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## "Genethliakon" - a Religious and Humanistic Poem-Song in Commemoration of Life or Rhetorical Approbation of Poetry?

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## ***Genethliakón* – a Religious and Humanistic Poem-Song in Commemoration of Life or Rhetorical Approbation of Poetry?**

The literary genres like *genethliakón*, epitalamium and epitaph named usually as a “domestic muse” used to be ascribed to commemorative kind of poetry and commonly associated with the Renaissance. There are many scholarly publications of the last few years that show the background of classical Antiquity behind occasional hymeneal or funereal poems, but birthday poems are rather exceptionally evoked in this context. Ludwika Ślękowa<sup>1</sup>, a Polish specialist in the field, claims that “ancient literature had not been very rich in birthday poems”. It is for this reason that I am going to examine Greek and Roman literature to look for the beginnings of this genre in the Hellenistic period and follow its development unto modernity (using the example of Silesia) in order to explore the question of *genethliakón*.

There were already some mentions of birthday celebrations in Mesopotamia and Egypt, connected with processions and fests prepared for the royal and magnate families. The birthday of a child in ancient Greece was close bound with the ceremonies of *amphidromia* which were held during the seventh day after the child’s birth. It was not uncommon for ancient Greeks to celebrate the anniversary of a person’s birthday organizing banquets for family members, friends or even for the servants.

Γενεθλιακόν μέλος, γενεθλιακόν ᾠσμα is according to the most general and basic definition in *Der neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*<sup>2</sup>, an *encaenia* of somebody’s birthday by way of a poem *γενέθλιος ἡμέρα*, *γενέθλιον ἡμῶν* added to presenting the person with a gift or doing without it.

It is Callimachus of Cyrene (Καλλίμαχος ὁ Κυρηναῖος, 310 – 240 BC) that is considered to be a precursor of the genre *genethliakon*. Callimachus wrote an

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<sup>1</sup> L. Ślękowa, *Muza domowa: okolicznościowa poezja rodzinna czasów renesansu i baroku*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1991, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Der neue Pauly Enzyklopädie der Antike. Das klassische Altertum und seine Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Hubert Cancik, Helmuth Schneider (Hrsg.), J. B. Metzler, Stuttgart 1996-2010, B. 4, pp. 913-914.

iambic verse (iamb twelfth- fr. 202 Pf.) for his friend who was just celebrating the birth of his daughter. Callimachus's friend as a happy father had to move around the fireside with the baby girl in his arms among the guests that had been invited to this festive occasion. The *amphidromia*, mentioned above, provided the impulse to create a new poem. The seventh day after a child's birth was a very special day because Apollo was considered to be its patron. According to the researchers of Callimachus's works (like, for example, Benjamin Acosta-Hughes<sup>3</sup>), this poem should be considered from the point of view of the internal structure of the iambs that the poet deliberately placed just in this, and not in any other sequence. It is not a coincidence that iamb twelfth is the parable of the first one. Just as the Apollo hymn was more valuable than all the gifts brought by the other gods to goddess Hebe, so the gift of Callimachus presented on this occasion towers over the other offerings. The story of divine birth juxtaposed with the birth of a man has a special meaning for this first genethliakón in the history of literature. At the same time, the didactic purpose of the iamb enhances the value of the human birth and poetry.

Callimachus, Fragment 163 [202 PF]:

Ἄρτεμι Κρηταῖον Ἀμνισοῦ πέδον  
 ἢ τε Δικτ[  
 τιμίη· [  
 ἢ σε τωυ· [  
 ἰ] σήηλ· [

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[.....]· γάρ [...]· αἶνοι πόλεις  
 [...]· κου μο[...].· ὄφρα βλέπει  
 [...]· μες ὃ κά[λ]ιστα νήθουσαι μο[  
 [...]· ουρειοι· [...]· χθονός  
 [...]· θετ' οὐχ ὕμν' ἀ[  
 καὶ θέμιν καὶ πα[  
 τῶνδ' ἀναζ· υδ' οἱ [...]· [...]· ουσ[  
 φανλ ... β· [...]· ναποι .. [...]· [...]· ους  
 ἔσταν οικ [...]· ἰ ... ἀμειδέα λέγων  
 καὶ τάφο[ν τὸ]ν Κ[ρ]ῆτα γινώσκειν κενόν·  
 φησὶ καὶ πατρῶ[ο]ν οὐ κτείνει Δία·  
 τῶνδε κ' ἀνήσ[αυτε] πρηεῖαι, θεαί,  
 πῆσδ' ἐπῆσ' εὐχῆ[σ]· ἐγὼ δ' ἄεσομαι  
**Μοῦσα τῇ μικκῇ τι τε .. ηνω μελ[**  
 ἠνίκ' ὄν[...]· υ[...].· α τῆν γενεθλίην  
 ἐβδόμην Ἡρ[η] θ[υ]γατρὸς ἡμέρην

<sup>3</sup> Cf. B. Acosta-Hughes, *Polyeideia: The Iambi of Callimachus and the Archaic Iambic Tradition (Hellenistic Culture and Society)*, Univeristy of California Press, Berkeley 2002, p. 7.

η[...].ν οἱ δ' Ὀλυμπον ἦτ. σ .... οἱ  
 η[...]. [.] τις παῖ . [.] καλλιόσῃ δόσει  
 π . [.] α τιμήσει τ[...]. ..... ερο. [.  
 Ζεὺς πατὴρ οὐ φῶν .... [.....]. [.  
 πολλὰ τεχνήεντα ποικίλ]α γλ[υφῆ]  
 παύρ]ια] Τριτωνὶς ἤνεικεν κόρ[.  
 πολλὰ καὶ Ἀπίου πολωρὸς ἀγένο[ς  
 ἔκ τε τῆς .... [.] [.]..... [.]ης ἀλόξ [...].

As can be seen above, the iamb (fragment 163 [202 PF])<sup>4</sup> is preserved in fragments. However, the poet's declaration: "I will sing, Muse, for a tiny newborn" (ἄείσομαι Μοῦσα τῇ μικρῇ) precisely defines the genre of the birthday song, which did not have any clear parallels in the earlier ancient Greek or Hellenistic literature. A modification of this genre was introduced by Leonidas of Alexandria (Aleksandrinus). It was on the one hand a formal adjustment as the poet made use of the type of verse composed of an equal number of syllables, but he also changed the recipient and circumstances: the work is made as a gift to the Emperor "in birthday hours" (γενεθλιακάσιν ἐν ὥραις), so another opportunity to celebrate a birth is provided here: it is not the birth of a new life, but the anniversary of a famous person's day of birth.

Leonides Aleksandrinus (Anth. Pal. VI, 321)<sup>5</sup>:

Θύει σοι τόδε γράμμα γενεθλιακάσιν ἐν ὥραις,  
 Καῖσαρ, Νεῖλαιή Μοῦσα Λεωνίδεω·  
 Καλλιόπης γὰρ ἀκαπτον αἶθρος. Εἰς δὲ νέεπα,  
 ἦν ἐθέλῃς, θύσει τοῦδε περισσώτερα.

In another birthday poem Leonides mentions "birthday gifts of wealth" (πλούτου δῶρα, γενεθλίδια) as a crystal, silver, yellow and green gems for the compilation of the two distiches he created. He was the winner in this "gift rivalry". The poetical gifts are more likely to be accepted than those material ones and even envy (possibly the envy of the other donors) will not change it.

The subsequent birthday literary works are thereby a kind of a special birthday present, although sometimes it is only a complementary gift. For example, Krinagoras presents Proklos with a silver stylus (κάλαμος; Anth. Pal. 6, 227):

Ἀργύρεόν σοι τόνδε γενέθλιον ἐς τῶν ἡμῶν,  
 Πρόκλε, νεόσμηκτον δουννακὴν κάλαμον,  
 εἰ μὲν ἐυσχίστοισι διάγλυπτον κεράεσσιν,

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Anthologia Graeca*, H. Beckby (Hrsg.), Aufl. Heimeran Verlag, München 1965, B. 1-6. All Greek fragments cited in this article and known as the fragments of "Anthologia Palatina" are taken from this book.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

*εὖ δὲ ταχνομένην εὖροον εἰς σελίδα.*

The same benefactor gives the son of Simon a bottle filled with oil made of bronze (Anth. Pal. 6, 261). It is worth noting that in the second latter poem the birthday congratulations later conventionalized appeared for the first time. They are the type expressions present now in almost all the congratulations as “heart-felt” wishes, coming “out of goodness of somebody’s heart, straight from the heart” (in Greek: σὺν φρενὶ, e.g. in Polish: “z *serca*, *serdeczne*”<sup>6</sup>). In turn, roses were given with a birthday poem to one lady celebrating her birthday and wedding (6, 345). Furthermore, the five books of lyrics seem to be the precious gift offered by Anacreon (9, 239) to Antonia, written for the same occasion as the poem by Krinagoras (Anth. Pal. 6, 239):

*Βύβλων ἢ γλυκερὴ λυρικῶν ἐν τεύχει τῷδε  
πεντὰς ἀμιμήτων ἔργα φέρει Χαρίτων.  
Ἀνακρέοντος, πρέσβυς ἄς ὁ Τῆιος  
ἔγραψεν ἢ παρ’ οἴνον ἢ σὺν Ἰμέροις·  
δῶρον δ’ εἰς ἱερὴν Ἀντωνίῃ ἤκομεν ἠῶ  
Κάλλεως καὶ προσιδῶν ἔζοχ’ ἐνεγκομένη.*

Γενεθλιακός λόγος was also a special part of the epideictic rhetoric which is best evidenced by the works of Aristeides (Aelius Aristides AD 117-181)<sup>7</sup> and Himerios (AD 310-385)<sup>8</sup>. So, for instance, Aristeides focuses his attention on the nature of this branch of rhetoric. Its main purpose is not only to make a spectacular speech but to indicate, isolate and point at something. So with reference to the occasion of a human birth, the parents and circumstances of the particular birth need to be pointed out and underlined. The literary genre called *genethliakón* was somewhat absorbed by this kind of rhetoric and became very common, since both the Menander Rhetor and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 BC – after 7 BC)<sup>9</sup> devoted a lot of attention to it. There are many treatises inspired by their works that enjoyed enduring popularity. Let us see, then, how *méthodos genethliakón* is described by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his work about rhetoric (3, 1-15)<sup>10</sup>. According to Dionysius, it is a combination of a poem, a speech and birthday wishes and, first of all, it has to be a praise. It should begin with praising a man’s

<sup>6</sup> Polish “*serce*” means a “heart” and there are “*serdeczne życzenia*” (heart-felt wishes) in Poland.

<sup>7</sup> The extant works of Aristides include fifty five orations and declamations and two treatises on rhetorical subjects. Cf. *Der neue Pauly Enzyklopädie der Antike...*, op. cit., p. 914.

<sup>8</sup> Greek rhetor whose twenty four orations are preserved. Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> C. C. de Jonge, *Between Grammar and Rhetoric: Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Language, Linguistics and Literature*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2008, pp. 450 and consecutive.

<sup>10</sup> *Der neue Pauly Enzyklopädie der Antike...*, op. cit. p. 914.

family and his homeland, then it should reveal his physical and spiritual assets, and it should end with a prayer for a good future and long life. In the case of a speech on the birth of a child, it is mainly the family background, the parentage and the date of the child's birth that should be additionally emphasized. During this period the genethliakón ceases to be an independent genre, it becomes a part of a larger whole, a dedication. An example of this type of work is the text assigned to Lucian of Samosata (Ad 125 – after AD 180)<sup>11</sup> entitled “Long-livers”, “Long lives” or “The cases of longevity” (Μακρόβιοι) and dedicated to Quintillus as a birthday present. The formula “I offer you a gift” (προσφέρω σοι δῶρον – in Latin „*donum do*”) will be the main and basic form of dedication for many centuries. Lucian or the anonymous author wishes Quintillus that both he and his children (at that time the second child of Quintillus was born) live happily ever after. The author considers the birthday anniversary of Quintillus as a special circumstance both because of the possibility of providing him with the gift, and also because of the subject matter of this book-gift, which is the story of long-lived people and of the ways to gain longevity. The case of Nestor illustrates the need to care for the health of the body, which provides the occasion for giving some examples of maintaining a proper diet. It is proved that the priests and philosophers of Egypt and India were long-lived. Also Chaldeans lived more than 100 years and, moreover, there was a tribe with a life expectancy of a hundred years, which was a norm (Seres<sup>12</sup>). Roman examples are not as spectacular as those mentioned above. They picture the period of 80 years of Numa Pompilius – “the happiest of the Roman kings” as the case of longevity, together with the similar cases of Servius Tullius and the exiled Tarquinius. The author gives a lot more examples of longevity, dividing the “long-livers” into certain social and professional groups: philosophers, grammarians, rhetoricians. Democritus of Abdera, Sophocles, Anacreon and Eratosthenes of Cyrene, named as the last, were all supposed to have lived long. The treatise ends with repeated wishes of longevity and good health.

Ancient Roman works praising the occasions of birth should not be considered as a sequel to the Greek genethliakón, but as an unaided and relatively independent genre. Roman *Carmen natale* is closely linked with concepts such as *dies natalis* and in particular with *Genius natalis*. The Romans believed that every life, every place and even every phenomenon had their own genius. Each genius was born with a new life, joining in it as a divine element, the symbol of an intangible life. Geniuses were caring spirits of the men of Ancient Rome; for women there

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Long Lives (Makrobioi)*, translated by A. M. Harmon in 1913; *Lucian. Longi avevi* [in:] *Lucian with an English Translation by A. M. Harmon*, Wiliam Heinemann LTD Cambridge 1961 (first printed in 1913), p. 221.

<sup>12</sup> (Gr. Σῆρες, Lat. *Sērēs*) people who were inhabitants of the land Serica, which means “of silk”, firstly mentioned by the Greek historian Ctesias in the 5th century BC.

were intangible persons resembling Juno. Human *Genius* was born with the man, who lived and died with him. Therefore, sacrifices were submitted to Geniuses on the birthday. Roman birthday *carmina* (songs) are also associated with the phenomenon of the so-called Roman subjective elegy, which, according to Jacoby's theory<sup>13</sup> developed from the Greek epigrams. It expanded thematically from other literary genres such as new comedy, bucolic poems and objective Alexandrian elegy. The Roman elegy is a creation of the original expression of individualism, already awakened, and of self-knowledge. These themes are no longer viewed as a subject of minor motifs in short works, but are characteristic of great works, of high artistic standard.

The first example of the birthday Roman elegy is *carmen* composed by Tibullus for Messala (*Elegy* I, 7). In those days Messala suppressed a revolt in Gallia Aquitania and because of this victory he was awarded a triumph. There is an interwoven commendation (enkomiastion) of the Egyptian god Osiris as the inventor of agriculture and benefactor of mankind. Osiris and Bacchus are supposed to come to celebrate Messala's birthday, who is probably already sitting wearing a wreath, with his hair moistened with lotion... The poet wants him to experience great pride in his children. They are expected to surpass their father's deeds. These deeds do not mean just the merits of the war, but also the way built to Tusculum and Alba that was funded by Messala. Every villager in the area worships him by virtue of that. The *carmen* ends with a call to the god of Messala's birthday to come to visit him every year in a more and more wonderful manner:

*Hunc cecinere diem Parcae fatalia nentes  
Stamina, non ulli dissolvenda deo,*

.....  
*At tu, Natalis multos celebrande per annos,  
Candidior semper candidiorque veni*

(Tibullus, *Elegiae* 1,7)

Kazimierz Morawski regarded this elegy created by Tibullus as an "interesting song, which gives an overview of all motifs specific to Tibullus", and "an eloquent specimen of inspiration and afflatus of the poet"<sup>14</sup>.

Propertius also wrote elegies commemorating the birthday. In the elegy 3,10 he wanted to encourage Cynthia to celebrate his birthday spending time with him in the bedroom. It is worth noticing that this elegy begins with a beautiful

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<sup>13</sup> F. Jacob regarded Latin elegy as an enlargement and development of Greek epigram, from which it will have derived its subjective character, its situations and motifs. Cf. Gian Bagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History*, translated by Joseph B. Solodow, revised by Don Fowler and Glenn W. Most, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1999, p. 322.

<sup>14</sup> K. Morawski, *Zarys literatury rzymskiej*, Polska Akademia Umiejętności, Warszawa 1922, p. 196.

description of the birthday morning. We can almost imagine the poet torn from his sleep and surprised because Camenae<sup>15</sup> went to meet Propertius in the glare of the morning sun to remind him about the day of birth:

*Mirabar, quidnam visissent mane Camenae,  
ante meum stantes sole rubente torum.  
natalis nostrae signum misere puellae  
et manibus faustos ter crepuere sonos*

.....

*annua solvamus thalamo sollemnia nostro,  
natalisque tui sic peragamus iter*

(Propertius 3, 10).

Ovidius included two birthday elegies in his *Tristia* (3, 13 and 5, 5):

3,13:

*Ecce supervacuum – quid enim fuit utile gigni? –  
ad sua Natalis tempora noster adest.  
dure, quid ad miseros veniebas exulis annos?  
debueras illis inposuisse modum.*

5, 5:

*Annuus adsuetum dominae natalis honorem  
exigit: ite manus ad pia sacra meae.  
sic quondam festum Laertius egerit heros  
forsan in extremo coniugis orbe diem*

(Ovidius, *Tristia*).

The first one (3,13) is especially alarming for the reader because of the poet's pessimism expressed there. He asks a question whether it was worthwhile to be born. He even addresses his own Genius in a tone of resentment despite the fact that the god of the birthday has to share with the poet the fate of a difficult exile. In the second elegy (5, 5) the poet recalls his wife's birthday. Because he is celebrating that day far away from her, he compares himself to Odysseus, who had to feel in a similar way about his wife Penelope on such occasions.

Another example of a birthday poem is the eleventh song inserted in the fourth book of Horace's poems (*Carmina*). It is a kind of extended invitation to a birthday party. The poet naturally wants to celebrate the birthday of his patron and friend named Mecenas. On this day they are obliged to reject all kinds of concerns

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<sup>15</sup> The nymphs of the sources, endowed with divinatory gifts.



and everybody is rushing (*cuncta festinat manus*) to make the ceremony truly unique:

*cuncta festinat manus, huc et illuc  
cursitant mixtae pueris puellae,  
sordidum flammae trepidant rotantes  
vertice fumum*

(Horacy *Carm.* 4, 11, 9-12).

Among the Roman poets who wrote birthday verse are also Statius and Persius. *Silvae* written by Statius is a collection of occasional pieces with various topics, including birthday (*Silva* 2, 3). *Silvae* were very popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g. the term *Silva rerum*<sup>16</sup>) and the popularity of Statius' works during that period certainly contributed to the growth of interest in creating poems like genethliakón.

However, the work deserving greater attention is the second of the six surviving satires written by Persius. It is a kind of a philosophical birthday diatribe showing the immorality of human wishes presented to the gods. The diatribe is dedicated to the birthday celebrated by Macrinus. It refers to the prayers used on the occasion of the submission of the sacrifice for the genius. Macrinus can say his prayers loud, while on this day many people pray asking for immoral things, such as the quick death of a rich uncle. There is an interesting passage in this diatribe devoted to superstitious women who lubricate the child's forehead with saliva using the middle finger which has protective power. They say special wishes like these:

*ecce avia aut metuens divum matertera cunis  
exemit puerum frontemque atque uda labella  
infami digito et lustralibus ante salivis  
expiat, urentis oculos inhibere perita;  
tunc manibus quatit et spem macram supplice voto  
nunc Licini in campos, nunc Crassi mittit in aedis:  
hunc optet generum rex et regina, puellae  
hunc rapiant; quidquid calcaverit hic, rosa fiat.*

(Persius, the second diatribe, 30-38).

The genre of genethliakón is placed here by Persius in a quasi 'casket way'. The connotations of birthday works with the initiation rite will be the theme used quite willingly in later (especially in sixteenth-century) poems representative of the genre.

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<sup>16</sup> Literally: "forest of things". Literature based on the *silva* in practice means mixing genres.

On the other hand, Martial (40 AD – c. 102 AD, known in English as Martial), a poet famous for his occasional works, shows the importance of birth usually in a playful tone. The most interesting is epigram 12, 67 which is a kind of a commemoration of Virgil's Birthday. The last non-Christian genethliakón was written by Ausonius for his grandson.

Meanwhile, Christian writers began to bless the day of a martyr's death as the birth of a new life for heaven, and this type of work was first published by the poet Paulinus of Nola, the worshipper of St. Felix, who was martyred on 14 January 260 AD. A series of poems dedicated to him on the occasion of the next "birth in Heaven" is a prelude to the phenomenon of a Christian agonistic competition. The holy day dedicated to a sainted patron becomes an opportunity for creating the poetical, then also the rhetorical performances by various authors. Praising a sainted person, they compete with each other to invent new arguments and metric solutions (for example, in this way St. Catharina was praised in old neolatinist Silesia). Paulinus' poetical works are created in various meters so to praise the beauty of the patron's day and tell the story of his deeds and miracles. Paulinus worships the power of the saint person as the power of God. It is quite evident in the formal declaration of the poet (Carm. 29, 12-15):

*Sed mihi non isto fundendus in aequore sermo est,  
Ut per sanctorum merita aut miracula curram  
Et quae per sanctos omnes ab origine rerum  
Praestat agiturque Deus versu detexere coner.*

The genre of modern genethliakón seems to return to the tradition of Callimachus, making use of his stylistics and intertextual indication. It means, of course, the celebration of the child's birth connected with the praise of poetry and related to the divinity. Genethliakón begins to be used for creating poems and songs about the birth of Jesus as the famous *De Partu Virginis* (by Jacopo Sannazaro, AD 1526 year, three books in hexameter). This genre takes an epic form here and the poet, formally using the invocation modeled on Homer, sings not about an anger, like in the *Iliad* but about the birth of God thanks to the Virgin Mary. Many imitators followed the biblical epic of Jacopo Sannazaro in seventeenth-century Europe. Sannazaro's first follower in the central and eastern part of the continent is considered to be Gregory Czaradzki, who dedicated his "Rhythms of the immaculate birth"<sup>17</sup> to the city council of Poznan (*Posnania*). However, it had been seven years earlier that the famous Silesian poet Caspar Cunradus wrote his very interesting genethliakón (which will be analyzed for a while).

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Rytmy o porodzeniu przenaczystszym Bogarodzice Panny Maryjei*, [Jacopo Sannazaro], Grzegorz Czaradzki, wyd. i oprac. R. Mazurkiewicz i E. Buszewicz, red. nauk. tomu: A. Nowicka-Jeżowa. Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warszawa 2009.

The genre of genethliakón is also sometimes associated with modern Christmas carols and dramatic performances such as the *Dialogus in Natali Domini*<sup>18</sup>, and *Ecloga de nativitate Domini*, staged in the Jesuit colleges in the sixteenth century. Rhetorical "kinship" connects genethliakón also with congratulatory speeches on a child's birth. The critical study of the occasional literature in Renaissance and Baroque cited at the outset of this article documents frequent references to the initiation rites and liturgical formulas in Polish genethliakón. An example to be mentioned here is the poem by Andrew Trzeciecki entitled *Zachariae Gregorii Orsacii filioli genethliacon*. However, the famous limerick by Jan Kochanowski ("Fraszka" 3, 65: „Małe[m]u wielkiej nadzieje Radziwił[łowi]” – “To small Radziwill giving great expectations” refers more to the tradition of epideictic genethliakón, recommending "little Michnik" to continue the tradition of the Radziwill family.

There were very interesting forms of genethliakón written in Latin, German and Greek in the area of the former Silesia, where the Protestant religion, prohibiting the cult of saints, greatly revived the tradition of the ancient genethliakón. In 1537 in Wrocław city (Breslau, *Vratislavia*) young lady Elisa Winkler gave a speech including a short birthday poem in Latin. It was declaimed in the main church of the city and was dedicated to the birth of Christ. There are many other examples of birthday works in Silesian old schools, where the poetical and rhetorical performances took place usually on the occasion of Christmas. Also in private correspondence and in works written for private use anyone could create this kind of occasional poetry. E. g. Silesian poet Abschatzius (Hans Freiherr von Abschatz Aßmann) using the Hellenic “epícharma”<sup>19</sup> expresses – in a private manuscript notation - a feeling of happiness because of the birth of his child.

The above-mentioned poet Caspar Cunradus also congratulated his best friend Daniel Bucretius, on becoming father once again. *Carmen genethliacon* written on the birth of Theodore, the son of Daniel, born of Emelia Langia, also refers to Sannazaro, but the "high" epic theme here relates to the bourgeois family in Wrocław. It describes the situation of the expected birth of the first son in the house, in which there are already three daughters. The dispute between goddesses Aphrodite and Athena about the sex of the child to be born can be cut only by Jupiter. The most important god forbids Venus to desire a girl (*desine velle puellam*). In spite of this fact the poem is not anti-feminist. The boy is born only because the house is occupied already by three *Charites* – the goddesses of beauty. The action also takes place in the women's circle (with the exception of the situation when the decision is

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Dialogus in Natali Domini; Ecloga de Nativitate Domini*, wydała i przełożyła Joanna Ziabicka (transl. and edit.), Warszawa 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Greek ἐπίγραμμα means 'happiness'.

taken by the Deity), the mother Emelia is the person who gives her son the name “Theodore” – “the gift of God”:

*Emmeliae quartum gravefacta tumeret ut  
Celicolas inter lis fuit orta Deas. (alvus,  
Nata mari teneram roseo vult ore puellam:  
Daedala sed puerum Pallas habere cupit.  
Adstunt Charites Veneri, parvusque Cupido:  
Palladi cum Melicis Laurifer adstat Herus.  
Illis se sociant Dryades, Chlorisque, Ceresque:  
Svada sed, et Sophie his ac Meditrina favet.  
Lis volat: haec puerum vult pars, pars illa puellam.  
Haeret in ambiguo res ea tota loco.  
Stat medias inter Divum Lucina catervas,  
Nec, cui pro voto gratificetur, habet.  
Iuppiter at: Cypris tu desine velle puellam:  
Natabus domus haec pullulat ante tribus.  
Nascatur suboles tibi mascula, Pallas Athene:  
Nascatur domui masculus huicce puer.  
Arridet Iuno, parientis et ocyus alvo  
Producit placito pro Iovis en puerum.  
Io bene! Io! gaudet Pallas: io! parte sub ista  
Congaudent hilari Numina cuncta Deae.  
Io gaudet genitrix quoque cum genitore, piaque  
Excipit optatum cum prece ventris onus,  
Ultrouque effatur: date tu mihi munere IOVAE,  
Parve puer, IOVAE munere nomen habe.  
Sis Theodorus o usque mihi! Sis dos mihi IOVAE,  
Quem vovi, Domino, tu mihi, dante, venis.  
Conclamat Iuno, Tu pupule pumile cresce;  
Cresce sequens matre (m) moribus, arte patrem.  
Annuat optatis magnus IOVA, votaue firmet,  
Ac vivo hoc Nato vivat uterque Parens<sup>20</sup>.*

It is certainly possible to quote many more examples of birthday songs, ancient and modern; for example, many epigrams of Martial and Christian authors might be discussed in detail. The obvious conclusion to be drawn here is that in European culture both the birth of a child and the anniversary of any person’s birth are good, appropriate reasons for celebration.

The tradition of genethliakón is still alive nowadays in Silesia. The poem created by Anna Elisa Radke, a famous German neo-Latin poet, is an adequate

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<sup>20</sup> Caspar Cunradus, *Carmen genethliacon (Miscella pro strena feliciter ineuntis anni MDCVII)*, Olsnae Silesiorum 1607. [The Jagiellonian Library, BJ 585815 I.]

example. It was written in January 2013 to celebrate the birthday of Silesian professor Joanna Rostropowicz<sup>21</sup>:

*Caeleste verbum, principium omnium  
rerum, Joannes discipulus dedit,  
sanctus Joannes, qui patronus  
auricomans tuus est, Joanna.  
Tuque a poetis, a sapientibus  
Graecis doceris, postuma filia,  
de rege scripsisti et poeta,  
indicat ut titulus libelli.  
Vernacula illa et verba patrum colis:  
versus Josephi ne pereant, timens  
semper tibi est cordi ruinas  
exstruere et renovare claras.  
Doctas, profestrix, gignere litteras  
non solum amasti: nuper erant tibi  
nati, decus matris quadruplex.  
Unus obit – taceantque laudes!*

The thematic motifs of genethliakón have remained the same throughout the centuries. The first one, worthwhile emphasizing, is the association between the birth of a man and the creation of poetry. It stresses the fact that there is something metaphysical in the situation of a birth. Other motifs expressed refer to important gifts and to the joy of being a recipient or a donor of the presents, a joyful opportunity to celebrate the person's birthday, almost a magical desire to secure all that is good for the loved one, and finally an opportunity for reflection, sometimes optimistic, sometimes bitter. The recurrence of these motifs is associated with direct reference to the same circumstances and topics codified in rhetorical theory. Thus, each year survived is a victory of life, and the poem dedicated to it indicates the triumph of poetry. So why not to celebrate birthday? As Mecenas said: *Vita dum superest, bene es* ("As long as life lasts it is well") and we can hope everything will be good.

**Abstract:**

The main idea of this article is to present the genre called genethliakón from its origins in Antiquity to the modern times. The paper contains an analysis of several works in ancient Greek and Latin, which shows how widespread this literary genre was at that that time. This analysis contradicts the views of some scholars who claim that genethliakón evolved only in the Renaissance and the

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<sup>21</sup> A. E. Radke, *Genethliakón Joannae Rostropowicz septuagenariae dedicatum* (Marburg 2013, still in manuscript available for me by benevolent Author).

Baroque period. The motifs of birthday works are repeatedly used through the centuries, and the most important one seems to connect the birth of poetry with the tutelary deity. Modern genethliakón refers to different traditions: the Christian and the Greek of the Hellenistic era.

### **Key words:**

genethliakón, Greek and Roman occasional literature, Silesian literature in Latin at the beginning of modernity, history and theory of rhetoric

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[Тлумачэнне на беларускую мову: Olga Pańkova, Helena Pietrukowska]