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# *In extrema fere Livonia:* The Jesuit College in Tartu in Piotr Skarga's Correspondence

*In extrema fere Livonia: Jezuickie kolegium  
w Tartu w korespondencji Piotra Skargi*

## ABSTRACT

In the relation addressed to his monastic confreres written in 1583, the Jesuit chronicler wrote that Tartu (Dorpat), where the Jesuit had recently moved to, was a city located in the most remote part of Livonia, as the territories belonging to today's Latvia and Estonia were then called (*Torpatum urbs est in extrema fere Livonia*) (Kurtz 1925: 12).<sup>1</sup> The present article reminds us why the Jesuits arrived in these lands, which were little-known to Europeans at that time (and perhaps even today), and what Piotr Skarga wrote about them in his letters. The subject literature and archival sources available in Rome reveal that their arrival was aimed at the recatholicisation of Livonia undertaken by King Stefan Batory after his victorious wars with Russia. Regardless of the king's obvious political goals, the Jesuits' presence in the region was primarily linked with the evangelisation mission of the Order, whose tools included education, which, alongside direct pastoral work, was the leading form of its activity both in Livonia and elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> The book contains Latin relations called *litterae annuae*, which were sent by the Jesuits to Rome, and their German translation.

## KEYWORDS:

Society of Jesus,  
Jesuit education, Tartu  
(Dorpat), Piotr Skarga,  
college

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

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## ABSTRAKT

Jezuicki kronikarz z 1583 r. pisał w swej relacji przeznaczony dla współbraci zakonnych, że Tartu (Dorpat), gdzie od niedawna Jezuici zamieszkiwali, jest miastem położonym w najbardziej oddalonej części Liwonii, czyli Inflant, jak wówczas określano tereny dzisiejszej Łotwy i Estonii (*Torpatum urbs est in extrema fere Livonia*) (Kurtz 1925: 12)<sup>2</sup>. Niniejszy artykuł ukazuje przyczyny, dla których jezuita znaleźli się w tych niezbyt dobrze znanych ówczesnym (a może także współczesnym) Europejczykom stronach oraz to, co na ten temat pisał w swoich listach Piotr Skarga. Istniejąca literatura przedmiotu oraz dostępne w Rzymie źródła archiwalne dowodzą, że główną przyczyną ich przybycia na te tereny była akcja rekateolizacji Inflant podjęta przez króla Stefana Batorego po zwycięskich wojnach z Rosją. Niezależnie od oczywistych celów politycznych władcy, dla jezuitów główną racją obecności w regionie była misja ewangelizacyjna zakonu, a jednym z jej narzędzi było szkolnictwo, które obok bezpośredniego duszpasterstwa stanowiło wiodącą formę ich działalności tak w Inflantach, jak i gdzie indziej.

## Polish and Jesuit Livonia

The Society of Jesus, founded in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola, developed dynamically. Between 1581 and 1615, when Claudio Acquaviva (the fourth successor of the founder) was the Superior General of the Order, the number of its members increased from 5,000 to more than 13,000. Many new provinces were created in and outside Europe, and the Jesuit missions engaged in various activities. The number of Jesuit schools increased from 144 to 372 and the Superior General sometimes had to refuse new foundations because he did not have enough teachers to work in the colleges (Bangert 1990: 114).<sup>3</sup>

The Jesuits arrived in Poland in 1564, at first as members of one of the German Provinces (*Provincia Germaniae Superioris*), but the

<sup>2</sup> Książka zawiera łaciński tekst relacji zwanych *litterae annuae*, przesyłanych przez jezuitów do Rzymu, oraz ich niemieckie tłumaczenie.

<sup>3</sup> Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615), an Italian and a Jesuit from 1567 (in Rome he was a co-novice of St. Stanislaus Kostka), was elected as the Superior General in 1581, and he led the Order for the longest period in its history, almost 34 years (Grzebień 1996: 15).

Polish Vice-Province was established as early as 1565, and in 1576 it transformed into an independent Province (*Provincia Poloniae*). In 1598, the Lithuanian Vice-Province was created from it, and it became a separate Province (*Provincia Lituaniae*) in 1608. The number of Jesuits increased: in 1576 there were 400 of them, and in 1598 already about 800. At that time, Jesuit colleges operated in Braniewo (Braunsberg), Pułtusk, Poznań, Jarosław, Lublin, Kalisz, Nesvizh, Polotsk, and at the university in Vilnius (O'Neill, Domínguez 2001: 3173–3179).

At the same time, the Jesuits also settled in the territories which now belong to Latvia and Estonia. Their presence and work there were heavily influenced by the political situation in this part of the continent, hence it is impossible to discuss the “Jesuit” part of the history of Livonia outside the context of the general situation of the entire region in this period. Unfortunately, due to reasons of space, it is impossible to present even a short outline of this situation here (Lewandowski 2002: 68–85).

After the wars fought in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century mentioned above and the Polish-Russian Truce of Jam-Zapolski in 1582, a short “Polish” period in the history of Latvia and southern Estonia (its northern regions remained under Swedish rule) can be mentioned. A historical perspective allows us to call this “Polish” period a “Jesuit” period as, after the end of the war, King Stefan Batory founded two colleges for the Jesuits in the conquered areas: in Riga and in Tartu (for understandable reasons, the third foundation planned for Narva did not materialise).

In February 1583 a group of Jesuits arrived in Riga, where they soon opened a college (the foundation act of 25 June 1582 was approved by Pope Gregory XIII on 1 April 1583). In 1613, the so-called Jesuit residence (an institution of a lower rank than a college) in Wenden was also established in Latvia, which operated until 1625. Although its main purpose was pastoral work, a school was opened there in 1619, but there was no time to consolidate its activity (Załęski 1905: 280–283).

The Jesuits arrived in Tartu on 19 March 1583. Giovanni Paolo Campano, the Provincial of Poland, came there with six confreres: four priests (Theodor Havkenscheid, Thomas Busaeus, Valentin Hengelius and Joannes Ambrosius Völcker) and two brothers (Johannes

Strunk and Stephan Braun) (Helk 1977: 211–253).<sup>4</sup> First, they set up a residence and committed themselves to pastoral work. King Batory, persuaded by Antonio Possevino, who visited Estonia twice in 1585, signed the act of foundation of the college in January 1586; Thomas Busaeus became its first rector (Grzebień 1996: 80, 532).<sup>5</sup>

The number of students gradually increased: in 1584 there were 30 of them, and in 1592 there were already 70. Apart from the college, the Jesuits owned two churches in Tartu and numerous other properties (houses in the city, landed estates in the countryside). Their pastoral work was conducted in three languages: Estonian, German and Polish. In addition to teaching at the college and conducting pastoral work in the churches, the Jesuits also engaged in missionary work among the local rural population.

A special school for Latvian and Estonian translators was opened at the college, as knowledge of these languages was necessary for direct pastoral work with the local rural population, and, with time, a theatre and a Marian congregation were created. Tartu also became a place known for its translation and publishing activity. Unfortunately, none of the catechisms published in Estonian has survived; *Agenda Parva*, a collection of prayers in Polish, Latin, Latvian and Estonian published in Braniewo in 1622, seems to be the only item known to historians from this period (Helk 1963: 679).

The Mission in Livonia was first subordinated to the Polish Province of the Society of Jesus, and from 1598 to the Lithuanian Vice-Province, which became an independent Province in 1608. However, the Jesuits working in Tartu were of different nationalities: they were mainly Poles and Germans, but there were also Frenchmen, Italians, Dutchmen, Swedes, Hungarians, Latvians, and Estonians. In total, in the years 1583–1625, there were over a hundred

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<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Paolo Campano (1540–1592), an Italian and a Jesuit from 1563, was the Provincial of the Polish Province in the period 1581–1591 (Grzebień 1996: 84).

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Possevino (1533–1611), an Italian and a Jesuit from 1559, was a writer and diplomat in the service of the Popes, who entrusted him with various important and delicate missions, including peace negotiations between Poland and Russia in 1581. He was also Batory's advisor (Grzebień 1996: 532). Thomas Busaeus (c. 1550–1591), a Dutchman and a Jesuit from 1564, had been in Poland since 1583, and he worked and died in Tartu (Grzebień 1996: 80).

Jesuits in the city: priests, brothers and so-called scholastics, or Jesuit seminarians, who spent part of their studies there or worked at the college as teachers (Helk 1977: 211–253).<sup>6</sup>

The history of the college was, of course, influenced by the political situation in the region. In 1587, Sigismund III Vasa became the Polish King, and as the king-elect, in the so-called *pacta conventa*, committed himself to join Estonia to the Kingdom of Poland. In 1592 he was crowned King of Sweden, although he never held real power in this country, and his announcement from 1600 that he would fulfil his electoral promise resulted only in long wars. The fights took place in several stages, each ended by a short-lived truce. The final result was advantageous for Sweden, which captured the entire territory of present-day Estonia and most of Livonia, moving its borders southwards. This state of affairs was sealed by the truces of Altmark (1629) and Stuhmsdorf (1635), and the definitive renunciation of Polish claims to these lands was sealed by the Treaty of Oliva (1660).

This signified the end of the Jesuits' presence in these lands: the Order could spread its activity within the territory of Poland, but it was no longer possible under non-Catholic rulers.

After Tartu was captured by the Swedes (January 1601), the Jesuits (three priests and four brothers) were arrested and imprisoned in Stockholm several months later. Only three of them survived and returned from captivity five years later. In the meantime, the Polish Hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz regained Tartu in 1603 and the Jesuits were able to return to the city; however, it was only several years later that they managed to reopen the college. The return of the Swedes in 1625 marked the end of both the "Polish" period in the history of Estonia and the Jesuits' presence there. An academic gymnasium was opened in the college building in Tartu, which was transformed into the Protestant Gustaw Adolf University in 1632 (many Poles studied there at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the only form of Jesuit work in these areas was their missions among the rural population, carried out mostly in the area of today's Latvia.

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<sup>6</sup> The catalogues preserved in the archives made it possible to conduct biographical and statistical studies, the results of which can be referred to today.

## Tartu in Skarga's letters

Piotr Skarga's correspondence has been published several times. First, to commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the author of *Sejm Sermons*, Jan Sygański published 101 of his letters together with several dozen other documents (mainly letters to Skarga, but also other documents concerning him) (Sygański 1912a; "Z nieznanych listów Skargi" 1912: 157–161; Tyszkowski 1925–1926: 370–373). The originals of most of them can be found in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus (*Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu*), which also contain three other original documents of Skarga, published by this author in 2013 together with a fourth one, a copy of which can be found in the Vatican Archives (Danieluk 2013: 203–222). To commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of this great Jesuit, 16 of these letters were translated into Polish (most of Skarga's correspondence was in Latin), which was done by Stanisław Ziemiański, who has continued to publish Polish translations of his letters in *Biuletyn Jezuici w Polsce* [*Bulletin of the Jesuits in Poland*]. This process began in 2016, and the Polish translations of 31 letters had been published as of July 2019 ("Wybór listów Piotra Skargi" 2012: 81–125). The extensive fragments of several of these letters were also translated by Sygański himself in his study entitled *Działalność ks. Piotra Skargi T.J. na tle jego listów 1566–1610* [*The Activities of Father Piotr Skarga T.J. against the background of his letters 1566–1610*] (Sygański 1912b). Moreover, two previously unknown letters by Skarga were published in 1976 and 2001 by Jerzy Starnawski and Lech Szczucki, respectively (Starnawski 1976: 141–143; Szczucki 2001: 539–541). In total, 107 letters written by the author of *The Lives of the Saints* have been published (either in the original or in Polish translation); Appendix 1 contains a table listing these in chronological order.

In his letters written between 1581 and 1583, Skarga, who was directly involved in introducing the Society of Jesus to Livonia and Polotsk, frequently described what he did during his numerous journeys between Vilnius, Polotsk and Riga. He also mentioned Tartu.

In a letter dated as early as 20 June 1580, he informed his addressee, who has not been identified yet, that he was to leave Vilnius a day later and go to Polotsk. He mentioned that Batory had shown him the

foundation document of the college in Kolozsvár (Cluj) and that the King was very enthusiastic about the idea of the recatholicisation of Livonia, which he hoped to control after the war (Danieluk 2013: 214).

More than a year later, on 5 July 1581, Skarga wrote to Father General Acquaviva about Batory's promise that he would open the Jesuit colleges in Livonia after the war with Russia ended:

(...) today I heard from His Majesty himself: If He makes peace with the Moscals, His Majesty will head to Latvia as quickly as possible, and the first thing to do there will be, as a thanksgiving offering to the Lord for tearing this province away from the Moscals' hands, the foundation of three colleges in Riga, Dorpat and Narva. He will treat Latvia as a clean slate on which he will be able to write His royal law and use the right of the conqueror to eradicate heresy and introduce the Catholic faith. (*Biuletyn Jezuici w Polsce* 2018: 35)

In the same letter, Skarga also mentioned that the King had asked him to accompany him to Livonia and help him to organise everything there. He finally reported that Possevino and the consultors were of the opinion that the royal foundations should be accepted, which the Jesuits did.

Upon arriving in Livonia, in a letter dated 21 April 1582 sent from Riga to the General Possevino, Skarga described the city and the opportunities for Jesuit work in the region ("Wybór listów Piotra Skargi" 2012: 128–134). It soon became evident that the king's kindness did not mean that the foundations would be established quickly and without problems. The latter were abundant, as a month later (on 21 May 1582) Skarga reported, in a letter written from the Latvian capital to the Bishop of Warmia, Marcin Kromer, that: "We grow vines in hard and infertile soil, which is only seemingly easy" (*Biuletyn Jezuici w Polsce* 2019: 28).<sup>7</sup>

In his subsequent letters to General Acquaviva, written from Riga on 17 June and 24 October 1582, Skarga described the religious and national situation in the city and its surroundings (Sygański 1912a: 183–186, 194–197), and on 16 April 1583, he wrote from Polotsk, informing the General that the Provincial Superior Campano had

<sup>7</sup> Marcin Kromer (c. 1512–1589), Royal Secretary in the period 1545–1558, was the author of numerous historical works. In 1579 he became Bishop of Warmia after the death of the previous one, Hosius (Szostek, Migut, Sawa et al. 2002: 1305–1306).

arrived in Livonia with Jesuits for two houses which were to be built there. As the Provincial had gone to Tartu and could not go to Polotsk to deal with the affairs of the foundation, which encountered certain difficulties, he sent Skarga there, who again covered the distance of 60 miles between the two cities on the Daugava River (Danieluk 2013: 215).

On 20 June 1583, Skarga informed the General that the Provincial had entrusted the posts in Riga, Dorpat and Polotsk to his care. Polotsk, from where he also wrote, was the main cause of his worries, but also the object of his greatest hopes. Meanwhile, Tartu, being indeed *in extrema Livonia*, caused him fewer worries, and—probably because of this—it is rarely mentioned in his correspondence. In the aforementioned letter, he even admitted that he had not yet been to the city at all (“*Derpatum enim nondum vidi*”) (Danieluk 2013: 217).

However, Skarga did not forget about the Jesuit post there, as is evidenced by his letter sent to the General from Grodno on 12 January 1584, in which he mentioned plans to establish several different colleges, including one in Tartu, where he expected greater fruit from pastoral work than in Riga itself:

Dorpat, whose college Your Majesty has not yet mentioned, would be far more convenient for the benefit of souls and would soon surpass Riga; the inhabitants are slower there, and the great volume of Moscow trade and the influx of Poles into this city makes everything easier, Skarga wrote. (Sygański 1912b: 68)

In the same letter, he noted that Estonians would easily convert to Catholicism if only the missionaries could reach them by speaking their language. Meanwhile, the Jesuits, who did not speak Estonian, had to rely on translators. He also mentioned the beginnings of the college and the Poles teaching there. “If we had a college and a papal seminary for the Russians here,” he concluded, “we could quickly reap a bountiful harvest” (Sygański 1912b: 68). Fortunately, as he recalled, the King had promised to found a college in Tartu and give the Jesuits the local church of St. Mary Magdalene.

Skarga did not forget about this foundation even after leaving Livonia. On 17 September and 28 October 1584, he wrote to the General from Krakow, mentioning that this Estonian city is so distant that when the Provincial Father is there, he is further away from Krakow than the General in Rome, which of course makes it difficult

to do various things (Sygański 1912a: 212–213, 218: “Wybór listów Piotra Skargi” 2012: 135–136). Is this further proof that the Estonian post appeared to him as the proverbial end of the world? It probably is, but it is obvious that he treated it in terms of a missionary challenge, as is evidenced by his numerous comparisons between the northern and eastern regions of the Kingdom of Poland at that time and “India,” that is, the Order’s overseas lands and missions. A fragment of Skarga’s letter to the Provincial Lorenzo Maggio of 17 July 1573 can serve as an example: “We do not have to look for East or West Indies. Lithuania and the northern country are such Indies” (*Biuletyn Jezuici w Polsce* 2016: 26).<sup>8</sup> He saw equally great challenges to his pastoral work a few years later in the areas conquered by Batory, but his attitude was strengthened by the King himself: “Do not envy,” Batory wrote to Skarga on 29 August 1579, just after he had conquered Polotsk, “your Portuguese and Spaniards their foreign worlds in Asia and America, which they can convert to God; both India and Japan are nearby in the Russian nation of Polotsk, in the city unaware of the Divine things” (Sygański 1912b: 48).

The history of the Jesuits in Estonia and Latvia has a modest historiography. Although the existing studies are not particularly numerous, they are well-documented in source materials, some of which have been published (see e.g. Polgár 1983: 183–184, 395–396; Kučinskis 2001: 2338–2340; Grzebień 1996: 129–130, 149–150, 229, 391, 588, 728).<sup>9</sup> Some of the documents quoted in them are kept in the Roman Jesuit Archives, where, thanks to the inventories of Polonica, they are easy to find (Bieś et al. 2002–2008; Lamalle 1981–1982: 89–120). Vello Helk rightly highlighted the importance of these collections in his works on the Jesuits in Tartu as early as 1963 and 1977 (Helk 1963: 673; Helk 1977: 7–8). He has gained access to many—maybe even all—of them, and often quotes them. It seems, therefore, that the existing documents have already been ex-

<sup>8</sup> Lorenzo Maggio (c. 1530–1605), an Italian and a Jesuit from 1555, was responsible for the arrival of Jesuits into Poland as the Austrian Provincial and directed their activities until 1576, and in the period 1579–1580 he was also a Jesuit Visitor to Poland (Grzebień 1996: 399).

<sup>9</sup> Extensions of this bibliography are systematically published in the journal *Archivum Societatis Iesu*, published by the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome.

tensively analysed. However, this does not mean that new areas of research are not possible. After all, as the 19<sup>th</sup>-century French historian François Guizot said, “There are a hundred ways to write history” (“*Il y a cent façons d’écrire l’histoire*”) (Carbonell 1998: 83). The correspondence of the Servant of God Piotr Skarga (his beatification process began in 2014) is a noteworthy contribution to many of these ways.

### Appendix 1: Piotr Skarga’s published letters from the period 1565–1609

The first column in the table gives the year and the next 12 columns give the months of each year.

If several letters share the same date (e.g. 3 January 1572), each letter is recorded separately.

Letters with several dates are placed following the latest date, e.g. a letter written both on 27 July 1580 and 4 August 1580 is placed under the latter date.

? means that the precise date of writing the letter is unknown (e.g. a letter from November 1584 or a document written in the period between September and December 1583).

\* marks letters whose Polish translation appeared in the publications quoted in the article.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
1565											13	
1566											18	
1568											13*	
1569		26*										
1571					10 19	21* 24* 29*	20*	28*			12*	
1572	3* 3	26*	17* 17		3 13*				16			
1573		3					17* 17					
1574									7* 30*	5*		22*
1575				26*	4*					10 10		

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
1576			10				1* 1*					
1577			12*	8			17* 17* 31*	6		9*		
1578			29				3*					
1579			29*			10						16*
1580	8*					20* 20	7*	4*			30*	
1581			7		25*		5*	2*			13* 27*	
1582		14*		21*	21*	17*	2 22*			24*	15	
1583	10			16	8	20						?
1584	12*						4		17*	28	?	
1585					15				18		28	21
1586							13	16*	13 13		1 29	
1587	17											
1588	13											
1593	26							25				
1594						5					26	16
1595		9						8	27	19		
1600					26							
1603						10						
1604								12				
1605								14*				
1606							29		14 20	9		
1608		9										
1609										20		

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