonus*, deserves a mention here as well.

Slightly earlier, Siemek alludes to an anecdote (known only from Diodorus) according to which Alcibiades advised Pericles, who was under threat of having to submit a financial report, to provoke a war (Peloponnesian War) in order to

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[29] Cymoniis in primis, depressit filios, recenti memoria viri inter gloriosos. Tucididem deinceps agressus, inferiorem se, caeteris superiorem, sed meliorem omnibus. Nec defuit venalis populus Pericli. Anaxagorae philosopho, id Consilii imputabutur, conueto vulgi vitio: sua errata alienam improbitatem vocitare. Caeterum, ut virtutes decrescunt, ita vitia imitamentis intenduntur. Peior exemplo Alcibiades, legibus et nobilitati infestus, domi terrore, foris bello enituit. Et quia infames belli Siculi conditiones; Niciae, publicum dedecus, posse abolere credebatur: populo gratior. Ostracismum, unum adversus potentiam remedium, demolitur: iam tutior tyrannis, et impia machinamenta. Iste gliscentes, populum inter optimatesque inimicitias complevit extrema publici pernicie: cum ad se unum, quantum omnes haberent, pertraxisset potentiae. Se exacto: vacuam fecit Rempublicam, tanquam defuisset caput et potior pars, inexercitatis reliquis.

distract the populace: "Among the Athenians, the talent of Alcibiades was great but perverse; he was corrupted by riches, and he corrupted the Republic. The Republic's great generosity towards him was the source of wickedness. He corrupted many, even Pericles, with the instruction that a powerful man should think of not giving rather than giving accounts to the Republic" (Dial. III, 168–169).[30]

There are also snippets of other information of varying value. For instance, there is a mention of how, during the Persian wars, Themistocles urged the Athenians to leave the city (Dial. IV; 194–195; see also Dial. IV (196–197) and of the king of Persia's reaction to the defeat in the Battle of the Eurymedon (Dial. IV (200–201); also, the reader is told that "among the Athenians, Pericles, even though not able to do much in war, won the populace to himself and publicly held on to his reputation, if tarnished" (Dial. VII, 312-313).[31]

Siemek perceives the senate as an extremely important institution, nowhere does he use the name of the gerousia, and the Areopagus Council appears in his work only once, precisely in *Lacon*: "In Athens, the state [was] the people's, but the senate was chosen from among the wise, without any regard to poverty or wealth. Thus the populace could not go wild. The Areopagus, influential owing to its skill and authority, helped, for the more difficult matters were entrusted to it' (Dial. IV, 192–193).[32]

Siemek informs the reader about the alleged idolisation of Aristotle by the Greeks: "Yet to Aristotle, free Greece granted divine honours. He was endowed with Athenian citizenship, and his homeland was forbidden to claim him; it was a crime to deny that he was an Athenian. He preferred the aristocracy above the others, because that which is moderate gains the recognition and rule of the best. To the senate he gave the name of optimates for the reason of their virtue and talent. This is enough to govern, the rest he omitted or rejected" (Dial. IV, 204–205).

Fittingly, the titular Lacon has much to say about Sparta. Siemek alludes to the earliest history of Sparta, talking about the Parthenia and the founding of Tarentum: "The origins of the Lacedemonians are mystifying. The Parthians, seasoned in military service, having incited the helots to a conspiracy, made an attempt to become equal to the others; the conspiracy being discovered and neutralised, the fugitives, the founders of Tarentum, pointed out the means of effecting a change, and this matter proved detrimental to the state"

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[30] Alcibiadis inter Athenienses magnum sed pravum ingenium illum fortuna, ille Rempublicam: corrupit. Origo malignitatis, profusa in eum Respublica. Is multorum et Periclis corruptor: monito, de non reddendis potius, quam reddendis Reipublicae rationibus virum potentem cogitare oportere.

[31] Pericles apud Athenienses cum parum potuisse bello, et publicae retinuit sui opinionem, sed distractam.

[32] Athenis popularis status, senatus tamen e sapientibus legebatur, nullo pauperita respectu. Nec vulgus delirare potuit. Assistebat Areopagus artium professione auctoritate potior, dum eo difficilliora amandabatur.

(Dial. VI (280–281).[33] Solutions known from Sparta were adopted by the Romans, with whom the Spartans took refuge when their state collapsed after centuries of existence: "And the Spartan laws (*instituta*) were brought to Rome by Numa; on this basis his origin is determined. The Spartans, who in the time of Nabis, out of hatred of tyranny, fled from their country in all directions, were attracted by the Roman freedom and the similarity of laws" (Introductory Dialogue, 110–111).[34]

Siemek's actual knowledge of Sparta is limited to the time of Lysander and Agesilaus (Agesilaus II). He rightly emphasises that Agesilaus owed his throne to Lysander: "Agesilaus, thanks to Lysander's skill and power, was given supreme power with us" (Introductory Dialogue, 116–117).[35] His point of view is as follows:

> He would have been the best king if he did not have to repay the dignitaries for the royal power given to him. As a result of leniency, it came to pass that austerity turned into unbelievable disorderliness and luxury, which suddenly and vastly changed the strength and ability to endure the hardships of military service. Before their power weakened and failed, a decision was made to defeat the rivals of Spartan fame, the restless and quarrelsome Athenians. They had long been greatly corrupted by disorderliness and luxury, and deprived of their usual strength, because contempt drove men of wisdom into exile, they easily gave in to the accepted philosophers, which, had it been possible, should have been resisted in time. The lower ranks brushed aside, the more powerful [men] vied for supreme command in the war, the most powerful [man] gaining it. The armies on both sides [were] equal. The Thebans [were] slightly effete, ours by then somewhat lacking in energy. Our army [was] stronger in numbers, the enemy [made stronger] by the talent of the commander, Epaminondas. Our old valour, once almost intact, by then already weakened, was not equal. Thus, vanquished by the talent of one wise man, we now wander, scattered (Introductory Dialogue, 116–117).[36]

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[33] Primordia Lacedaemoniorum arcani ratio. Parthenii militia exerciti, excitis in coniurationem Helotis, quo pares fiant caeteris, periculum fecerunt: praecognita et praeventa coniuratio; profugi, conditores Tarenti, corrigendi ostenderunt modum, quae res publicis nociva.

[34] Et instiuta, Romam intulisse Spartana: Nummam, cuius inde origo: perhiberetur. Dillapsi sub Nabide, Tyrannidi infensi: libertate Romana, legumque similitudine, alliciebantur Spartani […].

[35] Agesilaus, artibus et potentia Lysandri, rerum apud nos potitus.

[36] Rex fuit Optimus, ni Primoribus dati regni referre gratiam debuisset. Conniuentia ventum est, ut austeritas, in novum luxum commutaretur, qui tollerantiam militiae viresque, repente non mediocriter labefactavit. Antequam diffluant, et enerventur vires: aemulos Spartanae gloriae, confusos et discordes Athenienses, opprimi visum antiquo luxu corruptiores, sapientibus ob. Contemptum profugis: destituti consequentis viribus, non aegre opprimuntur. Thebanis non tanta gloria, recens philosophorum receptorum ingeniis gliscebat, cui in tempore si posset, occurrendum fuit. Inferiores semoti; potentiores, belli imperium ambiebat, potentissimus consequitur. Militia utrinque par, Thebanis leviter mollibus, nostris, iam mediocriter dissolutis. Noster exercitus multitudine, hostilis, ingenio Epaminundae Ducis, potior. Antiqua et integra virtus nostra, vix olim: iam tum imminuta, impar. Ita unius sapientis ingenio victi, nunc disiecti vagamur.

The Lacon returns to the issue of Lysander's merit and position on two more occasions: first, by highlighting Lysander's importance and the potentially bad consequences of it: "Lysander had more authority among us than King Agesilaus; it was subdued as disastrous, but a situation dangerous to the state would have been looming had it not been averted" (Dial. III (168–169),[37] and second, describing the relationship we Agesilaus and Lysander in Asia Minor, and Lysander's alleged plans for regime change in Sparta, in more detail:

> Lysander was the first to introduce this kind of power in violation of the old law. Having become governor of many of the greatest cities of Attica and Achaia thanks to the excessive benevolence of King Agis, by generous hospitality he tied to himself the first among the citizens as friends, then made them his table companions so that they would not think differently than he. Trusting in so many and so great servants, he transferred the crown from the king's son to [the king's] brother, so that he might have royal power not by laws but by [Lysander's] grace. Hence he was dear to the new king, terrible to the citizens. Agesilaus was ashamed as if Lysander had reminded him of the benefices for which he could never sufficiently repay. He got rid of him by sending him as an envoy to the Hellespont. The king regarded [Lysander] as loathsome and detestable, although he had never reigned. The only thing lacking in the power of the man who had appointed the king was this: intending to avenge his hopes, he presented a new law for the transfer of the royal power from Heraclids to the best of the citizens, supporting this with just causes, if only there had been no hatred; and he would have accomplished this, if the king, who had experience in pretence, had not betrayed, or deserted, the commander of the Beotian war, by then restored to rank and favour; or perhaps he perished, surpassed by the virtue of Epaminondas. The one and the other is generally known; the Republic perished with him. The rest, already spoilt by service, above all wanted provinces and cities to be free from Lysander. With the diminution of the freedom of citizens and kings the fame lessened: they could not last, since what had hitherto united the parts had disintegrated.
>
> A. So you disapprove of Lysander's deeds?
>
> L. Indeed, I do not approve of them, because it is more difficult for many mediocrities to be destroyed than for one mighty man (Dial. III (178–179, 180–181).[38]

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[37] Apud nos maior Lysandri, quam Agesilai Regis fuit auctoritas, quae tanquam exitiosa, supressa, sed parum abfuit publici discrimen.

[38] Lysander id potentiae genus, primus, violato iure antiquo, intulerat: Aegide Regis nimio favore, multarum amplissimarum, Atticae, Achaiae, urbium, gubernator factus:lautitia devinxerat potiores civitatis, tanquam amicos, postea mensae asseclas mancipavit, ne ab se diversa sentirent. Tot tantisque fretus servitiis, a filio Regis, ad fratrem, transtulit coronam: ne legibus, sed sua gratia haberetur regnum. Unde novo regi carior, formidolosior civibus. Pudebat Agesilaum, quasi nunquam satis solvendum exprobraret beneficim Lysander. Specie legati Hellespontum amolitur, ivisus, infeensusque Regi, quod non regnaret. Hoc unum defuit potentiae, qui fecerat Regem. Vulturus spes suas, novam proponit legem transferendi ab Heraclidis, ad praestantiorem civium regni. Iustis innixus causis, si odium abesset: et effecisset, ni Rex simulandi peritus, loco, gratiaeque restitutum Ducem belli Boetici prodidisset, deservisserue; aut forte Epaminundae superatus virtute, periit.

Siemek is aware of some details of the political history of Sparta in the late fifth and early fourth century BC, for instance the issue of Callicratidas's quarrel with Lysander (Dial. III (170–171), Clearchus's attack on Artaxerxes (Dial. II (146–147) and the case of Gylippus, "who grew rich to the detriment of the public cause" (Dial. VII (312–313).[39]

It seems that Siemek links the collapse of the state's power with the victory of Thebes, but the collapse of the political system he regards to be the result of a long-term process, as indicated by his statement that "the laws were disrupted during the reigns of Agesilaus, Agis, Cleomenes" (Dial. V (244–245).[40] If this reference pertains to Agesilaus II, Agis IV and Cleomenes III, it means that Siemek is unaware of the activities of the last two, the "reformer kings" of the third century BC, or he is holding them responsible. Whatever the case, the last chord of Sparta's history are, in Siemek's perception, the reigns of Nabis or even Machanidas.

In fact, Siemek knows more about Sparta than his text reveals. He says, for instance: "The famous Lacedaemonian weapon, carried over the vast and various areas of Asia and Europe, was well known in Africa too" (Dial. VI (294–295).[41] The mention of Africa among the parts of the world that have come to know the fame of Spartan war craft could be taken as a cliché, were it not for Xanthippus of Sparta, a mercenary chief in the service of the Carthaginians. At various points, it is clear that Siemek's knowledge is not skin deep. He knows, for example, that the laws of Sparta are called *rhetra*: *Legibus, quas nostri Rhetras* (Dial. VI (294–295). He has also apparently heard of *xenelasia*: "Spartan strictness did not admit foreigners, elsewhere [it was] looser, for in Athens and everywhere Spartans were admitted" (Dial. VIII, 328–329).[42]

Siemek knows the political structures of the Roman republic as well, including the assemblies: *comitia curiata*, *tributa* and *centuriata* (Dial. VII, 304–305, *curiata* also in Dial. VII, 318–319), offices: tribunes and consuls (Dial. II, 138–139), the censor power: *censoria potestas* (Dial. IV, 190–191), or *dictator* (Dial. IV, 223–225). As apparent already in *Civis bonus*, he is quite familiar with the events of the waning years of the Republic. In *Lacon*, he speaks, among others, of the triumvirate of Crassus, Caesar and Pompey (Dial. III, 168–169). Speaking of Pompey and

Utrumque in vulgo: cum hoc, periit Respublica. Caeteri servitiis iam impuri, provincias urbesque malebant; Lysandro vacuas. Imminuta civium libertate, et Regum minor gloria: consistere nequibant, dissoluto, quod hactenus? connectebat partes.

A. Igitur facta Lysandri improbas?

L. Et vero non probo, cum difficillius sit multos mediocres, quam unum evertere potentem.

[39] Gylippus apud nos qui publico damno dituerat.

[40] Sub Agesilao, Agide, Cleomene regibus […].

[41] Famosa Lacedaemoniorum arma, Asiae et Europae per vastos et diversos ambitus circumlata, nec Africa eorum ex pers…?

[42] Spartana austeritas, exteros non admittebat, nam laxior ubique, Athenis et ubiuis non prohibiti Spartani.

Caesar, he mentions clients and patrons (Dial. III, 164–165). He assesses Crassus unfavourably; his Lacon says: "Crassus, the most powerful one in your country, was useless in war, unless he took the fruit of someone else's victory; he fell because he failed to accomplish what he dared to do" (Dial. VII, 312–313).

In addition, *Lacon* contains some assessments formulated by Augustus:

> Sulla, an unknown, did not shine with virtue or talent in front of the Nolan army; later, he excessively relied on luck in war, on power at home. Caesar, in contrast, was distinguished by wisdom in warfare, by gentleness at home; neither luck could desert him nor the populace cease to love him. My father was most modest; if only he had not fallen into the human race's innate desire to rule, a vice innate to warlike spirits (Dial. IX, 348–349).[43]

It is obvious, in more than one place, that the assessment of Caesar, and his killer Brutus, presents a problem:

> How much my father showered Brutus with honours, and would have continued to do so if he had been more moderate in his public activities. However, enraged by the fall of the fatherland, he dared to challenge fate; he did not conquer the heavens. Yet he did enlarge the Senate, so that, while keeping the former men, he would have his own ones there: those, however, were swept away by the new and ancient heroic examples. It would have sufficed to have, in the Senate, just one man opposed to autocracy. I excluded the unworthy, whom I knew to have been appointed through favour, and induced the disorderly crowd to be serious (Dial. II, 140–141).

Siemek says much, with clear expertise, about the relationship between the Senate and the *princeps*. He certainly knows the terms o*ptimus princeps*, *pater patriae*, *Augustus* (Dial. V, 262–263). He refers to the notorious defeat of Varus, much discussed in the time of Augustus: "It is only recently that Varus lost in battle [who knows] how many eagles, banners of the Roman army, and public glory" (Dial. III, 162–163; see also Dial. IV, 210–211, and Dial. VI, 288–289).

And again, a range of references appears in various places in the text: on restoring *libertas* to Greek states (Dial. II, 140–141); "If you try hard, you will overcome even Nature. Witness Hannibal, who crossed the Alps" (Dial. IV, 188–190; Caesar "resorts to the ways of the tyrant Peisistrates" (Dial. VI, 284–285).

Siemek's attention to detail is evident. For instance, he uses the term *lanista* with precision (Dial. IV (202–203); he knows the difference between the types of spears and shields: "The Greeks had adopted *hasta* [short light spear] instead of *sarissa* [long heavy spear], and *scutum* [long shield] instead of *clipeus* [round shield]" (Dial. VI (290–291).[44]

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[43] Ignotus Sylla, nec ante Nolanum exercitum, enituerat virtute aut ingenio: deinceps fortuna in bello, domi potentia abutebatur, contra Caesar prudentia in bellis, clementia domi insignis, nec deseri, a fortuna, nec non amari a populo potuit. Modestissimus pater meus; ni ad innatam Humano generi Dominatus cupiditatem recidisset, bellicosis animis ingeneratum vitium.

[44] Hastas pro sarissis, scute pro clypeis assumpserant Graeci, levitate armorum, hostilem fortunam causati.

CONCLUSIONS

It is a common belief that the authority of Antiquity was used in Poland to emphasise the worth of the political solutions adopted by the Commonwealth; that those references were a meeting of two apologies: the apologia for the republican system of Antiquity and the apologia for the system of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Invoking the example of the ancient republic made the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania universal.[45]

Siemek probably used the example of *tres famosiores Respublicae* to the same purpose. There are obvious conclusions to be drawn from a reading of both his works in relation to the presence of the tradition of Antiquity, as well as the less obvious conclusions arising from the extensive presence of Greece and Rome in his writings and the by no means superficial nature of his knowledge. It does not seem that Siemek derived his knowledge of Athens and Sparta second-hand or through Latin authors. Traces of an in-depth reading of Plutarch and of his own very independent analysis are more than evident in his texts. What is more, on a broader level, these texts must be perceived not so much an attempt to raise the worth of contemporary Poland by appending an ancient example to it, but an attempt to understand a state that was still alive and open to change by referring to states whose history was already closed: the illustrious *famosiores Respublicae*. It is hard to resist the impression that Siemek was interested in achieving the most advantageous system, not in elevating the Commonwealth by giving it ancient roots.

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[45] See Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2014, 31.

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Abstract

During the Old Polish period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), the ancient tradition played a major role in Polish political and constitutional thought. The citizens of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania living in the seventeenth century were well aware of the uniqueness and value of their statehood. The contemporary world did not provide them with many analogies to debate these issues, and as a result, they sought a more distant point of reference, finding ancient examples to which the Commonwealth could relate in recognizing its own strengths and weaknesses.

In the political writings of the Old Polish period, the republican system of the Commonwealth was regarded as a realisation of the mixed model which existed in Sparta and Rome at the earliest and which was regarded as a permanent, stable, virtually ideal system. It is clearly visible in the texts of Kasper Siemek, who like many other young men of his generation, studied at the universities

of Cracow (1610) and Bologna (1620). In the last years of his life he wrote two treatises on political and legal issues. In the first treatise, *Civis bonus* (1632), he gave a systematic lecture on the state, the laws and citizenship, and at the same time an apotheosis of the *status quo* in the Commonwealth. In the second book entitled *Lacon,* Octavian Augustus and a Laconian discuss the republican constitution, acknowledging that only a republic, under the rule of law, enabled freedom to be preserved.

Siemek's texts reveals a knowledge of the ancient history that was thorough for its time. The author was fluent in Greek and Latin, familiar with the works of Plutarch, Cicero and Aristotle. His knowledge of various details of Greek and Roman history is really surprising.

It is a common belief that the authority of Antiquity was used in Poland to emphasise the worth of the political solutions adopted by the Commonwealth; that those references were a meeting of two apologies: the apologia for the republican system of Antiquity and the apologia for the system of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Invoking the example of the ancient republic made the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania universal. Siemek probably used the example of *tres famosiores Respublicae* to the same purpose. There are obvious conclusions to be drawn from a reading of both his works in relation to the presence of the tradition of Antiquity. But in my opinion Siemek was interested also in achieving the most advantageous system, not only in elevating the Commonwealth by giving it ancient roots.