

Michał Otorowski

**How Was the *Manuscript Found in Saragossa*
Lost and Is It Worth Finding?**

Exegetical fragments





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**Jak zagubiono
Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie
i czy warto go odnaleźć?**



EVVIVA L'ARTE



Michał Otorowski, an outstanding authority and original interpreter of Jan Potocki's work, takes us on an erudite journey through the life of the author of the mysterious *Manuscript Found in Saragossa* and through the story of the book's main character, Alfonse van Worden. The numerous intertwined motifs in Potocki's work find clarification and new connections thanks to the author's excellent knowledge of how these motifs are interwoven in the worldly, mental, and spiritual life of Potocki himself. Thus the book provides us with an extensive lecture on, inter alia, the Lurian Kabbalah, masonic symbolism, and the traditionalism of de Maistre.

The author once again joins in the international discussion taking place on the subject of which version of the famous *Manuscript* should be recognized as the object of the appropriate studies, thereby standing in opposition to the currently prevalent idea of Professors François Rosset and Dominique Triaire.

"Due to the nonlinear construction of *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, everyone willing to venture an attempt at presenting its thought content has to take into account the exposition's convolutions, whereas speaking about a detail always turns out to be speaking about the whole. Considering the absence of analytical studies of such details in existing studies of this subject, such a summary presentation cannot be performed without identifying and resolving many issues that often require a very specialized framework as well as drawing on disciplines to which literary research usually has no need to refer. In other words, without doing so, it is difficult to answer the question that is only seemingly simple: What is Jan Potocki's book about and thus what is it?"

Author



Michał Otorowski (1971), PhD in cultural and religion studies, historian engaged in the study of the life and work of Jan Potocki, particularly in an analysis of the internal structure of *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*.

Otorowski is the author of the following works:

Archipelag Potockiego. Szkice i artykuły o konspiracjonizmie, mesjanizmie oraz teozofii politycznej (Potocki's Archipelago: Sketches and Articles about Conspirationism, Messianism, and Political Theosophy; Warsaw, 2010);

Romans dziwnie ułożony: Opowieść egzegetyczna o „Rękopisie znalezionym w Saragossie” Jana Potockiego, (days I-XXIX) (A Strangely Arranged Romance: An Exegetic Story about *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* by Jan Potocki; Warsaw, 2009);

Jan Potocki – koniec i początek : wprowadzenie do badań nad „Rękopisem znalezionym w Saragossie” (Jan Potocki – The End and the Beginning: An Introduction to Research on *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*; Warsaw, 2008);

Cagliostro w Warszawie. Alchemia lansu (Cagliostro in Warsaw: The Alchemy of Self-Promotion; Warsaw, 2007);

Konspiracjonizm polski. Zapoznana tradycja (Polish Conspirationism: An Underestimated Tradition; Warsaw, 2006).



Why is the form of the Manuscript presented by us so disturbing to Otorowski? Because he expanded the system of interpretation on the basis of the Polish version attributed to Chojecki. A discussion with M. Otorowski is also not easy because his statements blend elements of high-minded erudition and brilliant exegesis with a disarming ideological stamp.

Prof. François Rosset

Michał Otorowski has in recent years developed a kabbalistic reading of the work in an erudite and analytical way. His studies open up an unusually rich world of the imagination, metaphors, connections, symbols, and allegories.

Dr Mirella Kurkowska, Dr Jarosław Kurkowski

Yet it is only Michał Otorowski who today consistently rejects the determinations of editors by voicing with conviction the thesis of Potocki's religious breakthrough, the testimony of which was supposedly the version of the book known in Poland from Chojecki's translation – this is the version that the scholar recognizes as the definitive one.

Dr Maria Janoszka

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Translation rights: Izabela Michalska,
fundacja@evvivalarte.org,
www.evvivalarte.org

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Day XXXVII:

The Waverings of a Naturalist

We often treat matters that are not at all evident as though they were totally understandable. The seemingly silent theologist Geometer is addressed from the pages of the *Manuscript* as a naturalist, but this same Geometer in the 1810 version is a historian. The vision of the most ancient events that are presented there is aggressively naturalistic while not betraying the least connection with geometry, even though in that very year of 1810 Potocki himself announced a new method of studying the ancient chronology, purporting to elevate the *more geometrico* to the standing of an exact science. What is even stranger is that he was a historian prior to publishing the *Principles of Chronology*, and he could have thought of himself – even secretly – as a geometer, yet he was decidedly not yet the historian-geometer he would become during the many years of research as the author of this landmark – as he himself made no effort to conceal – work.

Potocki's great ambition, however, had always been to get *ad origines*: first the Polish and then the Slavic and universal. In the 1802 *Primary History of the Peoples of Russia*, which reconstructed the dislocation of the most ancient peoples inhabiting the Eurasian continent, he chose Herodotus, quite sensibly, as a guide. The next logical step was turning to Manetho as the

main ancient authority in the area of chronology. Unlike the account of the Greek chronicler, the work of the Egyptian, containing a dynastic list of the pharaohs and for that reason highly respected even by early Christian writers, did not survive as an integral text but was broken up and scattered in the form of more or less extensive citations among various ancient authors (predominantly Flavius Josephus and Georgios Synkellos). After the publication of the *Primary History*, Potocki took up the task of reconfiguring these fragments and adapting them to the needs of research in order to conquer time as he had previously mastered space. The practical result of his efforts, published in 1805, was the set of clear, tabular compilations of all accessible and at least seemingly reliable facts arranged chronologically on the basis of data derived from the first two books of Manetho's *History of Egypt*, which encompassed the pharaohs who were traditionally considered historical – from Menes (c. 3670 BCE) to Twosret, who ruled during the Trojan War (c. 1209 BCE) – because he was interested neither in the rulers from the third book nor in the legendary dynasties of gods and demigods with which the lost work began.

During this work, of course, the constant point of reference is the biblical tradition, especially the account of the flood, which the count identifies with the Babylonian “great deluge” (c. 2200 BCE) and differentiates from the two floods known to the Greek tradition: that of Ogyges (c. 1791 BCE) and that of Deucalion (c. 1529 BCE), privately devoting much attention – as evidenced also by the recently discovered *Essay on the Flood* – to the research, well-known at the time, by Pallas and de Luc, who were searching for a natural substantiation for ancient records. At the same time, the count is also accompanied during this work by the Turdulan ancestors of the Gomelezes, with a pedigree that goes back deep into antediluvian times (c. 6000 BCE) and that is impossible to reconcile either with the book of Genesis or with Manetho's chronology, and yet who are several times invoked on various occasions, which eloquently testifies to the degree to which they

must have intrigued him since no one took Strabo's references to them seriously since antiquity nor cited them particularly.

Five years after the publication of his Egyptian ephemera, Potocki published another work, the above-mentioned *Principles of Chronology*, which would form a continuation or even a crowning of his studies to date but would nonetheless present very different conclusions in every way and in its radicalism strangely resemble the new version of the *Manuscript*, conventionally dated in that same year of 1810.

* * *

Let us attempt to capture the changes that took place during this five-year period, starting with several symptomatic declarations from the *Primary History*. Potocki begins the chapter devoted to the biblical relation of the flood by pointing out that the mysterious category of antediluvian mountain dwellers designated by him – forming a class distinct from the four already discussed classes of Noachian peoples – does not indicate that secular history refutes sacred history. In the count's opinion, it is the exact opposite:

On a vu que tous les peuples de mes quatre premières classes avoient été mentionnés dans le dixième chapitre de la Genèse et qu'il n'y étoit fait au contraire nulle mention des autres, et c'est précisément en quoi consiste la principale différence entre l'histoire primitive prophane et l'histoire primitive sacrée, la première dit qu'après la grande inondation, il n'est resté des hommes que dans quelques pays de montagnes, l'histoire sacrée réduit le genre humain à une seule famille, ce seul point excepté, l'histoire prophane est non seulement d'accord avec l'histoire sacrée, mais elle lui doit ses principaux éclaircissements.¹

¹ J. Potocki, *Histoire primitive*, 207.

The absence of more specific references to the secular mountain dwellers that are known to history – that is, the Tibetan Serresians, the Shang from China, the Torbels from the Caucasus, the Togarmahs from Asia Minor, the Ethiops from Upper Egypt, the Pelasgians from Greece, the Sicanians from Italy, the Atlantans from Atlas, and the Iberian Turdulians – does not undermine the biblical tradition that Potocki considers to be very ancient and believable as well as instructive about the peoples of the Near East and Africa; this deficiency is equivalent only to the statement that the ancient Hebrews knew little about the peoples of Europe, deriving their knowledge of this subject from the Phoenicians:

Donc la Genèse est un livre étincellant de vérité, un livre historique, le plus ancien et le meilleur que nous avons, et bien plus instructif encore, sur les peuples de l'Asie et l'Afrique, que sur ceux de l'Europe, car les Juifs connoissoient leurs voisins par eux mêmes et ne connoissoient les peuples de l'Europe que par les Phéniciens.²

Moreover, comparing the chronological data offered by secular history, particularly the Chinese tradition, makes it possible to give a positive verification in practice of the chronological data about the flood contained in sacred history:

Tous les Juifs à commencer par les 70, comptent les quatre cents ans d'exil, de la naissance d'Issac [*sic!*]. En suivant cette supputation j'ai la naissance Abraham [1]910 ans avant J. C. Au-dessus d'Abraham j'ai dix générations qui font a peu près 320 ans, ce qui revient a l'année 2230 avant J. C. et diffère peu du Déluge Chinois.³

² Ibid., 215.

³ Ibid., 220.

Things were totally different, however, in the *Principles of Chronology* of 1810. Typhon, the Hellenized name of the Egyptian god of destruction, Set, with the help of which Potocki now consistently defined the great ancient catastrophe identified with the historical Babylonian deluge is nothing but a typhoon: “Le nom de Typhon est dans les mers d’Asie, consacré aux ouragans extraordinaires.”⁴ This statement is immediately followed by one having to do with “nouvelles considerations sur le Typhon, qui n’est point le deluge de la Genèse.”⁵ For the Babylonian deluge should not only not be identified with the biblical flood, but it also was not brought about, as Potocki earlier claimed, by a comet or some other heavenly body.⁶ De Maistre, who during the author’s absence in Białystok appears to have been supervising the printing of the work in Petersburg and reading it, picking up subsequent proofs from the printer, or at least he first received only the first twenty-six pages (*Introduction et plan général*), added in the margin of the letter sent to Potocki on 5/17 June, without hiding his astonishment: “As I write this, I am in receipt of your first footnotes (*Premières notions historiques*), and I see that you explain with marvelous fearlessness the deluge under discussion with the help of clouds gathered during the course of the year by the northern winds.”⁷ He then added, completely deprecating the addressee: “you are too learned and too genial not to yourself have a sincere laugh over this with us.”⁸ Indeed, the great movements of the seas – which according to the Christian geognosts of the time could be identified with the biblical cataclysm and which according to the count was felt in Mesopotamia, China,

⁴ Potocki, *Principes*, 29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶ Potocki, *Histoire primitive*, 219–222.

⁷ De Maistre’s note is only in the original known from the Polish translation; the date is visible in the Savoyard’s archive, reprinted in the collected Lyon edition of his works. Potocki’s location in June is determined on the basis of a letter from Jan Śniadecki through D. Triaire and F. Rosset (*Z Warszawy*, 31, 39). If the letter was not sent to Białystok but to Winnica or Chmielnik, where mail would come from Petersburg when Potocki was staying at his Uładówka estate, then he might not have read it until November.

⁸ S. Chołojewski, *Filozofia antysalonu*, 503.

and Egypt – became a rather larger flood, something the Savoyard also exposed in his extensive work, which, under the name *Second Letter about Biblical Chronology*, gained renown as one of his most important *opuscules*. But this was not at all the reason why Potocki's Typhon, who gave de Maistre no peace even on the pages of *Petersburg Evenings* (where he meaningfully appears in the statements of the Senator, who professes a Martinistic theosophy), had no connection whatever with the Bible.

The count goes on to explain to the readers that he has devoted so much attention in this work to Hebrew chronology because he had encountered great difficulties in putting it in order. He feels that he has been up to the task, but he realizes that the biblical tradition itself is not uniform in its sources. It comprises many different variants, and, as far as the most distant times are concerned, it presents difficulties of interpretation that are currently impossible to overcome:

J'ai employé une grande partie de mon ouvrage à éclaircir la chronologie des Hébreux en remontant jusqu'à la naissance d'Issac [*sic!*] et je crois en avoir parfaitement concillé les contradictions, qui n'étoient qu'apparentes. Mais on sait assez que si l'on veut remonter plus haut, l'on trouve entre les textes des variantes inconciliables, du moins dans l'état actuel de l'herméneutique.⁹

Did he, while writing this, have any idea of the Jahwist or other textological layers, which may have already been differentiated by Jean Astruc as early as 1753 but were not widely discussed on a foundation of scholarly biblical study until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? In any event, he shows how the ancient Hebrews constructed their chronology *ex post* and points to their liking for numbers, such as their liking for the number seven. More important for us than these reflections will

⁹ Potocki, *Principes*, 66.

be the fact that, referring directly to his own declarations of 1802, he declares in a more than categorical tone that secular history cannot shed light on sacred history, interestingly enough, calling this latter simply the tradition of the Hebrews:

Cette observation me paroît jeter un grand jour sur la leçon du texte hébreux; mais je le répète, dans l'état actuel de nos connoissances, l'histoire profane ne peut point encore servir à éclaircir la tradition des Hébreux.¹⁰

Potocki was led to these conclusions – already close to the minimalistic theses of today's Copenhagen school of Bible studies – precisely by the above-mentioned *méthode nouvelle*, which was to “élever la chronologie ancienne au rang des sciences exactes.”¹¹ And the point is not even that the erstwhile love of exactness acquired here the form of a caricatured formalization of a procedure based on quasi-geometrical axioms, problems, and theorem that by their presence alone did not cause the conclusion to be any more convincing but rather testified to the current mental attitude of their user. What matters is the very idea of resolving difficult issues by separating out their primary elements. In a way that is characteristic for critical historiography, the count dismantled the chronology he had put together five years earlier and divided it into periods. This was not so much a periodizing division in the strict sense, which was to reflect the social, political, or cultural changes of ancient human populations – although it could also fulfill such a function (such as the division into antiquity, Middle Ages, and modern times, or the Renaissance, Baroque, Enlightenment, Romanticism) – as it was an epistemological one, invoking the categories of fairy-tale, legendary, and historical times created by Marcus Terentius Varro, known to Potocki through the ancient compiler

¹⁰ Ibid., 67.

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

Censorinus but more precise. This division was accomplished because of the rather obvious circumstance that no contemporary historical records existed regarding the times being studied by the count – hieroglyphic and cuneiform writing had not yet been deciphered – a division that would enable the researcher to evaluate the traditions established by Jewish, Greek, Roman, or even Byzantine or Armenian authors. Potocki, of course, was always aware of these difficulties, and his retrospective journey *ad origines* was from the outset a journey *ad fontes*, undertaken in defiance of the layers of imaginings heaped upon the tradition available at the time. Working on the *Principles of Chronology*, he was, on the other hand, aware that it was not enough to arrive at the oldest sources, rectifying tradition from later accretions, but these sources should also be subjected to rectification. And it was with this goal that he divided the oldest history into pre-Typhonic times, Typhonic, and an epic encompassed in new tabular compilations called the Chronological Canon and covering merely a fraction of Manetho's old tables, beginning with the year 2000 BCE. He obviously chose names so that they would not be associated with the book of Genesis, which chronologically earned the appellation of canonical only after Isaac's birth. Freed of this baggage, he could devote himself to unconstrained speculations on the subject of the flood and the antediluvian period while having the certainty that the framework within which he was functioning was unassailable:

Pour y réussir j'ai décomposé les durées générales, en autant de durées partielles que j'ai pu saisir de limites. Ce qui ma donné l'avantage de les pouvoir traiter séparément. Ainsi mon opinion sur les temps anti-Typhoniens pourroit être complètement faussé, et mes premières durées entièrement justes.¹²

¹² Ibid.

Yet it was not the *nouvelles considerations sur le Typhon* that testify to just how unconstrained and threatening to the biblical tradition of the flood these musings were but rather the conclusions pertaining to pre-Typhonic times for that reason equipped with a caveat, ignored by de Maistre, that they may be completely erroneous:

Les temps anti-typhoniens commençoient aussi par une catastrophe devenue fameuse par la dispersion des Atlantes. Événement immense, qui dans la connoissance du passé est une borne éternelle que l'esprit humain ne passera jamais.¹³

In accordance with the definition given by the count, the dispersion of the Atlantans should not be identified with the catastrophe described by Plato. Potocki rejects the famous philosophical myth taken from Solon as unsubstantiated by the Egyptian tradition familiar to him. The dispersion was simply a great migration of Ethiopian tribes to Egypt, also marking the most distant point in secular history: “Les Atlantes de l’histoire étoient un peuple habitant Méroé en Éthiopie, et leur migration en Égypte est le point le plus reculé de l’histoire profane.”¹⁴ The significance of this event is testified to by the tradition according to which the Atlantans-Ethiopians, after colonizing Egypt, gave it hieroglyphic writing and knowledge of the gods: “Quant au nom d’Atlantes, il étoit consacrée à ces anciens Éthyopiens, qui sous Osiris, avoient colonisé l’Égypte, lui avoient donné l’écriture hiéroglyphique, et la connoissance des Dieux.”¹⁵ Finally, the cause of this migration may have been the atmospheric events that Potocki had already associated with Typhon’s definition earlier:

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 61.

¹⁵ Ibid. Potocki here refers to Diodorus, just as he does when mentioning the Atlantans in the *Manuscript* of 1810 (*Oeuvres*, IV, 1, 504).

Nous trouvant réduits aux conjectures, nous pouvons supposer que des phénomènes de ce genre ont pendant plusieurs années accumulé les nuages contre la chaîne du Thibet, les monts de l'Arménie et de l'Éthiopie. Les troupeaux périrent et le défaut de subsistances entraîna la perte des nomades habitants de la plaine.¹⁶

As the author of the *Principles of Chronology*, Potocki did not think that one could reach deeper into the past. He was obviously wrong, although these were not the blunderings of a lunatic, as Dominique Triaire and François Rosset contend, calling his research for some unknown reason mathematical madness.¹⁷ For his basic intuition was correct if the period preceding pre-Typhonic times is to be taken as the pre-dynastic period in the history of ancient Egypt. The designated Typhonian horizon also conforms in the currently accepted chronology of ancient Egypt to the so-called First Transition Period, separating the Old and the Middle Kingdoms. The count, of course, did not know all these periodizing divisions because, unlike the baffled students of his legacy, who on this one issue seem to concur with de Maistre, he could not know them. And working before Champolion, he could also not know that pre-Typhonic times, encompassing the first six dynasties from Pharaoh Menes to Queen Nitokris, would turn out to be “historical” to the same degree, so that this laboriously worked out concept would lose its heuristic meaning. He himself can also be imprecise, beginning his chronological canon from the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Sesostri I, the second pharaoh of the twelfth dynasty, whom he identifies with Sesostri III and calls his Ozymandias (in reality, this Hellenized name, famous thanks to Shelley’s poem, refers to Ramses II). So all in all,

¹⁶ Potocki, *Principes*, 29.

¹⁷ Other statements by the two researchers sound equally baffling. For example, that the tabular composition of the Egyptian dynasties printed by Potocki “invalidate the narration.” Have they never had contact with today’s sciences supportive of history or have they no understanding of the challenges faced by eighteenth-century historiography? This is truly hard to believe! F. Rosset and D. Triaire, *Z Warszawy*, 126–139.

Potocki's investigations, in spite of wavering and errors, certainly do not deserve to be called unscientific. And after taking into account all the otherwise obvious limitation of his research facilities, he should be given credit in all fairness that the chronology of the Egyptian dynasties he developed is in many instances at least comparable to the one that is valid today. But returning for a moment to the remarks of Dominique Triare and François Rosset, who deem virtually every manifestation of scientific activity by the count in the area of research into chronology as proof of his pathological extravagance, it should be added that he is simply a continuator of Eusebius of Caesarea, to whom, by the way, he constantly refers. Both the expressions *canon chronologique* and *synchronisme* and the very shape of the tables compiled by him are taken from Eusebius's *Chronici canones*, which constitute the foundation of all of European chronography up until the landmark discoveries made in many fields in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁸

But this is not what is most important. What has decisive significance is the fact that the whole biblical paradigm of thought about the most ancient, the previously most secularized events was deconstructed. However much some catastrophe that is more or less parallel to the Noachian flood still exists in the new model, the clear division of time into pre- and postdiluvian was completely deconstructed. The chronological canon supposedly also begins after Typhon, but Typhon himself does not fulfill the role of a cardinal caesura because of the introduction of the category of pre-Typhonic times that we could deem the equivalent of pre- or rather protohistorical times if Potocki had clearly stated that the appropriate discipline for their study was archeology, which he understood to be the search for relics that could confirm information gleaned from written sources, but not as a separate research discipline. Moreover, the new caesura in

¹⁸ For more on Eusebius's method, see A. Kotłowska, *Obraz dziejów w „Chronici canones” Euzebiusza z Cezarei* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009).

the form of a catastrophe patterned after Typhon that resulted in the dispersion of the Atlantans does not here replace the Typhonic-Noachian caesura that at the same time, thanks to the bridge-like category of anti-Typhonic times, moves our cognitive horizon further into the past because it is a more than enigmatic caesura, separating the unknown from the completely unknown, as de Maistre already noted with his keen eye.

* * *

Could, then, Potocki's speculative historical research, which should be recognized as a significant but underappreciated achievement in the context of the Egyptology of the time, have a ruinous effect for the story in its existing form? Let us recall that, when years before Dominique Triaire and François Rosset announced their thesis regarding two significantly different variants of the work, even they did not seriously wonder why the count did not complete an almost finished text – conventionally called the 1804 version – and started editing the next, supposedly the last, 1810 version. The whole explanation of this strange turn was the statement that Potocki had changed from a “champagne” writer to one who was “better groomed.” It is interesting that this was a sudden change (which took place around 1807), encompassing a change in his attitude toward the Kabbalah: from irreverent to more reflective, and additionally expressed in Cartesianism under whose influence Potocki was not only to feel a need for greater authorial clarity but also to abandon relativism, materialism, and libertinism in order to attune himself to the social aversion to the achievements of European Enlightenment.¹⁹ We see, rather, that Potocki repeated only what he had achieved on the basis of scholarly research, and he not so much tidied up the originally chaotic, labyrinthine text, as both scholars believe, as

¹⁹ Rosset and Triaire, *Z Warszawy*, 159–168. Both scholars repeat these conjectures in varying configurations on the pages of Potocki's biography and in the introduction to the restored edition of the *Manuscript*.

abandoned the whole intricate construction based on the system of ten *sefirot* for the same reasons as he had leveled the Egyptian chronology, trivialized the flood by separating it from the Bible, created a framework for anti-Typhonic times located outside of canonical history, and demarcated the final horizon of events for the dispersion of the Atlantans.

In the 1810 version, however, composed according to the *méthode nouvelle* known from the *Principles of Chronology*, we also have the Geometer's lecture, this time being neither the fourth narrator nor the representative of Gedulla's *sefira* (Chesed) but also having very little in common with geometry. This fact gives rise to the suspicion that the new *Manuscript* mirrors the simple change in Potocki's views as much as it documents his inner struggles. Perhaps not even documents but is simply their arena since even Dominique Triaire and François Rosset admit that this *Manuscript* is not an ossified creation, whereas the Geometer's lecture is among the least stable parts. In their opinion, Potocki constantly returns to this episode, removes it, changes it, and is still working on it around 1812.²⁰ And why exactly is this? Putting aside the issue that the fate of the story about the adventures of the young officer is to such a degree dependent on strictly academic issues very far removed from the romantic plot – literary scholars, after all, see nothing unusual here (after all, enlightenment is “to teach while entertaining”) – that we should expect the count, through the agency of the Geometer, to smoothly summarize the findings contained in the *Principles of Chronology*. And perhaps that is the way it was supposed to be. At least that would have been more convenient in every respect. However, Potocki, for whom Flaubert's grapplings with the comma were completely alien, behaved in such a way as to suggest that he must have encountered a fundamental difficulty here.

Two things in the Geometer's lecture are striking as a unique response to de Maistre's objections to the *Principles of Chronology*.

²⁰ Rosset and Triaire, *Jan Potocki*, 423.

The flood as a gigantic cosmic cataclysm with the simultaneous reduction of Typhon back to the role of a “mythological figure” about which “we know only” that he died “in the Serbonian Bog” is an answer to the Savoyard’s amusement with the vision of Typhonic catastrophes caused by the accumulation of clouds. Meanwhile the Atlantans, with their history predating the occupation of Egypt, is a reaction to the charge that the Atlantans never existed and were simply empty words: “Hélas! Monsieur le comte, il n’y a point d’Atlantes. Ne croyez pas, je vous prie, aux rêves de ces Français dont la vanité excède la mesure de la vanité humaine et dont le vice principal est le défaut de logique.”²¹ This whole idea of Velasquez’s exegesis of the book of Genesis, stepping outside the impassable cognitive horizon outlined in the *Principles of Chronology* with this enigmatic pre-Typhonic beginning of times, seems to be an answer to the Savoyard’s charge that, in periodizing the most distant past, the count is merely breaking up empty space into pieces in his work: “Une chronologie sans faits est précisément une géographie sans terre.”²² Moreover, it seems to be not only a simple response to the reproof by professors Triaire and Rosset, repeated probably not entirely intentionally, but also a sudden, totally unexpected abandonment of all the methodological research principles elaborated *more geometrico*, an abandonment, let us add, that is so troubling that we have no certainty if Potocki is speaking totally seriously in the Geometer’s lecture because the proposed exegesis of the book of Genesis attempting to insert a de-Typhonized flood into the made-up prehistory of the totally non-biblical Atlantans from the *Principles of Chronology* gives the impression of being strangely pointless. Not only is it poorly written – the count has evident problems in the construction of a conclusion, which gets so constantly convoluted that we cannot say who exactly the Atlantans are and what relation they have to the Adamites because he tells us nothing about where

²¹ We are certain that de Maistre’s reproach reached the count in this form because it sounds similar in S. Choloniewski’s translation, *Filozofia antysalonu*, 504.

²² Choloniewski translates this sentence *mot à mot* (ibid., 506).

the Adamites come from whereas the Atlantans are identified with the wild Cushites, civilized Egyptians, biblical *b'nei Elohim*, as well as the hypothetical first people. It is also unreadable on the level of basic intent: Is it supposed to synchronize the book of Genesis in relation to mythical *origines* with the anti-Typhonian system, or conversely, is it to deconstruct it entirely, make it a late and fundamentally expendable addition to other traditions containing an intuition that is not quite precise and thus of little use to naturalists, an intuition that our planet's formation took place rather violently?

Some of these ambiguities can, of course, be explained. The enigmatic and persistently repeated separation of the biblical call to "be fertile and multiply" from the clearly later act of bringing Adam to life becomes understandable when juxtaposed with the Hyperborean concept of the pre-Adamic history of pastor Hass. This researcher, who was eccentric even by the standards of the day and who aroused toward the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century a certain interest among the closest acquaintances of the count and in terms of radicalism the only real rival of our Typhonic revisionist, contended on the basis of Greek and Scandinavian myths, which he considered to be older than the Hebrew myths, that the biblical Adam was only the first farmer, not the first man, while humans existed earlier in the far north, which was at one time warmer than it is presently (hence the medieval Prussians as well as their current descendants are the oldest nation on earth).²³ Potocki's peculiar Elohimism, reconciling the Hebraic-Phoenician theology of Elyon with the "history of Saturn," acquires sense when juxtaposed with Hass's Hyperboreanism. The name Elohim, in the opinion of the German scholar, referred to the Greek Kronos and his descendants and denoted pre-Adamic humans of the mythic golden age living in the North (the biblical Jahwe was therefore to correspond

²³ J. G. Hasse, *Entdeckungen im Felde der ältesten Erd- und Menschengeschichte*, vol. 2 (Halle-Leipzig: Ruff, 1805), 324–327.

to Jupiter).²⁴ So if Hass's chimeric ideas, which at the time affected even Kotzebue,²⁵ also stirred Potocki to competitiveness (because there can be no question of simple imitation), then we would get at least a hypothetical explanation of why the count abandoned the cognitive minimalism of the *Principles of Chronology*, revised his views on the subject of Typhon, and even returned to the noncanonical part of Manetho's system, according to which the events described by Velasquez are dated, but delving beyond anti-Typhonic times he de facto deepened his argument with de Maistre along with the biblical tradition defended by him in its integral form instead of turning once again to the Turdulians, whose distant lineage barely suggested some events before the flood, making it possible to avoid the childish speculation contained in the Geometer's lecture.

The resolution of the basic issue of whether or not Potocki's pride, wounded by de Maistre's opinion of the *Principles of Chronology*, underlies all of this must remain in the sphere of conjecture, particularly since we are entering here onto the shifting sands of psychology. Does this senseless and chaotic vision of prehistory – one might say pastiche if there were any evidence for it whatsoever – serve as some kind of retaliation against his friend to the same degree as the later Day XXXVII is a declaration of reconciliation? Yet there is no doubt that, from the theological point of view, Elohim, who is sponsoring the Geometer's exegesis, is an empty word because at the time Potocki, as he admitted to de Maistre in a letter, viewed godliness as a wild, irrational abyss, while the providential depths in whose name he wants to become reconciled with the Savoyard are clearly personified only in the Turdulan Jahh or, more specifically, the messianic Lurianic call to fix the world contained in the nonvocalized form of this name – that is, the trigram JHH. For however much the sefirc coding of the whole *Manuscript* and of several key elements

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ A. Kotzebue, *Preussens ältere Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Riga: Carl Johann Gottfried Hartmann, 1808), 237–252.

connected with Day XXX was removed without a word, the repudiation of the Turdulians and Jahh takes place on the pages of the 1810 version very directly. It does so even more emphatically in the Geometer's lecture than in the Great Sheik's story, since in Velasquez's opinion Europe did not even exist before the flood as a place in which the Iberian aboriginals could venerate God under the name of Jahh, a name that served, according to Masud Gomelez, the priestly family of Stadrannahh during Carthaginian-Roman times as a guarantee of their status and exclusive access to underground wealth. Moreover, the Geometer describes the very name Jahweh – which was the biblical analogue to the Turdulan Jahh and was, according to the book of Genesis, known to mankind from the times of Adam's grandson Enos (Gen. 4:26) – with the appellation of a proud abstraction, which, let us admit, makes sense only on the grounds of the Kabbalistic metaphysics of the Tikkun, where the unvocalized *yod*, *he*, *vav*, and *he*, along with the sign preceding the *yod* that does not exist in Latin script, corresponds to the divine *parcifum* and their associated *sefirot*, who are accompanied by the whole system of equivalencies described by Knorr von Rosenroth that encompass even Moses's ten commandments, delineating for Lurianic theosophists the road to spiritual unity with the divinity (*devekut*).

The matter does not end here, however. For after all, this overpowering dislike of any kind of metaphysics evident in the naturalistic exegesis of the book of Genesis – although undoubtedly well integrated with the Lockeanism of the Geometer's conclusions about the nature of the mind and the purely biological, materialistic nature of the phenomenon of life that form the prolegomenon of existence itself – completely fails to dovetail with the declarations that Velasquez suddenly makes instead of continuing the lecture: that in his mathematical investigations he is seeking help from church theologians and their doctrinal reflections on the coexistence of the Holy Trinity. Let us note, moreover, that the enigmatic Elohim about whom he had been speaking rather noncommittally, since he actually needed Him

only in the role of “God in the gaps” in order to fill the qualitative hole between animals and humans in the area of the ability to think abstractly, a hole that is after all not entirely capable of being explained by the simple quantitative increase in their mental combinations, also does not come out very convincingly in the role of divine Providence acting with “seemingly human means.” So also the saving appearance of Christianity in the world of ancient, enlightened pagans who were cultivating a naturalistic, polytheistic algorithm instead of the aggressive, sectarian abstractionism of the Adamites (for this is precisely the direction in which the conclusions of the fictional *illustrado* are headed), seems, speaking most circumspectly, not particularly comprehensible. For it seems ironic that today’s Potockology faults precisely Chojecki’s so-called translation for being a mindless, mechanical compilation of incompatible parts. The 1810 version is not a mindless compilation to be sure, but it can certainly not claim to be a finished work. On the contrary, it fulfills all the criteria of a work in progress. Moreover, it does not reflect with the precision of Chojecki’s so-called translation the worldview changes of the last period of Potocki’s life. The very letter that de Maistre wrote a year before the suicidal death of the count, four years after the publication of the *Principles of Chronology*, indicate that the count not only triumphantly proclaimed that their positions had become closer but did something that the Savoyard deemed a turn toward theosophy. Only when this circumstance is taken into account can one comprehend why Elohimism disappears from the pages of the *Manuscript* and why Chojecki’s so-called translation is unequivocally Jahhistic. For it is not only the Lockean deliberations on the mind that undergo significant abridgement on Day XXXVII compared to the 1810 version and instead of the logical conclusion to which they appear to be inevitably headed are provided with the unexpected caveat that if they are mistakenly understood they may turn out to be a “dangerous weapon wounding those who wield it,” which makes it possible to orient rather clearly the evolution of the Geometer’s views but does

not yet need to testify to its sincerity, just as – let us note – the equally characteristic change of the very sound of the act of capitulation vis à vis Christianity from *je n'ai qu'à me soumettre* to *me soumets donc de cœur et d'âme* (this latter purportedly coming from 1804) does not yet need to testify to it. The Atlantans are also discarded, and no one in the story continues to question the Strabonian pedigree of the Trudulian mountain dwellers. But does this indicate a definitive overcoming of Typhonism? Did, in other words, the count complete a circle? Return to the views expressed in the *Primary History*?

Right before his death, Potocki indeed was printing a new, revised version of the *Principles of Chronology*, the first part of which he sent to de Maistre for evaluation. The Savoyard preferred not to look into it. After all, he had previously been grievously disappointed. He was counting on only having to talk Potocki into a more decisive stand on the side of the Bible than had been the case in the *Primary History*, whereas it turned out that he had to deal with godlessness, and, as a result of excessively delicate reminders, also with the lengthy silence of the addressee. However, it is the second part of the new edition of the *Principles* that is vital for the question of Typhonism. Even a cursory reading indicates that the count tried to take into account at least his friend's formal postulates, evident without irritation in the Geometer's exegetical lecture. He did not give in completely to the Savoyard in substance, which the naturalist explains in a sense to the theologist on Day XXXVII. In order to be able to say more, one would have to get access to the complete copy of this second part. It is difficult, however, to find it in a library, it is not in the most important private collection of the count's memorabilia, and the only copy that could be found stops suddenly on page 62 of Book VI – that is, precisely where the conclusion about Typhon and anti-Typhonic times should begin.²⁶ But perhaps it

²⁶ Kotzebue, *Principes de chronologie pour les quatorze siècles, qui ont précédé la première Olympiade vulgaire* (Krzemieniec, 1815), bk. 6, *De 2000 avant J. C. à 1800*, 55–62; copy from BN 11.15172 from the collection of the former Biblioteka Ordynacji Krasińskich. The text stops at

is possible that this is no longer significant for the *Manuscript* because the count realized after many attempts that his story is too strongly fused with Kabbalistic symbolism to exist without it, so it is not worth making the shape of the fictional “sacred history” dependent on the results of his own scholarly research forming a “secular history” here, which appears to be supported by the fact that a still inadequately studied new version of the *Principles of Chronology* at least in terms of methodology forms a development of the Geometer’s abandoned lecture, deviating from the ascetic minimalism that characterizes its original version. But speaking completely candidly, at the end of his creative road, Potocki capitulated “body and soul” not even to de Maistre or to Christianity itself as to the inner logic of his own masterpiece . . . Except that, on the question of the birth of the *Manuscript*, too much still seems possible, even though everything that is most essential has purportedly already been explained.

the word *foulon*. But even what he writes about the Ogygian deluge indicates that one should not expect at least a repetition of the remarks about the deluges caused by the gathering of clouds that de Maistre had ridiculed.