

The Scientific *Wanderjahr* of Vilnius Astronomer Andrew Strzecki in 1777–1778

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Abstract: In 1777–1778, astronomer Andrew Strzecki (Polish *Andrzej Strzecki*, Lithuanian *Andrius Streckis*, 1737–1797) from Vilnius went on a scientific journey to Western Europe, visiting Vienna, Paris, London, and some other cities. This article aims to investigate and describe the motives, chronology, itinerary, and outcomes of this journey, and to evaluate the importance of this event for the science history of Vilnius and Europe. The research is based on an analysis of original correspondence, with some of the letters mentioned in print for the first time. The narrative method was applied to create a coherent storyline from the incomplete data found in various manuscripts and other sources. The research sheds light on previously obscure details of Early Modern European scientific communication, among them, the connections between astronomers of Vilnius and Vienna. The article also mentions the circumstances of the events, which were essential in the history of Vilnius University: the election of Marcin Poczobut Odlianicki (Lithuanian *Martynas Odlianickis Počobutas*, 1726–1810) as a member correspondent of the Paris Academy of Sciences and international recognition of the constellation he introduced, *Taurus Poniatovii*. The article confirms that the social and scientific ties of astronomers in Vilnius were much broader than what is usually described and included their close personal relationships with some of the first-rated scholars of the era, such as Rugerius Boskovich, Nevil Maskelyne, and Benjamin Franklin.

Keywords: *Andrius Streckis (Andrzej Strzecki), British Royal Society, Greenwich Observatory, History of astronomy, international science communication, L'Académie des Sciences, solar eclipses, Vilnius University Observatory*

Introduction

The origins and composition of the research

The article is based on the paper presented by the author at the conference of the Society of Lithuanian Science Historians and Philosophers.¹ It offers a summary of the information gained by the author while performing her job at the Manuscript Division of Vilnius University Library (*Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka*, hereafter VUB), involving editing older descriptions and creating new ones for the epistolary documents from the final decades of the 18th century. This work is a necessary step in preparing these manuscripts for digitising. A significant number of the letters mentioned here are already available online as part of the library's *Digital Collections* portal (VUB, n.d.).

Astronomer Andrew Strzecki from Vilnius was assigned to go on a scientific journey and accomplish several tasks given by the Commission of National Education (hereafter CNE) of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (hereafter PLC). Some of the international correspondence preserved in the VUB is more or less related to this event. First, let us look at what has already been written and published on the topic and then at what new findings can be added after archival research. I am very grateful to Professor Romualdas Šviedrys, who read the draft and gave valuable advice, which helped me improve the original text.

Summarising what is known

The Astronomical Observatory in Vilnius: preparing the map

There are documents testifying that some professional astronomical observations were carried out on the territory of Lithuania at least as early as in the 15th century (Sūdžius, 1994, p. 7). The measurements of geographical coordinates, supported by astronomical observations, were needed for cartographic purposes and were implied, for example, when creating a map of the realm, published in 1613 (Buczek, 1988, p. 60). The earliest known manuscript of astronomy lectures in Vilnius Academy² was written in 1629 by Andrzej Milewski (1591–1656). In

¹ The virtual conference SCIENTIA ET HISTORIA of the society (Lith. *Lietuvos mokslo istorikų ir filosofų bendrija*) took place on 25–26 March 2021 (see *Lietuvos mokslo...*, 2021).

² This was the official name of the Vilnius University from its founding until 1780. In the years 1780–1803 it was called the Principal School of Vilnius, in 1803–1832 the Vilnius Imperial University, after which it was closed in the aftermath of the Polish-Lithuanian uprising against the Russian Empire.

1639, a student of Vilnius Academy, Albert Dyblinski, published his *Centuria astronomica* (Dyblinski, 1639): a current astronomical knowledge presented in a hundred questions and answers, which were based on theoretical studies and on his own observations (Tshenakal, 1970, p. 9).

A milestone in the evolvement of astronomy as a professional discipline was the founding and building of the Vilnius Observatory, which started in 1753. The construction of the rooms dedicated to astronomical observations and providing the required instruments began with the works of Tomas Žebrauskas (Polish *Tomasz Żebrowski*, 1714–1758). Vilnius Academy, at that time a Jesuit university, managed to acquire some valuable instruments as donations from the nobles and the King. The Oginski family contributed the most in support of constructing and equipping the Observatory. Countess Elisabeth from the Oginski family, married to Puzyna (?–1767), was recognised as the important patron of the observatory (Balaišytė, 2015, p. 265; Kucharzewski, 1872, p. 166).

By the mid-eighteenth century it was obvious that a modern state map could not be created without implementing new technologies for measuring precise latitudes and longitudes of multiple points on land. In France, such an enterprise started already in 1643 by the commission of Cardinal Richelieu and was aided by the dynasty of astronomers Jean Dominique (1625–1712), Jacques (1677–1756) and César-François (1714–84) Cassinis. This work was finished by 1750 (Burke, 2000, p. 134). In 1766, the Polish king Stanislas August Poniatowski asked astronomers Marcin Poczobut in Vilnius and Alexander Rostan in Warsaw to start working on a similar project. In 1767, Poczobut and his assistants had already measured twenty places in the PLC (Eitmanavičienė & Vaitiekūnas, 1970, p. 101). After more works done by Poczobut and his assistants Andrew Strzecki, Pierre François Gattey³ and Francis Narvoysz,⁴ in 1770, the royal cartographer Karol Herman de Perthées (1740–1815) could rely on new latitude measurements of 26 places in Lithuania and Courland. Unfortunately, the first Partition in 1772 stopped further works (Buczek, 1966, p. 100).

In 1768, Poczobut went on a journey through many European countries, commissioning the much-needed sophisticated astronomical instruments. During this travel, he met many scientists, artisans, and merchants who would help organize the transportation of the scientific instruments to Vilnius. These

³ Pol. Piotr Franciszek Gattey (1742–1774).

⁴ Pol. Franciszek Ksawery Narwojsz, Lith. Pranciškus Norvaiša (1742–1819).

contacts were later kept intact through active correspondence.⁵ The second grand voyage for the benefit of the Vilnius Observatory took place in 1777–1778, when one of the students of Poczobut and his colleague Strzecki was sent to study the works of astronomers, learn about map-making and, most importantly, acquire the best possible instruments suitable for measuring latitudes and longitudes (Buczek, 1966, p. 101).

This journey of Strzecki, though important for the state, was also profitable for the Vilnius Academy, as it would increase Strzecki's qualification and attest to the importance of scientific research in Vilnius. The Jesuit Order, which traditionally supervised most of the schools in PLC (Račkauskas, 1968), was disbanded with a papal bull at different times in different countries; in Vilnius it took place on 12 November 1773. After the Order was abolished, some of the colleges and several other Jesuit observatories in Polish and Lithuanian territories were lost.⁶ The estates which used to belong to the Order were taken by the Commission of National Education (CNE). There was even a period of uncertainty regarding what to do with the Vilnius University. But as the Vilnius Observatory was founded by the benefactors, and its astronomers were already working on preparing for the state map, the observatory and the whole academy were safe from cancellation.

CNE, which took charge of the education process in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, wanted to modernise education and make it more secular. Therefore, it was decided to invite some foreign professors and buy the equipment needed for the studies. For the latter purpose, from Vilnius, the physician Nicolas Regnier (1723–1800) was sent to Paris⁷ and the astronomer Andrew Strzecki to London (AMV, 2009, p. 415). The CNE paid the costs of these voyages. It seems that the nobleman and politician Józef Wybicki (1747–1822) actively supported the idea of Strzecki's voyage. When in 1777 he was appointed to evaluate the condition of the Vilnius Academy, he was fond of its Observatory (Kamińska, 2017, p. 99) and befriended Poczobut, who helped him reveal some financial corruption schemes. There is a letter dated to 15 September 1777 from Wybicki to Poczobut, in which he recommends Strzecki

⁵ See, e.g., letters from the Koenigsberg merchants Joseph Green (1727–1786), Robert Motherby (1736–1801) and [Franz] Friedrich Saturgus (1728–1810), received in the time span of 1768–1788, in VUB, F2-DC55, and letters from the London scientific instrument' maker Robert Dollond (1730–1820) in the collection VUB, F2-DC53.

⁶ Poznań Observatory was closed in 1773, and Lviv Observatory, after the First Partition in 1772, belonged to the Austrian Empire.

⁷ According to Jan Chevalier, Regnier left for Paris on 9 December 1776 (VUB, F16-5_111; Chevalier, 1776).

to navigate from Gdansk to Hamburg and then go to Groningen or Amsterdam (VUB, F2-DC49_26-1). On 17 November 1777, Poczobut wrote to Wybicki, expressing gratitude for the money assigned for the journey (Skalkowski & Lewak, 1978, p. 196).

The idea of sending the Vilnius astronomer to Western Europe was discussed in the CNE session in Warsaw on 14 November 1777. It was decided that Strzecki would transport to Paris and London a volume of astronomical observations, printed in Vilnius in 1777, and purchase instruments needed to prepare the modern state map. CNE decided to give 1500 *złoty* for the instruments and provide 100 *złoty* for Strzecki's travel expenses, also leaving him his regular salary for the duration of the journey (Mitera-Dobrowolska, 1973, pp. 89–90).

As mentioned, the primary purpose of this journey was to create a modern state map, as, for example, Michał Pelka Poliński (1784–1848) mentioned in his notes on Strzecki's biography (LMAVB, f. 151, b. 751). The same goal was explained in Poczobut's letter to the head of CNE, Vilnius bishop Ignacy Jakób Massalski (1726–1794). Poczobut wrote him that the map could be accomplished only by using the newest technologies (LMAVB, f. 151, b. 634). However, the letters exchanged between Strzecki, Poczobut, members of CNE, and members of the Paris Academy of Sciences (hereafter PAS) let us believe that there were other goals set for Strzecki.

Biographical data about Andrew Strzecki

According to Strzecki's biographer Janina Kamińska, he may have been born in a noble family, on 27 or 29 November 1737. Strzecki studied in a college in Słuck, joined the Jesuit Order on 3 August 1753, and from 1755 until 1762 studied philosophy and mathematics at the Vilnius Academy (Kamińska, 2007, p. 594). In 1762–1969, he taught at Dyneburg (present-day Daugavpils, Latvia) college. Next, in 1763–1765, he studied poetics at the Kražiai College. In 1765–1769, he studied theology at the Vilnius Academy; around that time, he also became one of the students and assistants of the royal astronomer Marcin Poczobut (1728–1810). Strzecki started to work at the observatory and assist his professor in measuring the latitudes of various places. In June 1769, in Reval (present-day Tallinn, Estonia), he helped Poczobut to observe the transit of Venus across the Sun disc.⁸ According to some astronomy historians, these observations were not successful because of the weather conditions (Matulaitytė, 2004, p. 62;

⁸ This observations are mentioned in the city documentation (TLA.230.1.Ab336, p. 170).

Kucharzewski, 1872, p. 166). Even if the weather were nice, the observers could have been confused by the unexpected optical effect, now known as the “black drop” (Woolf, 1981, p. 148). In 1769, this optical effect prevented many astronomers from measuring the exact moments when the shadow of Venus entered and left the visible Sun disc.

In 1770, Strzecki got a master’s degree in liberal arts; in 1773, a doctoral degree in canonical law; and in 1774, received an honorary status of the royal astronomer. Later, Strzecki usually would be left in charge of the Vilnius Observatory, when Poczobut had to go to Warsaw or elsewhere. Strzecki became a priest in 1768. In 1780, the Bishop of Vilnius made Strzecki the pastor of St. John’s Church (church of the Vilnius Academy). In 1781, Strzecki became dean of the Faculty of Physics. He was appointed to teach astronomy theory in 1781–1796, twice a week during the first year, and thrice a week later (*AMV*, 2009, p. 421).⁹ In 1782, in recognition of his accomplishments, he was given the royal medal *Merentibus*, and in 1783, became Canon of Inflanty (present-day Latvia; Kamińska, 2007, p. 595). Strzecki died in Vilnius on 5 February 1797. His necrologies appeared also in France, for example, in *Magasin encyclopédique, ou Journal des sciences, des lettres et des arts*, issue of 25 brumaire (15 November) 1797 (*Magasin encyclopédique...*, 1797, p. 459). The astronomical observations of Strzecki and his mentor Poczobut were published by Vienna astronomer Maximilian Hell (Rudolf Maximilian Höll, 1720–1792) (Hell, 1776).

According to some of his contemporaries, Strzecki was a kind, hard-working, witty man. In his letters, Georg Adam Forster (1754–1794) mentioned him as a friend he had first met in London (Forster, 1988, p. 15). They could have met while Strzecki was staying in London in the spring and summer of 1778.¹⁰ Forster also mentioned in passing some ungrateful Vilnius woman Przesiecka, who depended solely on Strzecki’s money, and hastily spent it gambling (Forster, 1988, p. 110). Less sympathetic in his memoirs, Professor Bonifacy Jundzill from Vilnius wrote that Strzecki never actually gave lectures, was a keen wine drinker and was among the most active critics of the newly prepared modern elementary books in Polish language (as quoted in Bieliński, 1900, p. 769). Kamińska mentions that a large amount of money, donated by a Vilnius university professor Jozef Sartorius for the university hospital and entrusted to Strzecki, mysteriously disappeared (Kamińska, 2007, p. 595). Nevertheless, at

⁹ A summary of his lectures is given in Bieliński (1900, p. 228).

¹⁰ For example at a dinner, when Charles Woide invited, among others, Strzecki, Narvoysk and the Forsters, the son and the father (VUB RS, F17-3k).

least Jundzill's accusations of Strzecki as a lazy teacher have been denied by Stasė Matulaitytė, who researched the surviving prospects of his lectures (Piročkinas, 1984, p. 141).

The surviving family correspondence of Andrew Strzecki, mainly consisting of letters from his brother and sister-in-law, reveal that they resided in farmsteads near Vilnius: most letters were written in *Elniakumpis*, some of them in *Teresdvaris*. Some manuscripts suggest that Strzecki was interested in culinary arts.¹¹

Earlier publications on the topic

As Strzecki's mission was significant in many respects, it has been mentioned in the earlier publications, though usually in a somewhat sketchy way. Buczek (1980, 102) mentioned the instruments, acquired by Strzecki, and their importance for further cartography works. Matulaitytė (2004, p. 70) wrote that Strzecki visited Greenwich Observatory and met there Nevil Maskelyne (1732–1811), in France contacted Du Pont¹² and Lepaute Dagelet (1751–1788); that he acquired documentation of various astronomical observations, and bought instruments from Jesse Ramsden (1735–1800) and other artisans. Specially mentioned is Ramsden's grand mural quadrant, which was also ordered by Strzecki. Kamińska (2007) dedicated a large part of the biographical article about Strzecki to describe this journey. Milinkevičiūtė (2021, p. 40) admitted that Strzecki, together with reverend Remigian Kossakowski (1730–1780)¹³ had some influence on the election of Marcin Poczobut as a corresponding member of Paris Science Academy on 19 August 1778. Regina Jakubėnas (2021) provided more details on this event. Strzecki's mission was mentioned by Anita McConnell (2007, p. 86), who wrote about Jesse Ramsden and his customers, noting the extremely high price of the equipment, and by Dominique Triaire (2012), who provided essential documentation by publishing the texts of twelve letters exchanged between Poczobut and the French scientists, and thoroughly commented on them. The present article, on the one hand, continues Triaire's (2012) work. On the other hand, it gives a broader context of the events, because it includes a wider scope of related correspondence and the focus here is on Strzecki, not

¹¹ The third letter (LMAVB, f. 151, b. 650 and VUB, F16_13-3), mentioning a new kind of bread that he had learned to bake (VUB, F17-8b).

¹² Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours (1739–1817), a scientist and diplomat, who also temporarily worked in Warsaw for the Commission of National Education.

¹³ A former student and teacher in Vilnius Academy; after 1774 worked in Paris as the foreign correspondent of CNE.

on Poczobut. Some of these letters were mentioned by Matulaitytė (2004). Still, I was lucky to find some additional story fragments, such as Strzecki's close relations with Rugerius Boskovich (1711–1787), meeting Benjamin Franklin in Paris, the addresses and details of Strzecki's stay in London, as well as his contacts, during the journey, with astronomers Christian Meyer (1719–1783), Maximilian Hell (1720–1792), Jan Madarassy (János Madarassi, 1741–1814), and others. This extensively documented travel can be studied in many ways as an example of the scientist's voyage of study (or *Wanderjahr*) in the late 18th century.

What else could be found in the correspondence?

Peculiarities of communication and troubled spelling

The voyager must have used different languages on various occasions. Interestingly enough, in his letter, French astronomer Edme-Sébastien Jeaurat wrote down his recommendations to Strzecki, telling him whom to contact in Britain and in which language: Nevil Maskelyne in Latin, Jean Hyacinthe de Magellan (1722–1790) in Latin, French and English (VUB, F17-3c).¹⁴ The letters preserved in Vilnius show that, when corresponding with Viennese astronomers, Strzecki and Poczobut always used Latin. While staying in Britain, Strzecki tried to master the English language.¹⁵

Strzecki was also addressed in different ways. Most of the correspondence I worked with is in Polish and French, and some letters are in English or Latin. The pronunciation of the astronomer's name, which is difficult for non-native Polish speakers, must have caused trouble for some of his foreign colleagues. We can only guess about the mispronounced variants, but quite often it was also misspelt. The most exotic versions were perhaps these: *Monsieur l'abbé Kresqui, astronome polonaise* [Polish astronomer], as written in the letter by L'Abbe Tandu (LMAVB, f. 151, b. 883, p. 8), or *Sricki* in the invitation, received from Turgot (VUB, F2-DC54_32).¹⁶ Sometimes the surname could be simply avoided by using a descriptive strategy, as on a dinner invitation from Benjamin Franklin, where two gentlemen were mentioned, *l'abbé de Kossakowski* (a surname, much

¹⁴ This letter is mentioned in McConnell (2007, p. 85).

¹⁵ As it is mentioned in Franciszek Bukaty's letters (VUB, F17-4c; F2-DC130_4).

¹⁶ Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1727–1781), an economist and eminent statesman.

easier to pronounce) and *egalement Monsieur son compatriot*.¹⁷

This problem of spelling persists. According to the adaptation rules of foreign surnames to Lithuanian language, the astronomer's surname should most likely be transformed to *Stšecki* (rz [ž] altering to š [sh] due to the neighbouring voiceless consonant [t]). However, this version is seldom seen. The number of transcriptions of this surname in the catalogues of the Lithuanian libraries is stunning (Streckis, Stžecki, Ščeckis, Šeckis). In publications it also lacks consistency—Andriejus Steckis (Raila, 2010), Sricki (McConnell, 2007), and so on. When creating the VUB electronic catalogue entries, I chose the variant which has been traditionally used by historians of science in Lithuania (Vladimiras Zubovas, Arnoldas Piročkinas, Libertas Klimka, and others)—Streckis, with the Polish original in brackets, when possible.

Chronology and itinerary of the journey

On 25 September 1777, the ex-Jesuit scientist Jan Chevalier from Warsaw wrote a letter to Poczobut, approving his idea to arrange a voyage for Strzecki.¹⁸ In the same letter, Chevalier insisted that, prior to this journey, Strzecki should visit the Warsaw palace of the member of CNE and Vice-Chancellor of Lithuania Joachim Litawor Chreptowicz (1729–1812). As we mentioned before, Józef Wybicki recommended Strzecki to sail to Hamburg and from there go to Groningen or Amsterdam (a letter dated to 15 September)(VUB, F2-DC49_26-1).¹⁹ On October 10, Poczobut sent a letter to London, to Nevil Maskelyne, recommending his colleague Strzecki, who would be interested in seeing Harrison's chronometer.²⁰

On 13 October, Chevalier informed Poczobut that Strzecki was in Warsaw and had already met Bishop Massalski, and later Wybicki (VUB, F16-5_125). He wrote that Strzecki would continue his journey after CNE officially approved the decision to pay for his voyage (15 October 1777) (VUB, F16-5_126). On

¹⁷ Fr. *and also other Mister, his compatriot* (LMAVB, f. 151, b. 847). Though Strzecki here is not mentioned, it must have been him, as a few days earlier, on 4 September 1778, Franklin participated in a party held by Kossakowski and Strzecki, as was mentioned in letters by Kossakowski (VUB, F2-DC42_33), and in some other correspondence (*Founders Online*, n.d. [1988]).

¹⁸ Or Jean Chevalier de Beaulieu (1738–1780), a son of French emigrants in Poland (see his letter VUB, F16-5_124).

¹⁹ Strzecki would go by land via Vienna to meet some scientists and artisans there.

²⁰ A letter stored in the repository of the Cambridge University Library (1777). John Harrison (1693–1776) invented the marine chronometer, which solved the problem of calculating longitude while at sea.

October 27, Chevalier wrote that Strzecki was still in Warsaw because he had caught a cold (VUB, F16-5_127). The same date is on the copy of an unsigned letter from Warsaw, thanking Poczobut for the present brought by Strzecki: the published Vilnius astronomical observations of 1773. From the context it can be deduced that the original of this letter might have been written by King Stanislas August Poniatowski (VUB, F16-5_128).

The date 8 November 1777 is written on the draft of a project for Strzecki's journey, mentioning 27,000 *florins*, supposed to be given by CNE (VUB, F2-DC130_22-2). In his letter dated to 10 November, Chevalier announced to Poczobut that he had received Strzecki's letter, written from Kraków (VUB, F16-5_130). In an unsigned draft of a letter, written in Latin and addressed from Krakow to Göttingen, Strzecki (?) recommended students Sniadecki and Trzcinski, who would like to study in Göttingen, and also sent his greetings to professor Meyer (VUB, F17-8r).²¹

On 11 September, Rector of Kaunas College Ludwik Roszkowski, responding to Poczobut's request, agreed to contribute cash from the Kaunas College funds for Strzecki's journey (VUB, F2-DC110_1-1).

Maximilian Hell, in his letter to Poczobut on 12 November 1777, mentions meeting Strzecki in Vienna (VUB, F2-DC54_2-1). On the same day, Hell's colleague Jan Madarassy wrote down a list of things that Strzecki was asked to do. In Strasbourg he should visit the bookstore of Bauer and place an order for certain books, in London he should ask Maskelyne, Dollond and Sisson about the instruments, which were being made for Vienna, and acquire for the Austrian observatories some more books, among them Maskelyne's and Newton's works (VUB, F17-3b).²² British astronomer Nevil Maskelyne would mention scientific instruments and communication with Hell in his letter to Strzecki, written later, on 16 April 1778 (VUB, F17-3s).²³

Chevalier informed Poczobut about receiving Strzecki's letter from Vienna on 19 November. On 24 November, he wrote that perhaps Strzecki's next letter would be sent from Strasbourg (VUB, F16-5_131).

²¹ Jan Śniadecki (1756–1830) and Andrzej Trzcinski (1749–1823) both started their studies in Göttingen in 1778. As the famous mathematician and cartographer Tobias Meyer (1723–1762), who worked in Göttingen since 1751, died in 1762, greetings perhaps were sent to his son Johann Tobias Meyer (1752–1830), who worked as astronomer and lecturer in Göttingen University, since graduating in 1773.

²² Most likely, the bookstore of Johann Gottfried Bauer (1724–1781) and Johann Georg Treuttel (1744–1826), which was active in years 1772–1781 (*Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*, n.d.). Jeremiah Sisson (1720–1783) produced scientific instruments in London.

²³ This letter is mentioned in McConnell (2007, p. 86).

On 16 December 1777, mathematician Francis Narvoys, a colleague of Strzecki who had been studying in Western Europe since 1775, wrote to Strzecki from London, greeting him upon his arrival in Paris (VUB, F17-4h_1). Strzecki wrote at least three drafts of letters to Poczobut from Paris that December (VUB, F17-8a; VUB, F17-8c; and LMAVB, f. 151, b. 652). It is possible that these letters were not actually sent, as only on 29 December, Chevalier (from Warsaw) wrote to Poczobut that Strzecki arrived in Paris. Chevalier was puzzled by the fact that Strzecki ordered himself a new cassock in Paris, although he had had a new one made in Warsaw (VUB, F16-5_134).²⁴

On 17 December 1777, Strzecki got a note from Du Pont (VUB, F17-8c). On 31 December, editor and intellectual Pahin de Champlain de la Blancherie (1752–1811) sent to Poczobut a printed proposal to collaborate (VUB, F2-DC53_27). On 2 January 1778, Strzecki received invitations for dinner from Du Pont and Turgot (VUB, F17-3i). On 14 January, Chevalier wrote to Poczobut (from Warsaw) that he still had no letters from Strzecki, but that Bishop Massalski received a letter from Remigian Kossakowski, announcing that Strzecki had reached Paris and already met several scientists (VUB, F16-5–116). On 26 January, Chevalier announced to Poczobut that he received the first Paris letter from Strzecki (VUB, F16-5_136).

Meanwhile, Strzecki was preparing to travel to Britain: he received several recommendation letters. On 24 December, from G. Laurent (VUB, F17-4f), another one, without a date, from Rugerius Boskovich, who asked Lord Shelbourn (1737–1805) to introduce Strzecki to the “famous Presley” [could it be misspelt Joseph Priestley (1733–1804)?] (VUB, F2-DC53–8). On 22 January, Edme-Sébastien Jeaurat (1725–1803), in his observatory, wrote a letter recommending Strzecki to Nevil Maskelyne and Jean-Hyacinthe de Magellan (adding also a recommendation in which languages one should address those two) (VUB, F17-3c). That same day, Alexis Rochon (1741–1817) wrote an invitation for Strzecki (VUB, F2-DC130_21). On 18 January 1778, professor of the German language at Paris military school, Hamman wrote Strzecki that he received some ordinances from King of Poland, addressed to the astronomer (VUB, F2-DC53_24). More details of Strzecki’s stay in Paris in 1777 and later in July 1778 can be found in the letters from Remigian Kossakowski to Poczobut, from Paris to Vilnius.²⁵

²⁴ The Paris-based companion of Strzecki, Kossakowski explained in his letter that they needed to buy new clothes because clothes made in Warsaw had been torn during the journey (VUB, F2-DC42_33-3).

²⁵ The letters archived in collections VUB RS, F2-DC42_33 and VUB RS, F16-8.

On January 19, Saint Maurice de Saint-Leu (who also signed his letters as an officer of the Polish army) wrote to Poczobut that Strzecki told him about the idea of affiliating Vilnius Observatory with the Paris Academy of Sciences (PAS). On February 16, in Warsaw, CNE (Commission of National Education) asked Massalski, bishop of Vilnius, to write a letter in which he should ask for the union between the PAS and the Observatory of the Vilnius Academy. This letter should be sent to Strzecki, obliging him to use it only after making sure that such procedure was possible (Mitera-Dobrowolska, 1973, p. 99; mentioned also in VUB RS, F17-3d). On 23 February, Chevalier wrote to Poczobut that in a session of CNE, Bishop Massalski presented an [unnamed] idea of Poczobut (VUB, F16-5_140). On 16 March, Chevalier communicated to Poczobut that Massalski and Chreptowicz each would write a letter on the topic of affiliation, addressed to the PAS (VUB, F16-5_143). On 18 March, however, Chevalier wrote to Poczobut, that Massalski left for Vilnius without composing such a letter (VUB, F16-5_144). On 23 March, Chevalier informed Poczobut that Chreptowicz wrote a letter to Du Pont, but the King would not write anything (VUB, F16-5_145).

[February?] 22, 1778 is the deduced date of Strzecki's note, describing his itinerary via Boulogne to the coast and crossing of the Channel from Calais to Dover. While waiting for the weather to calm down and become safe for navigation, he visited a local school, run by English [Benedictine] nuns, and bought a wooden box made by the pupils. The bill for perhaps the same one wooden box, bought by Strzecki, has also survived (VUB, F2-DC130_23-8; F2-DC130_8).

In England, Strzecki would be supported and accompanied by his colleague Francis Narvoysz and a diplomat, the ambassador of PLC in London, Francis Bukaty (Polish Franciszek Bukaty, Lithuanian Pranciškus Bukota, 1747–1797).²⁶ On 24 March, Strzecki had been invited to dinner with Charles Woide (German Karl Gottfried Woide, 1725–1790).²⁷ The letter of Jérôme de Lalande²⁸ to Strzecki (from April 24) was addressed to the Oxford Street in London (VUB, F5-A41_7979-1), the house of astronomer Anthony Shepherd (1721–1796): perhaps that was where Strzecki stayed in London, at least temporarily. Bukaty's letter to Strzecki on 29 July 1778 was addressed "to Mr Robinson' Greenwich Hill," where Strzecki also must have lived for some time. In this letter, Francis

²⁶ For more about this person, see Limanowska (1972, pp. 70–78).

²⁷ For more about this person, see Limanowska (1972, p. 247).

²⁸ Joseph Jérôme Le Français de Lalande (1732–1807).

Bukaty wrote to Strzecki that “eight impressions of Abbot Poczobut done in white&blue” [?] were already made in manufacture of Wedgewood and Bentley (VUB, F2-DC130_4). On 20 July, an invitation for Strzecki from Mr Brown was addressed to Bukaty’s house “at Clifford Sheck. 10, New Bond Street” (VUB, F2-DC53_10).

Strzecki’s list *Memoria*... contains things which he was supposed to remember to do. Among those were: to write letters to astronomer Alexander Aubert (1730–1805), to Jan Ingenhousz (1730–1799), and Anton Pilgram (1730–1793), to speak with l’Abbé Fontana about barometers, with Rochon about optics, with Dobanton about books on natural history (VUB, F2-DC130_23-1). Dobanton was perhaps a misspelt name of Louis Jean-Marie D’Aubenton (1716–1800), a naturalist and a member of multiple scientific societies. Fontana perhaps referred to the Italian physicist and naturalist Felice Fontana (1730–1805), who stayed in France and Britain at that time and was known as the creator of barometers. Strzecki indeed met Fontana, because in another letter he described the shapes of barometers he saw at Fontana’s, sadly, not mentioning where it happened (VUB, F2-DC130_23-3).

On his way back to Vilnius, Strzecki himself would write that, in Britain, he visited Cambridge and twice Oxford, had been to Joseph Banks’ (1743–1820) natural history museum, and would bring some seeds from there to Vilnius (VUB, F2-DC130_23-7). In the same letter (possibly addressed to the bishop of Plock Michal Jerzy Poniatowski, 1736–1794), Strzecki wrote that he left Paris on 19 September 1778, and on his way back visited Brussels, Maastricht, and Cologne, and on 30 September would go to Berlin, heading from there to see the University of Göttingen. In this letter, he mentioned that he had communicated with artisans Jesse Ramsden, Larcum Kendall (1714–1790), scientists Jean Condorcet (1743–1794), Charles Messier (1730–1817), Dionis de Séjour (1734–1794), Jean Cassini (1748–1845), Guillaume Le Monnier (1721–1797), Louis Jean-Marie D’Aubenton (1716–1800), Jean-Paul de Fouchy (1707–1788), Rugerius Boskovich, and Bishop Paul Albert de Luynes (1703–1788).

In the March 1778 issue of *Le Journal des Sçavants* (1778, pp. 184–185), there is an article mentioning Strzecki, who came to France and Britain to buy better instruments for the Vilnius Observatory, the honorary medal Poczobut received from the Polish King, and also Poczobut’s published works.²⁹ On 27 March

²⁹ Titled *Cahiers des Observations astronomiques faites à l’Observatoire royal de Vilna en 1773*, 158 p. in-folio, *Le Journal des sçavants*, 1778.

1778, PAS wrote to Bishop of Vilnius Massalski, mentioning Strzecki.³⁰

On the 1 of April, Chevalier received a letter from Paris, in which Strzecki asked for extra money (VUB, F16-5_146). On April 27, Chevalier sent 400 *złoty* from his own money to support Strzecki (VUB, F16-5_149).

On 16 April, Maskelyne wrote a letter to Strzecki, mentioning the needed scientific instruments and their prices (VUB, F17-3s). On April 23, London watchmaker John Arnold (1735–1799) wrote to Strzecki, mentioning the watch made for him (VUB, F2-DC130_1). In a letter to Poczobut, dated to 29 April 1778, the Viennese astronomer Madarassy again mentioned Strzecki's visit to Vienna and Britain (VUB, F2-DC54_12).

On 8 April 1778, Kossakowski from Paris informed Strzecki (who was in London) that he found a young scientist ready to work in the Vilnius Observatory. He wrote about other candidates in his following letters, mentioning among them also Jean Baptiste Louis Clouét (1729–1790?), who translated the works of Boskovich into French, and adding that Boskovich himself would be happy to work in Vilnius, were he not engaged to work in Paris (VUB, F17-5_1). On 30 April, Kossakowski wrote to Strzecki again, expressing irritation that the recipient was still in London, and left him alone to take care of elections in PAS (LMAVB, f. 151, b. 883, p. 5).

On May 5, Joseph Lepaute Dagelet, apprentice of de Lalande, wrote a note to Strzecki, asking for the possibility to meet and present him his charts (VUB, F17-3e). On 14 June, Chevalier communicated to Vilnius that Strzecki was still in London, waiting for a letter from Poczobut (VUB, F16-5_155). On June 24, Strzecki was in Oxford, taking part in the observation of the total solar eclipse with the other astronomers.

On 25 June 1779 [perhaps a mistake, should be 1778], Chevalier wrote to Poczobut that Massalski left for Vilnius without writing the needed letter (VUB, F16-5_171). In a letter written in Latin, dated to 15 August 1777 [perhaps a mistake, should be 1778?], Reinhold Forster (the father) mentioned Strzecki as his good friend (VUB, F17-4b).

On 13 August, in his letter to Poczobut, Kossakowski wrote that on that day the praise for Poczobut written by Hell was read aloud in the session of PAS (VUB, F2-DC42_33-16). On 17 August 1778, Anthony Moring [the signature is not clear] wrote a letter to Poczobut, in which he lamented that their common friend

³⁰ For a copy of the said document, see VUB, F16-12f.

[Strzecki] had to leave London in a hurry, and that while being in London, he hardly had time to communicate with friends, being too busy with the astronomical observations.

On 19 August, the PAS session was held, in which Poczobut was elected a corresponding member of this Academy. On 28 August, Lalande wrote to Poczobut, thanking him for the copy of Vilnius observations of 1773 that he received, and promising to publish Poczobut's observations of comets. Lalande added that this letter would be brought by Strzecki, who was preparing to return to Vilnius (VUB, F2-DC54_6-2). On [29] August, Kossakowski wrote to Poczobut about the physical experiment which Strzecki performed in the palace of the PAS, and some marks on the ceiling of the hall left after it (VUB, F2-DC42_33-28). Kamińska (2007, p. 595) claims that Strzecki must have demonstrated the lightning rod invented by Franklin; perhaps this information is based on the note by Kucharzewski (1872, p. 168). In the comments to the online resource *Founders Online*, the demonstration of a “British machine for experimenting with inflammable air” is mentioned.³¹ The use of a pistol of some kind is also mentioned in another letter (from Ludwik Roszkowski, VUB, F2-DC110_1-12). On 9 September the festive “Polish party” must have happened in Paris, arranged by Kossakowski and Strzecki for several French academics and Benjamin Franklin with his son, to mark the election of Marcin Poczobut as the member correspondent of PAS.³²

On 12 September, Charles Messier (1730–1817) wrote to Strzecki that he found an artisan who could make barometers (VUB, F2-DC54_13). On 16 September, Mathieu Tillet (1714–1791) wrote a note to Strzecki, offering his help. In a letter dated to September 17, Hermin from Versailles wrote to Strzecki that his passport was ready and wished him a good journey. On 19 September, Strzecki wrote, already from Cologne, an extended account on his journey, which was mentioned above (see VUB, F2-DC130_23-7).

On October 12, Remigian Kossakowski from Paris informed Poczobut that Strzecki could not go straight to Göttingen, as was expected, but went via Mainz and Frankfurt to Mannheim, where he would meet the astronomer Christian Meyer (VUB, F2-DC42_33-21). October 10 is the date on the bill that Strzecki received in Berlin from David von Splitgerber (1741–1826) (VUB, F17-9). On October 23, Jean Bernoulli (1744–1807) from Berlin wrote a letter to Poczobut,

³¹ Le Roy's (1988 [1778]) letter to Franklin.

³² The event is mentioned in the comments to the online edition of B. Franklin's correspondence (*Founders Online*, n.d.).

thanking him for the letter brought to him by Strzecki (LMAVB, f. 7, 1832, pp. 1–3, as given by Triaire, 2012, p. xiv).

In the 19 October letter, Chevalier (from Warsaw) asked Poczobut if he knew anything about Strzecki's whereabouts (VUB, F16-5_159). On 28 October, Chevalier communicated to Poczobut that Strzecki wrote to bishop of Plock Michał Poniatowski from Cologne, and to Chreptowicz from Mannheim (VUB, F16-5_160). On 4 December, Strzecki wrote to Poczobut from Warsaw (he was staying at Chreptowicz's palace again). In his letter to Strzecki without a precise date, professor Christof Pfeiderer from Warsaw mentioned books that Strzecki had brought him from Berlin (which means that Strzecki had acquired some more books in Berlin). In a December 1778 letter, Chevalier said that CNE was about to listen to Strzecki's account of his journey and the expenses he had spent. As Strzecki himself mentioned, preparation for this account was a challenging task because, somehow, all the documentation he had been sending to Warsaw had disappeared, "vanished into thin air" (VUB, F17-8b).³³ Perhaps that was the reason why, as Chevalier wrote to Poczobut on December 7, their common friend looked exhausted and depressed, and was even prepared to pay for the instruments with his own money. In the same letter, he mentioned that Anthony Kossakowski, brother of Remigian, a secretary and a courtier to Stanisław August, had received the Order of St. Stanisław (VUB, F16-5_165). It may have been related to the successful Paris mission. In a letter dated to December 12, Chevalier admitted it was exceptional luck that CNE agreed to reimburse all the extra expenses Strzecki made during the voyage (VUB, F16-5_166). On December 24, Chevalier wrote that Strzecki had left Warsaw for Vilnius the previous week (VUB, F16-167).

Strzecki gave an account of his journey in the session of the CNE on 27 November 1778 (Mitera-Dobrowolska, 1973, p. 105), mentioning especially the longitude clock (*zegar longitudinum*) by Harryson. But only on the 19th of October 1779, referring to the order of Bishop Michał Jerzy Poniatowski from 9 September 1779, CNE decided to pay to Strzecki 7,906 *złoty* to cover the full price of the British instruments (Mitera-Dobrowolska, 1973, p. 116).

Consequences of Strzecki's journey and his message about the *Taurus Poniatovii* constellation³⁴ continued even after he successfully reached home. In Paris, on 3

³³ The idiom literally translated as "as if licked away by a cow."

³⁴ The constellation, introduced by Poczobut in 1773, was dedicated to the ruling King Stanisław August Poniatowski and named after his coat of arms. Poniatowski expressed his surprise and dislike of the idea and recommended to choose a more appropriate name (Platt, 1959, p. 42).

October 1778, Lalande wrote a letter to R. Kossakowski, reminding that he was looking forward to Poczobut's letter and sending his greetings to Strzecki. On 10 November 1778, editor of Cologne newspaper *Jeauranvilliers*, a former Jesuite also known as Joseph Dambrin, wrote to Poczobut, mentioning Strzecki's visit and the new constellation (VUB, F5-A41-7979_3). On 28 November 1781, Johann Elert Bode (1730–1793) from Berlin wrote to Poczobut asking for more information about the *Taurus Poniatovii* constellation (VUB, F2-DC53_7).

Other aims of Strzecki's journey and his accomplishments

It seems that while the primary goal of the voyage was to acquire the instruments needed to prepare the great state map, in addition, Strzecki was also assigned to carry out several other tasks. Among these were:

- 1) Contacting scientists working in Vienna and helping them;
- 2) Finding a new assistant for the Vilnius Observatory;
- 3) Promoting the new constellation *Taurus Poniatovii*, which originated in Vilnius;
- 4) Taking care of the election of Poczobut in PAS;
- 5) Investigating whether it was possible to have the Vilnius Observatory affiliated with the PAS.
- 6) Strzecki was invited to join the observation of the solar eclipse on 24 June 1778 in the Oxford Observatory, which might have also been planned as part of his voyage.

The first aim was Vienna. As mentioned before, Wybicki recommended Poczobut the easiest itinerary for Strzecki: from Gdansk to Hamburg by sea, then via Groningen or Amsterdam to Paris. This was the route Poczobut himself had chosen in the 1768. However, Strzecki took another direction. According to Chevalier's letters, after leaving Vilnius, he stayed at Chreptowicz palace in Warsaw, where he received the last instructions and met with the royal brothers—*Prymas* Michal Jerzy Poniatowski and King Stanislas August Poniatowski. From there, he headed towards Krakow and next to Vienna, where, as he himself wrote in one of the reports, would meet with several scientists and creators of instruments (VUB, F130_23-7 & F17-18c). This information is supported by Maximilian Hell's and Jan Madarassy's letters sent to Vilnius. It seems that Hell was happy to correspond again with his old friend Poczobut, and that Madarassy had some requests for the voyager,³⁵ asking Strzecki if he could get books for

³⁵ Five letters from M. Hell (VUB, F2-DC54_2) and a letter from Jan Madarassy (VUB, F17-3b).

Strasbourg and London for them. Two drafts of Strzecki's answers to Viennese astronomers in Latin were found, describing the acquisition of certain scientific books (LMAVB, f. 151, b. 650, p. 3; VUB, F17-8t). There is also a note from Bukaty to Strzecki, with advice on how to address the ambassador from Vienna in London, Count di Belgiojoso (1728–1801), which could imply that Strzecki would also meet this Austrian diplomat in London (VUB, F17-8d).³⁶

The second aim was to find a new assistant for the Observatory. In his letter from Warsaw dated to the 22 December 1777, Jan Chevalier sent his condolences to Marcin Poczobut, writing that now that Michał Sienicki had died, it would not be easy find an equally good assistant for the Vilnius Observatory (VUB, F16-5_132).³⁷ On 10 November, Jan Koc (1739–1799) wrote to Poczobut that he would be happy, but could not at that moment accept Strzecki's proposal to work in Vilnius (VUB, F2-DC42_16). This means that Strzecki was looking for an assistant astronomer already at the start of the journey. In several letters to Strzecki, Remigian Kossakowski mentioned the names of candidates who agreed to spend some years working in the Vilnius Observatory. This goal was not achieved, perhaps because of financial reasons.

The third aim was the need to promote the new constellation. Strzecki brought to Warsaw, Paris and London printed copies Poczobut's observations from 1773. The constellation of *Taurus Poniatovii* was approved by English and French scientists, and was mentioned in *Le Journal des Sçavantes* and Lalande's *Astronomie* (Triaire, 2012, pp. iv–v). It was immediately put on the celestial globes by Jean Fortin (1750–1831) and appeared in the new edition of John Flamsteed-Fortin's atlas and, a while later, was added to the maps, printed by Bode (VUB, F2-DC42_33-21).³⁸ The coordinates of the stars, mentioned by Poczobut, were checked by Boskovich (VUB, F2-DC42–33-31).

The fourth aim—Poczobut's election to the Paris Academy. This story and all the scope of measures, taken by Strzecki and Kossakowski, can be seen described beautifully in Kossakowski's letters to Poczobut and other addressees. These letters have been mentioned in recent articles by Jakubėnas (2021) and Girininkaitė (2021a; b).

³⁶ The Count mentioned in this draft is Ludovico Luigi di Belgiojoso (1728–1801).

³⁷ The last known letter from Sienicki to Poczobut was written on November 13, 1777 from Nowogródek (VUB, F2-DC47_10-2).

³⁸ See also VUB, F5-A41-7979_3 and Johann Elert Bode's *Uranographia* (Berlin, 1801)(Triaire, 2012, p. iv).

Strzecki's fifth aim can be traced in the correspondence mentioned in this article. No attempt was even made to propose a union between the Paris Academy and the Vilnius Observatory because Kossakowski (as he wrote in one of his letters to Poczobut) became aware of its potential impossibility in a private conversation with de Lalande.

The sixth aim for Strzecki was to communicate and cooperate with his colleagues in other observatories. We can conclude that Strzecki's level of expertise was high enough, as his presence in the observatories of London, Oxford and Paris was welcomed and appreciated. He was also invited by different scientists and instrument makers. More importantly, Strzecki had access to more places than Poczobut before him: Poczobut was travelling as a young Jesuite student, while Strzecki behaved almost as a secular scientist. While wearing a priest's cassock in Paris, Strzecki had chosen secular clothes for his visit in Britain (as mentioned by Remigian Kossakowski) (VUB, F2-DC42_33-3). He met (and perhaps not once) Maskelyne and Woide (who were non-Catholics). Perhaps the friendly and collegial ties between him and his colleagues, former Jesuites Boskovich, Hell, even Lalande (not a Jesuite himself, though he studied at a Jesuit college), were stronger and it may be that they paid more attention to the voyager from Vilnius.

It is also possible that it was Strzecki, who brought documents with some interesting astronomical observations to Vilnius. Among them are the observations of the solar eclipse on June 24, 1778 made by Vicente Toffiño in Cadiz (VUB, F2-DC130_26) and by Maskelyne and Aubert (VUB, F17-1), Maskelyne's essay on the latitude of Greenwich (VUB, F2-DC130_15) or a scheme of solar eclipse created by Joseph Lepaute Dagelet (not found yet, but mentioned in VUB, F17-3e and VUB, F17-5).³⁹

During this journey, Strzecki became acquainted with the Greenwich Observatory and, of course, its head, Sir Nevil Maskelyne. The required instruments were ordered from the best artisans in London, some of them, also the grand mural quadrant, even from famous Jesse Ramsden (VUB, F17-9, p. 16; *AMV*, 2016, p. 214). In Strzecki's letter to James Hutton (1715–1795), other creators of the instruments are mentioned (VUB, F17-3).

The immediate unpleasant result of returning to the PLC, which must have been troublesome for Strzecki, was the need to write a report on the journey itself and the money he spent on the way. Happily enough for the voyager, this problem was soon solved.

³⁹ Most likely a copy of the one shown in the Gallica library (Lepaute Dagelet, 1778).

Conclusion

During Strzecki's lengthy trip, he achieved many goals, which later proved to be essential for the status of the Vilnius Astronomical Observatory in the PLC. He studied the ways and manners of the most prominent contemporary scientists, worked in the best observatories, assisted at the solar eclipse observations at Oxford Observatory, and ordered instruments of the highest quality from reputable craftsmen. Moreover, he contributed to the European recognition of the new Vilnius-born constellation and paying respect to its author, *astronome royale* Marcin Poczobut, who was elected a corresponding member of the Paris Academy of Sciences. In this institution, Strzecki had an opportunity to publicly perform a scientific experiment. He also acted on behalf of Viennese astronomers, by buying books for them and inquiring about the English instruments that they ordered.

Some of Strzecki's plans were not fruitful—he did not insist on affiliating Vilnius Observatory to the Paris Academy, and neither did he bring any fellow astronomy assistant from Warsaw or from France. As the correspondence shows, his previously friendly relations with Remigian Kossakowski grew sour over the years. Perhaps the reason for it was money, some debt which Strzecki somehow managed to forget, or Kossakowski, who may have felt underestimated after all the troubles he had experienced while helping Strzecki. It is still not clear whether Poczobut himself was pleased with his new obligations as *membre correspondant*—at least some correspondence shows that he was not fast enough to respond to his French colleagues after the election. However, the journey was successful—because the Vilnius astronomer was indeed elected a corresponding member of the Paris Academy, and the instruments bought and ordered by Strzecki were brought to Vilnius. Some of them, after a few decades, were even used while determining parts of the famous Struve Geodetic Arc.

We can see that proper work with the original correspondence allows us to discover several things. First, the Vilnius astronomer certainly had been given more tasks than has been previously mentioned, and he did not accomplish all of them. While checking the VUB and LMAVB manuscript collections, I managed to find and identify some previously seemingly unknown documents: Strzecki's report from Cologne, and his notes and drafts. I also attributed some of the letters which were once regarded anonymous. In this article, not all the letters related to Strzecki's journey were mentioned, so there is still room for future investigations on this topic. They may become even more informative if data from relevant correspondence held in other libraries and archives is added.

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