Belarusian
Traditional
Culture
in the Legacy
of Oskar Kolberg

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the subject of Belarusian musical and ethnographic materials collected by Oskar Kolberg. The materials on Belarusian folk culture, which were collected by the researcher throughout his whole life, were published almost 80 years after his death in Volume 52 *Belarus–Polesie*, while some of them are also to be found in Volume 53 *Lithuania*. Thus, the geography of these materials extends far beyond the borders of contemporary Belarus. However, individual regions of the country are not equally represented. Using the works of his predecessors, Kolberg compiled information about the culture and ethnography of Belarus and supplemented it with his own research. The author of this article divides the materials used to compile Volume 52 into two unequal groups: publications of other authors and the personal field notes of Kolberg (together with the materials sent to him by correspondents). The latter group, which constitutes more than a quarter of all the materials and is essential for assessing the Belarusian achievements of the Polish ethnographer, has been analysed in the article. The abundance of Kolberg's own transcriptions of music in the volume makes his work into one of the key sources in 19th-century Belarusian musical historiography. The author also puts forward a hypothesis concerning the Belarusian beginnings of Kolberg's entire collecting activity.

Keywords: Oskar Kolberg, Belarus, Belarus–Polesie, Belarusian materials, journey to Belarus

INTRODUCTION

The Slavic field first appeared as part of the humanities in the second part of the 18th century. The turning point in Western academic views on the role and importance of the Slavs had been the work of Johann Gottfried von Herder, entitled *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791), where in the chapter “Slavische Völker” the German philosopher draws attention to the value of traditional native Slavic creativity. Under the influence of this philosophy rooted in Romanticism, as well as the threat of losing national identity caused by the collapse of the Republic of Poland, many scholars – as well as representatives of the nobility and the bourgeoisie – took up the study of the cultures of peasant communities, perceiving them as a source of truth and identity.

Research conducted on the territories of present-day Belarus fitted in well with this trend, with the two research centres of Vilnius (with its Philomath Society) and Warsaw at its core. Attention given to the culture of the peoples living on the territory of Poland's today's eastern neighbour yielded many valuable collections

of materials¹, while the problematic aspects of the sources of Belarusian folklore recurred in the work of researchers over the following centuries – especially in the writings of Jan Czczot, Konstanty Tyszkiewicz, Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki, and Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski (a.k.a. Adam Czarnocki).

These were the works which served as the basis for Oskar Kolberg, the most outstanding Polish ethnographer, who set out to examine the nature of Slavic music. In his studies, he took into account not only the traditions and culture of Poland, but also those of the peoples of Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Belarus. However, although he spent almost the entire lifetime collecting information on Belarus, he did not live to see it published, as was also the case with other materials on the Baltic, South Slavic and Eastern Slavic territories (with the exception of the four volumes of *Pokucie*²). In such difficult and unstable times, he saw the need for publishing non-Polish-language materials, including those collected in Belarus. That is why, just a year before his death, he managed to publish two articles about wedding customs³ and fables⁴ of Polesie⁵. It was only almost 80 years after the death of the great ethnographer that his ever-growing series *Lud*⁶ was

1 H. Kapeliś, (1982). *Folklor obcy w badaniach Polaków* [Non-Polish Folklore in Polish Studies]. In: H. Kapeliś, J. Krzyżanowska (Eds.), *Dzieje polskiej folklorystyki 1864–1918* [A History of Polish Folklore Studies 1864–1918]. Warsaw: PWN, p. 590.

2 O. Kolberg, (1882, 1883, 1888, 1889). *Dzieła wszystkie* [Complete Works], vols. 29, 30, 31, 32, *Pokucie* [Pokuttia], parts I, II, III, IV. Cracow: Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (Jagiellonian University Printing House). Photooffset re-edition: O. Kolberg, (1962, 1963, 1963, 1962). *Dzieła wszystkie*, vols. 29, 30, 31, 32, *Pokucie*, parts I, II, III, IV. Wrocław–Poznań: IOK.

3 O. Kolberg, (1889). *Zwyczaje i obrzędy weselne z Polesia* [Wedding Customs and Rituals from Polesie], *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Krajowej* [Collected Materials for the Country's Anthropology]. Vol. XIII, pp. 208–245.

4 Idem, (1889). *Baśnie z Polesia* [Fables of Polesie], *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Krajowej* [Collected Materials for the Country's Anthropology]. Vol. XIII, pp. 200–207.

5 Idem, (1968). *Białoruś–Polesie* [Belarus–Polesie], *Dzieła wszystkie* [Complete Works], vol. 52. Wrocław–Poznań: IOK.

6 The original title of Kolberg's series is *Lud, jego zwyczaje, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusła, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce* [The People, Its Customs, Lifestyle, Speech, Tales, Proverbs, Rituals, Superstitions, Games, Songs, Music and Dance].

extended so as to include a Belarusian volume – 52. *Belarus–Polesie*.

For the purpose of the evaluation of Kolberg's work on Belarus, it is worth looking at these materials once more and perhaps shines a new light on the subject.

OSKAR KOLBERG'S BELARUSIAN MATERIALS

Originally Kolberg meant to devote up to three volumes of *Lud* to Belarusian folklore, as evidenced by the series planned in 1869: 31 – *Black Ruthenia, Lithuania (Grodno Governorate)*, 40 – *Pinsk and Volhynian Polesie*, 42 – *Belarus (Minsk, Vitebsk, etc.)*. This division reflects the regional nomenclature, which functioned even before the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth⁷. The possible incompleteness of the material, however, meant that he was unable to make separate volumes and was forced to contain everything in a single one.

All manuscripts by the Polish ethnographer are currently stored at the Oskar Kolberg Institute in Poznań. The core of the Belarusian materials collected by Kolberg is comprised in two “Belarusian” portfolios: portfolio 28 *Polesie* (includes four sub-portfolios numbered 1290, 1290a, 1290b, 1291) and portfolio 29 *Belarus. Grodno* (includes six sub-portfolios numbered 1292, 1293, 1294, 1295, 1296, 1297). A small amount of material from the area in question is also preserved in two Volhynian portfolios: 3206 and 3207, and in portfolio 2183 *Miscellanea*, with a few notated pieces in portfolios: 1, 4, 13, 20, 25, 31, 33, 35, 36, 39 and 47.

This dispersion of materials can mostly be explained by their occasional occurrence in the repertoire of performers coming from other areas, or by a mix-up of portfolio files, which is entirely justified given the period of more than a hundred of years since Kolberg's death. However, it was the geographical location of notated works rather than their placement in the files that determined the editing of *Lud* volumes. That is why all of the material on Belarus can be found in volume *Belarus–Polesie*, along with materials from the borderlands: the Pskov and Smolensk Provinces of Russia, present-day Lithuania (Vilnius), and Poland (Białystok and surroundings). It is mainly to do with the fact that Belarus was considered in terms of ethnic categories, and ethnic boundaries do not always coincide with state

borders. Finally, Belarusian musical material is also to be found in volume 53 *Lithuania*, which was published two years earlier.

In order to describe Belarus and its culture, Kolberg was carefully completing information on the subject from various published but often hard-to-find sources, such as leaflets and periodicals, thus creating a retrospective panorama of traditional culture in Belarus. He meticulously selected his bibliography, similarly as in the other volumes of his series. On the publication of the volume *Sandomierskie*, Kolberg wrote:

[...] when describing the various rites, customs, etc., and encountering the finished and reliable works of my predecessors, such as those by Gołębiowski, Wacław z Oleska (Zaleski), Żegota Pauli, Wójcicki, Konopka, Zejszner, Gregorowicz, Lipiński, Gizewiusz, Zienkiewicz, Łoziriski, and others, I used them willingly and have quoted them (and I still quote) at every opportunity and wherever they prove to be necessary, supplementing them with music, my own observations, comments, occasional rectifications, in a word – with everything I can so as to represent them as truly as I can⁸.

The same can certainly be said of the Belarusian materials collected by the researcher, and then published in a single volume. Kolberg drew information from published works in Polish, Russian, German, and Latin, which he then translated, summarised, and commented upon. All of these sources were supplemented with new material, collected personally by Kolberg or sent to him by correspondents.

The entire content of the Belarusian volume can be divided into two large groups⁹:

1. Copies and summaries of separate publications and articles by other authors, as well as translations of the works of other authors previously published;
2. Kolberg's own records (notes, fair copies, and autographs of his own works as well as materials sent in by correspondents).

The first group, which is considerably greater than the second one, comprises c. 72 per cent of all the Belarusian material intended for publication. On the basis of already

⁷ Kolberg interpreted the three northern provinces – Polotsk, Vitebsk and Mstislavl – as “Ruthenian”. Lithuania was understood as the provinces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – Vilnius, Trakai, Minsk, Navahrudak and Brest.

⁸ O. Kolberg, (1962/1865). *Sandomierskie [The Sandomierz Region]*, *Dziela Wszystkie [Complete Works]*, vol. 2. Wrocław-Poznań: IOK, p. 7.

⁹ A different division of Kolberg's manuscript materials concerning Belarus has been proposed by Stanisław Kasperczak. See: Oskar Kolberg, (1968). *Białoruś–Polesie [Belarus-Polesie]*, pp. XXV–XXVI.

existing publications (dissertations, articles, press releases) about Belarus and its ethnic territories, Kolberg compiled a variety of material, often complementing it with his own comments¹⁰. The key works were those by Romuald Zienkiewicz, Konstanty Tyszkiewicz, Paweł Bobrowski, Maria Czarnocka, Łukasz Gołębiowski, Aleksander Rypiński, Adam Kirkor, the unidentified E.S. and E.M., and many other authors. In this way Kolberg managed to present the then state of research on the culture and traditions of a given area, often with reference to diversified and difficult-to-access sources.

The second group of materials is much smaller in number when compared to the first one – approx. 28 per cent. However, it is essential for the assessment of the contribution of the Polish ethnographer to increasing the awareness of the Belarusian culture in the 19th century. That group includes all of the previously unpublished ethnographic materials collected by Kolberg, either personally or through correspondents.

KOLBERG'S BELARUSIAN MUSICAL MATERIAL

On the basis of the published Belarusian materials, I have calculated that Kolberg copied c. 66 per cent of the song lyrics from the works of other researchers, and the remaining 34 per cent are his personal findings. The situation regarding musical transcriptions appears to be completely different. Here Kolberg presents an unprecedented (for his times) number of notated melodies: 105 melodies (76 with lyrics and 29 instrumental), 94 per cent of which we owe to Kolberg's own research! In publications concerning traditional spiritual culture of that time song melodies were not notated, with few exceptions (e.g. collections of songs by Waław of Olesko, the collections of Kazimierz Wójcicki, Żegota Pauli, Józef Konopka). Consequently, there were few melodies in the published works. Song melodies were commonly known and frequently performed, which eliminated the need to write them down; that is why notated traditional melodies were very rare in contemporary publishing practice. This state of affairs began to change thanks to Kolberg, who drew attention to the need of writing down melodies side by side with the lyrics. A closer examination of the 19th-century collections of Belarusian traditional music

proves that Kolberg's collection of Belarusian melodies is in one of the largest¹¹. Therefore, it can be stated that Kolberg was an exceptional folklorist in that sense and with his musical transcriptions he made a significant contribution to the understanding of musical culture of the Belarusian countryside in the 19th century.

Musical transcriptions in the Belarusian volume are highly reliable, though not undisputed. They do not clearly state whether there was always just one person singing or more; only the solo melody line of just one verse was notated as an indication for future generations on which note a particular song was sung. Kolberg has been accused of favouring lively dance tunes, which due to their simplicity and metrical regularity were easy to notate¹². Nevertheless, he included a fairly high amount of details of musical ornamentation (mainly for melodies without texts), e.g. emphasised tremolos, mordents, appoggiaturas, accents. Kolberg also notated variants of Belarusian melodies by adding tiny musical notes to a single staff with the basic melodic contour or writing down variants of the melody on separate staves¹³. It should be noted, however, that the way of dividing a traditional melody into bars, which would be appropriate for 19th-century professional music, often distorts the actual rhythmic-metric pattern of folk material. Therefore, the real challenge today is to understand these notated melodies not as a seismographic reflection of the acoustic reality, but as "a conscientious attempt at interpreting a commonly or locally known repertoire, according to the principles of professional musical education of the nineteenth century"¹⁴.

11 The publications which are most abundant in melodies from Belarusian musical folklore collected in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century are: Z. Radchenko, (1888). *Gomel'skiye narodnyye pesni (belorusskiye i malorusskiye)* [The Belarusian and Little Russian Folk Songs of the Gomel Area]. St. Petersburg: Tipografia Bezobrazova i Komp. – 210 melodies; Y. Romanov, (1887–1912). *Belorusskij sbornik [Belarusian Collection]*. Kiev: Tipografia S. Kulzenko – 53 melodies. The most significant later work is that by M. Federowski (1853–1923), published in 1958, 1960: *Lud białoruski [The Belarusian Folk]*. Warsaw: PWN – 1413 melodies.

12 G. Tavlaj, (1997). *Muzykalnyye fol'klornyje sobraniya O. Kol'berga, L. Kuby* [O. Kolberg's and L. Kuba's Music Folklore Collections]. In: Z. Mozhejko (Ed.), *Belorusskaya etnomuzykologiya [Belarusian Ethnomusicology]*. Minsk: Technologiya, p. 59.

13 Ibidem.

14 P. Dahlig, (2014). *Czy żywą muzykę można oddać w druk?* [Can Live Music Be Sent to Print? Oskar Kolberg's Music Collections]. *Muzyka*. Vol. 3,

10 Those comments are very interesting and not only relate to the musical material, but also frequently show the researcher's reaction to the quoted ethnographic descriptions. These issues are a subject for a separate study, and I will not address them in this paper.

Kolberg's previously unpublished Belarusian musical repertoire (the second group of materials) consist of: songs of the ritual and calendar cycles – less than 10 per cent¹⁵, ritual and family songs – 3 per cent, universal repertoire (including couplets) – about 15 per cent. The dominance of the universal repertoire is thus noticeable. Kolberg divided the music thematically on the basis of the song lyrics and their function. Furthermore, the melodies without texts were ordered by their metre: even or odd-numbered. Such diversity is one of the earliest examples of the classification of musical material based on musical features in Belarusian ethnomusicology¹⁶.

In the times of Kolberg, the practice of adding accompaniment was common and Kolberg himself published traditional melodies with piano accompaniment in his first collections. He later changed his editorial method in favour of precise notation, without "improving" the music, and added further material in the form of melodic variants, which can also be found in the Belarusian volume. The change in Kolberg's attitude is also evident in his practice of separating traditional melodies from the accompaniment in the works of his predecessors. The songs called "Kupala" and "Rusalka", also contained in the Belarusian volume, are monodic extracts from piano arrangements published by Łukasz Gołębiowski¹⁷. Kolberg literally "extracted" the vocal melody, added lyrics and quoted the source of these songs. Ways of notating traditional melodies were revised and improved by the next few generations of ethnomusicologists. However, the change in attitude concerning the function of traditional music and the precise notation already become apparent in the works of Kolberg.

Poetic texts and musical notations in Kolberg's collection are also evidence of the "pre-linguistic" and "pre-ethnomusicological" phases. The researcher presents

the song lyrics in some kind of phonetic transcription; however, he does not make any distinction between Belarusian, Ukrainian and Polish phonetics. Therefore, Belarusian lyrics can frequently be recognized only by some constant, recurring elements. Many Belarusian folklorists agree that, judging by the language, many songs fall into the category of Ukrainian folklore¹⁸. It should be emphasized that Kolberg – in contrast to many other researchers – essentially did not change the language of the traditional lyrics, which was an important step towards documenting the real language used by the people.

In accordance with the convention of his time, Kolberg quoted the locations where he recorded the songs. The geography of Belarus (the cities, Belarusian ethnic regions and administrative units) in the examples collected by Kolberg (the second group) is as follows: Vitebsk, Minsk, Nesvizh, Grodna, Sopotskino, Lida, Slonim, Navahrudak, Pinsk, Velizh, Polotsk, Ovruch, Drissa, Vilnius, Kunkulka, Kovel, Rozaliyevka, and Lipova near Kobryn. Imprecisely quoted geographical locations in Kolberg include: Vitebsk – Mogilev, Ovruch – Mazyr – Minsk, Prussia, Vitebsk – Polotsk – Borisov, Surazh – Smolensk, Kovel – Luck, Nyemirov – Lepel, Mazyr – Ovruch, Slovyecho – Kishyni (?), Polesie – Belarus, Polesie, Belarus or Grodno Governorate.

KOLBERG'S THREE KNOWN INFORMANTS

The issue of informants in the case of Kolberg's Belarusian materials is difficult to determine. In compliance with the common practice of the time, the researcher did not collect any information about his interlocutors. Nevertheless, he wrote down three names: "Mrs Jenike", "Anczyc" and "Piotrowska of Rozalówka".

In portfolio 29 *Belarus. Grodno*, sub-portfolio 1295, cards 5 and 5a, containing three songs with melodies (the third song was marked "from Vilnius") and one more song on the back, Kolberg made the note: "Mrs Jenike". She probably came from a family of Warsaw publishers. According to the Encyclopedic Guide¹⁹, Ludwik Jenike (b. 1818 – d. 5th May 1903 in Warsaw) was a columnist and a socio-cultural activist, while his son Emil was a pianist. However, it is not known how Mrs Jenike was related to this family. She might have heard the songs

p. 18. Cf. also: A. Chybiński, (1937). *Dalszy ciąg pracy, czy praca od nowa? (W sprawie polskiej muzyki ludowej) [Work Continued or Started Anew? (The Case of Polish Folk Music)]*. *Muzyka Polska*. Vol. 3, pp. 99–107.

15 The unique "Yashchur", written down in Sopotskino, is especially worth looking at. It is a remarkable example of an archaic form of ritual procession, which today has almost completely disappeared from Western Belarus.

16 After: G. Tavljaj, (1997). *op. cit.*, p. 59.

17 Ł. Gołębiowski, (1831). *Gry i zabawy różnych stanów w kraju całym lub niektórych tylko prowincjach [The Games and Entertainment of Different Social Estates in the Entire Country and in Its Individual Provinces]*. Warsaw: Druk N. Gluecksberg.

18 U. Vasilevich, (1991). *Zbiralniki [Collectors]*. Minsk: Navuka i technika, pp. 5–20.

19 *Literatura polska. Przewodnik Encyklopedyczny [Polish Literature. An Encyclopaedic Guide]*, (1984). Vol. 1. Warsaw: PWN, p. 398.

she later sang for Kolberg directly or mediated in passing them to the researcher.

Card 9a of the same sub-portfolio, which includes melodies (no. 610 in portfolio 52) and lyrics, was labelled “Anczyc”. It was notated on the letterhead paper from Władysław Anczyc’s printing house, as evidenced by the stamp on the back of the card. The Encyclopedic Guide²⁰ states that Władysław Ludwik Anczyc, alias Kazimierz Góralczyk (b. 12th December 1823 in Vilnius, d. 28th July 1883 in Cracow) in 1875 bought a small printing house in Cracow, which he then transformed into a major company known for its high level of printing. Due to the fact that he was an active man of letters with a keen interest in the problems of peasants, he was also interested in folklore and probably published it. It is quite possible that he was in Polesie in Belarus himself, and passed what he had heard to Kolberg, or he may have had someone from those areas among his servants.

The most significant number of Belarusian songs out of the three known informants – possibly as many as 18 songs – come from Mrs Piotrowska (Piotrowska of Rozalówka). Similarly as in the other cases discussed above, not much is known about Mrs Piotrowska. The location “Rozalówka” seems to be the key to locating her home. It has already been determined that a Mrs Piotrowska was the owner of property in Rozaliyevka (present-day Rozaliyevka in the Bilotserkivskiy Raion of Kiev Province). Unfortunately, further research yielded no information concerning her identity, from whom she learnt the Belarusian songs and how often she kept in touch with the Polish ethnographer. The location “from Ovruch”, listed for some of the songs labelled with Piotrowska’s name, is quite a puzzle for researchers, but it should be assumed that she became familiar with these songs through the rural folk that served at the manor.

To conclude, all the three informants quoted by Kolberg may have been bearers of tradition themselves or just mediators who transferred the information to the researcher.

KOLBERG’S JOURNEY TO BELARUS

1839 is officially considered to have been the beginning of Kolberg’s folklore-collecting activity, when the researcher wrote down his first traditional melodies in Wilanów near Warsaw. During this period Kolberg wrote in a letter to one of his friends: “The first significant

catch which I had in 1839 in Wilanów brought me a huge amount of truly interesting themes and pushed me to further investigate this field”²¹. Here Kolberg implies that this was not his first expedition in search of traditional songs. However, it was particularly important for two reasons: its abundant results in the form of notated music and the increase of motivation to continue the work. This moment marks the starting point of the systematic collection of folklore in the biography of Kolberg as an ethnographer. However, Kolberg began to collect folklore much earlier – and although the researcher does not describe any of the earlier “catches”, some clues can be found in the surviving records.

Of particular interest is a notebook located in sub-portfolio 1296, which includes transcriptions of traditional melodies and lyrics. The date of creating that notebook is unknown. As it is the only notebook in Kolberg’s whole manuscript legacy, it can possibly shed new light on the beginnings of his collecting activity. The issue of “the secret notebook” – as mentioned by Agata Skrukwa, editor of *The Works of Oskar Kolberg (Dziela Wszystkie)* and longtime employee of Oskar Kolberg Institute in Poznań – remains one of the most interesting puzzles left behind by the great Polish ethnographer. He always made notes on loose sheets of paper of various formats, as this gave him substantial freedom with regard to form of notation, assigning materials to the various portfolios and passing them on to the publisher. It is much harder to complement written material with new data in a notebook, as there is no possibility of rearranging the fixed order of sheets. It is quite possible that this notebook testifies to Kolberg’s very early method of collecting information, which he later abandoned as ineffective.

The first four double-sided sheets and the fifth single-sided sheet of the notebook are all written in Kolberg’s handwriting and contain melodies, occasionally with incipits of texts, instructions concerning contexts of performance, and song lyrics. The other sheets (five double-sided and one single-sided) remained blank, although the sixth page had staves sketched on it. Numerous corrections and hurried handwriting

²¹ O. Kolberg. *Szkic autobiografii* [A Sketch for an Autobiography]. A manuscript in the library collection of the Polish Academy of Sciences, sig. 2183, p. 68; quoted after: E. Miller, (1990). Oskar Kolberg. Człowiek i dzieło [Oskar Kolberg. Man and Work]. *Twórczość ludowa*. Year 5, No. 4/17, pp. 2–5.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 14.

suggest that these were all field records. Each page of the notebook has names of locations written on it, three of which are in Belarus. Wedding melodies on page three (9 instrumental and one song) were labelled as “between Vitebsk and Polotsk”, “Borisov”. Under each of these locations there are distances written in miles, respectively “about 10 miles”, “12”, and “14”. This is not, however, an accurate clue, as various distance measures were used at that time. In Poland a mile could have from c. four kilometers up to more than eight. However, if we assume that Kolberg used the so-called average mile, which measures approximately 5.76 km (3333 fathoms, 1 fathom equals 1.728 meters), and then draw circles around Polotsk, Vitebsk and Borisov with a radius corresponding to the distances given by Kolberg, we will limit our scope of interest to a small area between Beshankovichy and Ula on their intersection. Subsequently, the following locations are listed on the other pages of the notebook: “Kamenets – Zhitomir – Kamenets – Vitebsk – from Polotsk, Drysyenski District – from Lviv, Przemyśl (in Galicia), Cracow, Skaryszew, Kamieniec, Kozienice”²². It seems that such detailed notes containing geographical distances were the researcher’s personal notes concerning his current place of residence. The uniqueness of these notes lies in the fact that they are the only indications of geographical location listed next to the notated repertoire in the entire Belarusian material collected by Kolberg (and perhaps also in his entire manuscript legacy). Could Kolberg have noted these songs during a stay in Belarus?

From the travel log drawn up by Kolberg at the end of his life it is known that he was in Belarus between 1836 and 1837 – he listed the cities of Gomel and Minsk²³. Probably he was just passing through, as his destination in 1836 was Mitawa (now Jelgava in Latvia), where the 22-year-old Oskar Kolberg worked for a year as a piano teacher at the house of Carolina de Kreutz. It is also known that on his way back Kolberg stopped in Gomel²⁴ in December 1837. Interestingly, this was the

young Kolberg’s second individual journey, the first one being that to a college in Berlin directly after his father’s death. Could it be that during that Belorussian journey Kolberg collected traditional songs from the local people? Unfortunately, the lack of sufficient information on the circumstances of these travels makes it only possible to formulate tentative hypotheses.

As mentioned earlier, Kolberg made 94 per cent of his musical transcriptions of Belarusian songs personally, as evidenced by the handwriting of the preserved manuscripts. Among these there are also field notes. Probably most of this material was collected from Belarusian emigrants residing in the Russian part of partitioned Poland. However, I believe that some portion of the songs was written down when Kolberg visited Belarus personally, possibly during the journey in 1836-37. This would mean that the starting point of Kolberg’s folklore-collecting career as an ethnographer should be moved back, two or even three years earlier than previously assumed.

CONCLUSION

Kolberg’s achievements are impressive in many respects: the scope of his study of traditional culture (language, history, spiritual culture, material culture), territorial and geographical extent of the study, as well as the range of means he used to carry out such an extensive operation. The scale of the project and its results put Kolberg at the forefront of researchers exploring Slavic traditional culture in Europe. As far as Belarusian culture is concerned, he was the first systematic researcher to take on the challenge of describing Belarusian traditional culture. Although his regionalist research mostly focused on Polish traditional culture, his achievements in the field of Belarusian studies remain truly unique. To list once again the key points:

1. He collected a huge bibliography on Belarus and the traditions of its people. His published materials on this subject come from different stages of Kolberg’s activity, and therefore cover a long period;
2. Kolberg’s personal contribution to the knowledge of musical culture in Belarus in the form of musical notations is invaluable. Previously unknown melodies collected by the researcher constitute an invaluable source of knowledge about the musical traditions of Belarus in the 19th century;
3. His way of notating music with melodic variants is one of the earliest examples of notation in Belarusian ethnomusicology;

²² O. Kolberg’s manuscript in portfolio 29 (sub-portfolio 1296, p. 3, 4) at the Oskar Kolberg Institute in Poznań.

²³ O. Kolberg, (1969). *Korespondencja Oskara Kolberga, part III (1883–1890)* [The letters of Oskar Kolberg part III (1883–1890)], *Dziela Wszystkie* [Complete Works], vol. 66. A. Skrukwa, E. Krzyżaniak-Millerowa (Eds.). Wrocław-Poznań: IOK, pp. 704–707.

²⁴ Idem, (1965). *Korespondencja Oskara Kolberga, part I (1837–1876)* [The letters of Oskar Kolberg part I (1837–1876)], *Dziela Wszystkie* [Complete Works], vol. 64. A. Skrukwa, E. Krzyżaniak (Eds.). Wrocław-Poznań: IOK, p. XX.

4. The unequal coverage of the various regions of Belarus is the result of Kolberg's limited opportunities to access sources;
5. The period of Kolberg's stay in Belarus (1836–1837) may mark his beginnings as an ethnographer.

In light of the above, it may be concluded that Kolberg, along with several other authors, was one of the founding fathers of Belarusian ethnomusicology. But the fact is that the knowledge of Kolberg's work in the environment of Belarusian ethnomusicologists and folklorists is very limited, not to mention the poor awareness of his pioneering achievements in Belarus. The possible reasons are mainly: firstly, the late publication of Kolberg's Belarusian materials (not until 1968 – when the developing Belarusian ethnomusicology was already at a new stage of its own historiographic work). Secondly – the Polish language is still a barrier for the Belarusian reader. Finally – the limited availability of Kolberg's Belarusian volume in Belarus, not to mention his other works.

The idea of Slavic culture has its direct reflection in the publication of regional monographs from the *Lud* cycle, which contains Polish, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian music. Kolberg's Belarusian materials incorporated most of the already existing sources on Belarusian folklore, which he decided to collect in one place, partly translate into Polish, and present to the Polish reader. Adam Gudas (a.k.a. Adam Maldzis) in his report of 1970 – the first Belarusian reaction to Kolberg's Belarusian volume – wrote: "They [the songs – A.N.] will give the Polish, and not only Polish, but also the general Slavic reader a valuable idea of how rich the Belarusian folklore is, and what aesthetic pleasure can be gleaned from the spiritual treasures of Belarusian culture"²⁵. Kolberg's role was not limited to that of an "archivist" or a translator of ethnographic material on Belarus, as he personally collected new information and most of all the songs, by which he developed both Polish and Belarusian ethnography.

We can only hope that the Kolberg Year²⁶, along with scientific and cultural projects implemented on this occasion, will contribute to increasing the availability and popularity of his work, while new research in this field will allow a reinterpretation of the Belarusian achievements of that great ethnographer.

²⁵ A. Gudas, (1970). Bielaruski tom Kolberga [Kolberg's Belarusian Volume], *Polymya*. Vol. 8 (496), p. 240.

²⁶ The year 2014 was proclaimed by the Polish Parliament as the Year of Oskar Kolberg.

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