

## **Mateusz Gralewski– the Polish exile to the Caucasus and his contribution to study on history, geography and ethnography of the Caucasus**

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**Özet:** Polonyalı Kafkasya Sürgünü Mateusz Gralewski ve Kafkasya Tarih, Coğrafya ve Etnografya Çalışmalarına Katkıları

Kafkasya hakkında ilk Lehçe metinler 18. yüzyılda bölgeye seyahat eden misyoner ve elçilerin yazdıkları sayesinde ortaya çıkmıştır. Fakat gerçekte Kafkasya 19. yüzyıla kadar Lehler tarafından pek de bilinmiyordu. Durum, 19. yüzyılın ilk yarısında Çarlık tarafından bazı Lehlerin, orada daha önceden işgal amacıyla bulunan Rus birliklerine zorunlu olarak dahil edilip Kafkasya'ya gönderilmeye başlanmasıyla tamamen değişti. Polonyalıların Rus ordusuna zorunlu olarak katılması işlemi, Polonyalıların Rus karşıtı vatansever hareketlerine, ki bunlardan biri de ünlü “Kasım İsyanı”ydı (1830), karşı bir ceza teşkil ediyordu. Genç vatansever Mateusz Gralewski de Kafkasya'ya sürgün edilen Polonyalılar arasında bulunuyordu. Gralewski 12 yıl süren mecburi askerlik hizmeti sırasında arkadaşları ile Dağıstan'dan Azerbaycan'a, Gürcistan'dan Osetya'ya, Kafkasya'nın farklı bölgelerine gitti. Yolculukları boyunca bölge tarihi, orada yaşayan haklar, coğrafya, örf adet ve gelenekleri hakkındaki detaylı gözlemlerini not etti. Gözlemlerinin sonucu olarak 1877 yılında, hala tenkitli neşri yapılmayı bekleyen, “Kafkasya. 12 Yıllık Esaretin Hatıraları” adlı bir kitap yayınladı.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Polonyalı Kafkasya sürgünü, Gralewski'nin eseri.

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**Abstract:** Mateusz Gralewski – the Polish exile to the Caucasus and his contribution to study on history, geography and ethnography of the Caucasus

The first Polish descriptions of the Caucasus appeared in the eighteenth century thanks to some accounts of emissaries or missionaries who travelled there. But in reality, until the nineteenth century the Caucasus remained rather unknown for Poles. The situation changed diametrically in the first half of the nineteenth century when tsar's authorities began to send to the Caucasus some Poles, earlier incorporating them by force into Russian troops which were there for occupation purpose. The process of obligatory incorporation of Poles into Russian army constituted an act of punishment for Polish anti-Russian, patriotic movements, among which the most famous was “November Uprising 1830”. Among Poles, who were sent into exile to the Caucasus was a young patriot – Mateusz Gralewski. During his compulsory military service, which lasted twelve years, Gralewski was moving with his company to various Caucasian regions – from Dagestan, to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ossetia. During his journeys he made notes concerning history of these regions, peoples living there, geography, customs and traditions which he observed in detail. As the result of his observations, in 1877 he published the book entitled “Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli” [“The Caucasus. Recollections from a twelve-year captivity”] which is still waiting to be scholarly edited.

**Keywords:** Polish exile to the Caucasus, Gralewski's work.

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### **I. Introduction**

Until the nineteenth century the Caucasus remained practically unknown for the Polish society. Although in previous centuries some Poles travelled through that region to Persia or India, nevertheless they did not stop there for any length of time. The first, but rather brief Polish description of the Caucasus appeared in the eighteenth century as the result of journeys made by emissaries and missionaries<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Reychman, *Podróznicy polscy na Bliskim Wschodzie w XIX w.*, Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1972, p. 176.

was to conquer the Caucasus. The process of obligatory incorporation Poles into Russian army constituted an act of punishment for Polish anti-Russian patriotic movements, among which the most famous was “November Uprising 1830”.

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## II. GRALEWSKI'S BIOGRAPHY

According to the information provided by Polish Biographical Dictionary<sup>3</sup> Mateusz Gralewski was born in the village Mazew as a son of a countryman – Wojciech Grala. The owner of the village – Prof. Waław, Aleksander Maciejowski aware of Mateusz's skill and talents sent him to the grammar-school in Łęczyca changing at the same time his last name into Gralewski. As a student Mateusz Gralewski joined the local patriotic organization which organized anti-Russian plots. For participation in this organization he was imprisoned in Warsaw citadel and subsequently in 1844 sent via southern Siberia to one of Russian garrisons which were stationed on the northern part of the Caucasus, probably in Dagestan.

On the Caucasus Gralewski spent twelve years serving in Shirvan regiment where he was promoted from ordinary soldier to the officer. Most of his military service he spent in the regimental headquarter. During his compulsory military service he was moving with his company to various Caucasian regions – from Dagestan to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ossetia. During his frequent journeys on the Caucasus he observed local lifestyle, some customs, learned local history and languages. His literary abilities helped him to make some notes which in future will constitute the base for his book describing the Caucasus. After twelve years of compulsory service in a Russian troop he was released under amnesty in 1856 and returned home to his home Mazew. What is interesting – according to information from already mentioned sources that is Polish Biographical Dictionary – before he left the Caucasus he allegedly destroyed all notes he made during his stay there<sup>4</sup>. Probably he was afraid of some restrictions from Russian side, the more so as he continued his anti-Russian patriotic activity after return from the exile. In 1861 he moved to Warsaw where he published some articles concerning both patriotic and democratic issues and also he edited some contributor's work on Polish ethnography. He also gave several lectures, among the others, in Paris where he presented the subject related to Poles on the Caucasus. Gralewski died in 1891 in Lwow where he moved several years before.

## III. GRALEWSKI'S WORK

In 1873 he published in a form of brochure his article entitled “Leaves from captivity – the memoir”. In this work, in a poetic form he presented in a very emotional way his imprisonment full of sufferings and humiliation and exile to Siberia, from where he was sent to the Caucasus. On the other hand, in the meantime, with great efforts he worked on literary elaboration of his Caucasian reminiscences. His book entitled *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli* [The Caucasus. Recollections from a twelve-year captivity] came out in Lwow in 1877 in the publishing house “Księgarnia Polska”. The voluminous book numbering almost 600 pages consists of eleven chapters which follow the introductory part. The titles of these chapters are the following:

- I. Płaszczyna kaukaska [Caucasian Plain];
- II. Płaszczyna Kumycka [Kumyk Plain];
- III. Pomorze Dagestańskie [Dagestan Maritime Region];
- IV. Chaństwo Kubińskie [Cuba Khanate];
- V. Miurydyzm na Kaukazie [Movement of Mürids on the Caucasus];
- VI. Dagestan Środkowy i Obraz walk [Central Dagestan and the Conflicts];
- VII. Szyrwan [Shirvan];
- VIII. Gruzja z Osetją [Georgia and Ossetia];
- IX. Ziemie Czerkiesów [Circassian lands];
- X. Szamil [Shamil];
- XI. Polacy na Kaukazie [Poles on the Caucasus].

Judging by the titles of individual chapters of the book one can notice that Gralewski's book with its content comprises whole Caucasus in terms of geography. However, the author's intention was probably not only to give general information about particular regions including the geographic and historical data, as in the chapters “Cuba Khanate” or “Shirvan”. As we see, Gralewski also wanted to make some unknown, and let's say, local subjects more familiar for the readers, as for example the chapter entitled “Shamil”, or “Movement of Mürids on the Caucasus”. As for the last chapter, it is in a certain sense, exceptional because it does not discuss

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<sup>3</sup>*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, t. VIII, Zakład Naukowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Wrocław, 1959-1960, pp. 540-541.

<sup>4</sup>*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, t. VIII, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Wrocław 1959-1960, pp. 540-541.

very local Caucasian issues. On the contrary, it concerns the questions of “strangers” constituting the synthesis of knowledge about the situation of Poles who found themselves on the Caucasus, most often, not from their own free will. Let us come closer to the subject matters presented by Gralewski in his book.

#### **IV. NATURE AND ITS DESCRIPTIONS**

Gralewski, as a very scrupulous observer of nature and landscapes he was travelling on could not skip typical features characterizing particular region he visited. Therefore, each chapter of his book includes some basic geographic data. On the other hand however, those geographic descriptions are very laconic such as the two presented below. The first one regards Baku and its vicinity where the author states that land of Baku produces little grain but has the sea shore, numerous saline lakes and dozens wells of oil liquid<sup>5</sup>. In another passage concerning the region of Shirvan Gralewski also gives very basic information stating that from the eastern side Shirvan is adjacent to the sea, from south-eastern is bordered by the river Cura and from the northern side by the mountain “Kaladar”<sup>6</sup>. According to Gralewski this region has fertile soil, rocky mountains and numerous orchards and gardens<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Historical data**

Undoubtedly, Gralewski was more interested in some historical regional facts. When travelling through the Caucasus he learned from the local people some historical data which he worked into each chapter of the book. Sometimes the historical data he mentioned were dating back to very remote period of time as in the passage where he was describing the history of the land of Baku. In this passage he mentioned that that territory constituted the aim of attacks from Warego-Russian tribes in the tenth century, then being in Persian hands became the object of trades and treaties between Persian shahs and Russian tsars. The final occupation of that territory took place after Russian six-month siege in 1806<sup>8</sup>. Another example of historical fact he reports when describing the Cuba city concerns Russians who in 1796 promoted a riot among local people against the ruling sheik in order to subdue Cuba themselves<sup>9</sup>.

#### **Wars and conflicts**

Some of the chapters from his book Gralewski dedicates to problem of wars, conflicts with enemies. However, almost all pieces of information regarding wars do not concern historical, ancient times but contemporary days, exactly conflicts with Russians whose genesis dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century during the reign of Peter the Great who conquered Derbent and many places of Dagestan. In the beginning, expansive policy of Russian authorities tending towards the annexation of the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan did not meet major obstacles. Even some local rulers inclined to accept tsar's supremacy. However, the situation began to change gradually when the local leader – Shamil united predominant part of highlanders of the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan and began to fight with the tsar's squads. In several places of his book Gralewski mentioned about help which Polish exiles gave to local people fighting against the Russians<sup>10</sup>. He even reported the cases of Poles passing over from Russian army to the Caucasian highlanders's side. With the subject of fights between Russian squads and Caucasian highlanders is related the question of movement of Mürids on the Caucasus. This religious Sunna movement dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In its development very important role played the highlanders from the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan. The main focus of the movement was to fight for independence against Russians who were regarded as invaders<sup>11</sup>. The subjects afore mentioned were discussed by Gralewski in the chapters: “Dagestan Środkowy i obraz walk” [Central Dagestan and the Conflicts], “Miurydyzm na Kaukazie” [Movement of Mürids on the Caucasus] and “Szamil” [Shamil].

#### **Descriptions of some places and cities.**

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<sup>5</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, p. 315.

<sup>6</sup>The name of this mountain is quoted after Gralewski's spelling.

<sup>7</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, pp. 313-356.

<sup>8</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, p. 315.

<sup>9</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, pp. 142-145.

<sup>10</sup>Jan Reychman, *Podróżnicy polscy na Bliskim Wschodzie w XIX wieku*, Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1972, p. 196.

<sup>11</sup>Bohdan Baranowski, Krzysztof Baranowski, *Historia Azerbejdżanu*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź 1987, pp. 140-141.

Gralewski was also interested in the history of places and cities he visited during his journey through the Caucasus. In chapter IV entitled “Chaństwo kubińskie” [Cuba Khanate] he presents the history of the city Cuba beginning its story from the time of reign of Peter the Great. In the eighteenth century Russia conquered Cuba which at that time constituted already an important commercial and industrial center. After the conquest the city was ruined to the ground where the Russians build first earthworks and next they built new city called “New Cuba” placing it more to the south. According to Gralewski New Cuba was a very modern city, with nice, new buildings and paved streets. The number of inhabitants was approximately 10 thousand people who represented both various nations such as: Persians, Turkmens, Armenians, Jews, Lezgi and various religions as well<sup>12</sup>. The next city he described was Baku. Judging by Gralewski’s descriptions one can presume that this city made a very strong impression upon the author. As usual, Gralewski begins his story about the city from its history, both that very old and this contemporary one. Gralewski emphasizes that this several thousand years old city has a very ancient history confirmed by numerous architectonic elements, ancient ruins and stone wall which surrounds Baku. The Virgin Tower, the old caravanserai and the ruins of the castle built by the Persian king are, according to Gralewski, the most magnificent relics of the past<sup>13</sup>. During his peregrinations along the city he even had chance to come across some Polish traces there, namely, some old coins. Gralewski’s admiration refers not only to the ancient monuments and history but also to the present time. The author stresses that in his opinion Baku has a great future and perspectives<sup>14</sup>. The next major city on Gralewski’s way was Shemakhy. “He mentions that the city is relatively new since it was built according to the Russian urban plans in 1824 on the places of the ancient city destroyed by wars and earthquakes. In Gralewski’s (1877: 329) opinion the city is not interesting and has no any aesthetic taste. The buildings constructed in the same style, with flat roofs are similar to each other. The Russian Orthodox church is the highest building in the city since Russians never allowed any other building like mosques or Catholic churches to be higher than this edifice. Apparently, the author is not enthusiastic about Shemakhy yet to pay justice to the city’s features, however he adds the information that the city is famous for silk textiles and some musical instruments (Gralewski 1877: 329)”<sup>15</sup>. Apart from the aforementioned cities Gralewski mentions in his book some other places such as Nukha, Ganja, Tiflis but without or with a very brief reference.

#### **Local people, their customs and events, religion.**

When reading Gralewski’s book everyone can notice that he was not only interested in geography or history of the regions he travelled on but also local people, their customs, lifestyle, religion, languages constituted the object of his real and deep interest. In the passage where he described Cuba he not only paid attention to the city itself but also gave very numerous descriptions concerning the ceremony of the engagement, celebrations of Moslem holidays and feasts. Gralewski also placed in one of the chapters a very detailed description of the wedding ceremony which took place in one Lezgi village in 1849. As a very open-eyed observer he even memorized and quoted the menu which was served during the wedding<sup>16</sup>. In turn of his visit to Baku he took opportunity to visit the local pharmacy ran by an old Persian chemist and a doctor at the same time. This fact gave the author occasion to present the subject of medical practice adhibited on the Caucasus. Gralewski states that in some severe cases, especially during the epidemic, the Caucasian inhabitants did not reject the European style of treatment, however they preferred the local methods, offered by the local healers<sup>17</sup>. One of the most interesting passage the reader can find when reading the chapter about Baku and its vicinity is the passage where Gralewski describes the sect of fire-worshippers. He sketches the origin of this sect, describes the place and the ceremonials. However, he is aware of the fact that both the subject and the described place are widely known in world literature, nevertheless still attractive for many visitors<sup>18</sup>.

## **V. POLES ON THE CAUCASUS**

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<sup>12</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, pp. 142-145.

<sup>13</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, pp. 315-317.

<sup>14</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, p. 320.

<sup>15</sup>This quotation comes from: Ewa Siemienieć-Gołaś, “Azerbaijan in the Eyes of Polish Travellers and Exiles to the Caucasus”, Khazar University Press, *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, volume 14, number 2, 2011, pp. 70-78.

<sup>16</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, p. 180.

<sup>17</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, p. 320.

<sup>18</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, pp. 321-327.

The last, rather comprehensive chapter of his book Gralewski designed for presentation the vicissitudes of Poles living on the Caucasus. First, he presents a dozen or so Poles whose contribution to study and exploration the Caucasus and its popularization was significant. The character of their work was differentiated. Among some Poles who dedicated their work to the Caucasus were poets, historians, writers, doctors, travellers, cartographers, linguists and others. Here are the names mentioned by Gralewski: Władysław Strzelnicki, Ksawery Petraszkiewicz, Michał Butowd-Andrzejkiewicz, Tadeusz Łada-Zabłocki, Leon Janiszewski, Wincenty Dawid Kalinowski, Wojciech Potocki, Hipolit Jaworski, Julian Surzycki, Minkiewicz, Strutyński, Józef Chodźko.

The second question Gralewski intends to discuss in this chapter is the history of appearance of Poles on the Caucasus. The author sketches the history of deportation of Poles by Russia beginning from the first partition of Poland by three empires (Russia, Austria and Prussia) in 1773. He presents ups and downs of Poles who found themselves far from homeland in severe rules of captivity, nevertheless they tried to organize their life anew undertaking various tasks and activity. Despite those positive remarks about Polish activity on the Caucasus Gralewski did not fail to write in this chapter some data concerning casualties among Poles living on the Caucasus. According to Gralewski the number of Poles who lost their life on the Caucasus beginning from the period of the first deportations is estimated at five hundred thousand people<sup>19</sup>.

### **Instead of the conclusion**

Coming to the conclusion one should ascertain that the book by Gralewski constitutes a very valuable and comprehensive source of information on remote, in terms of time and geography, region. However, some historical data, names of rulers or some geographic names should be verified since the spelling used by the author is not always correct. Undoubtedly this book deserved critical description and reedition in a form of scientific publication.

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<sup>19</sup>Mateusz Gralewski, *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1877, pp. 503-560.