

## The Image of Women in the Polish Chronicle of Master Vincent (called Kadłubek)

EDWARD SKIBIŃSKI (POZNAŃ)

Master Vincent was born in c. 1154 and died in March 1223. 1208 to 1218 he was bishop of Cracow, afterwards he joined the Cistercian monastery at Jędrzejów, where he passed away.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of traces of the works of John of Salisbury, Alan of Lille, Radulph Ardent and Placentinus to be found in his chronicle as well as his knowledge of Roman Law and classical Roman authors we can suppose that he had studied in France in his youth.<sup>2</sup> The chronicle is written in *Genus Demonstrativum*.

The chronicle belongs to the kind of *Gesta Ducum* in which the ruler was the hero. The first three books of the chronicle are written in form of a dialogue between two men of Church, John archbishop of Gniezno and Matthew the bishop of Cracow; Matthew is telling the history of Poland and John comments the told history, starting from the legendary ruler Gracchus up to the reign of Prince Bolesław Kędzierzawy. The first book describes the prehistorical time of Poland up to the fall of Pompilius (Popiel). The second book describes the history of Poland from the first ruler of the Piasts' dynasty Ziemowit up to the fall of Zbigniew brother of Bolesław Krzywousty. The third book describes the rule of Bolesław Krzywousty and ends with the rule of Bolesław Kędzierzawy. The fourth book is written in

---

<sup>1</sup> The best monograph is the foreword to the latest Polish translation of Master Vincent's chronicle by Brygida Kürbis: *Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), Kronika Polska*, translated and prepared by B. Kürbis, (1992), p. IV - CXXXII, 1-322; there are two critical editions of the text: 'Magistri Vincentii Chronicon Polonorum', ed. August Bielowski, in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, t. II, (Lwów, 1872, reprint Warszawa, 1961), p. 193-453. 'Magistri Vincentii dicti Kadłubek Chronica Polonorum', edidit praefatione notisque instruxit Marianus Plezia, in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica, Nova Series*, t. XI, (Kraków, 1994), p. XXXIV, 213.

<sup>2</sup> See my sources of the erudition of Kadłubek in *Roczniki Historyczne*, LX, (1994), p. 163-172 (in Polish).

a monological way, starts with the rule of Mieszko the Old and ends in the years 1201/1205.

The chronicle does not give any dates. The author's narrativs is based on an oral local tradition and on written sources preserved from antiquity and viewed from the point of a medieval scholar. Although Master Vincent's chronicle is not the first Polish one, its author is Polish himself, while an earlier chronicle was written by a Benedictine monk whose hypothetical place of origin is supposed to have been in southern France.

The purpose of my treatise is not to describe the whole chronicle but to find out the image of women on its basis. The prehistorical picture of Poland is based mainly on oral sources although some reconstructions of the historical past were made by the author in accordance with the method used by historians in those days. These were mainly based upon his large knowledge of ancient history. Each time when we analyze the chronicle we must remind those two kinds of knowledge.

The first queen who was described in the chronicle is Wanda, daughter of the mythological King Cracus appearing under the name *Graccus*. The whole story of Wanda goes as follows: King Graccus had two sons. There appeared a drake, called *holophagus*, which name comes from Greek *holos* (all, whole) and *phagos* (eater). The king sent his two sons to fight the drake; they killed it. After having killed the drake, one son murdered the other and returned to his father telling him that the brother was killed during the fight. After his father's death the murderer became king himself, but the crime was discovered and he was banished. The throne passed on to queen Wanda, sister of the two brothers. The person of Wanda is mentioned only at this point of the story. The kingdom of Wanda was invaded by the Leman ruler (*Lemanorum tyrannus*), seen by him as a place without proper ruler. The two armies of Wanda and the Leman ruler were facing each other, when the soldiers of the *dux* refused to fight telling that they won't commit a sacrilege. The Leman ruler wanted to sacrifice himself to the Gods and committed suicide, wishing his soldiers to get old under feminine ruling. Wanda wanted to stay virgin, so she did not marry anybody, had no children, and after her death there was a long period without ruler.

Wanda's ruling should not be treated as the rest of matriarchy. After the two brothers had died or left respectively, whole the society had entered

into a liminal state (*communitas* in the sense of Victor Turner<sup>3</sup>). This could also explain the Leman ruler's suicide as a reaction of meeting a society being in liminal state. We could suppose that the rule of Wanda was understood as an exception connected with the rite of purification and not a rule giving women the same rights as men.

Such is also the commentary of archbishop John who emphasizes that it is not in accordance with good customs for a woman to rule over gentlemen.<sup>4</sup> Commenting this story, John explains the agreement to Wanda's reign by faithfulness to her late father. The author gives also examples of other reigning women mainly Semiramis, noting that such women must be outstanding and surpass in their virtue not only other women but men as well. This gradual vision of the author is due to his opinion that women stand on a lower level than men as far as virtues are concerned.

Virtues are easier to obtain by men because of their natural possibilities. Unvirtuous men are often represented as being under feminine influence. The author describes such men as *virī uzorii* or *effeminei*.<sup>5</sup> As an example of such a man Pompilius (Popiel) may be regarded. In the chronicle Pompilius is represented as the son of Pompilius the Elder who was the son of the Polish king Lestko and Julius Caesar's sister Julia. Julia, as the Roman Senate refused to give her Bavaria as a dowry, was sent back to her brother leaving her son with her husband. Pompilius the Elder died after a short time of rule leaving the throne to his son of the same name. This son, after a short time of virtuous ruling, got under his wife's influence, poisoned his uncles and led a sinful life. His wife is presented as a strong-willed person, and she prepared the crime, leaving to her husband only the part of the performer. Afterwards, Pompilius was devoured by mice. The ruler who used to be virtuous before had become a murderer. Although he had done all the evil under his wife's influence, the chronicle describes him as the only guilty person. Therefore, he was devoured by mice, and there is no trace that the same punishment met his wife. The world of persons acting in the chronicle is the world of men, and women can only influence this world. The

---

<sup>3</sup> Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Antistructure*, (Chicago, 1969), p. 131-165.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Licet namque bonis videatur moribus dissonum feminam principibus imperare ... Magistri Vincenti dicti Kadłubek Cronica Polonorum*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibidem* p. 28: *Hic fructus uiros sequitur uzorios ...*

punishment was right for the bad man under woman's influence (*feminea prudentia*). Feminine influence over men became often the cause of military and political defeat. The *Daci*, e.g., who were defeated in their war with the Poles, were punished in such a way that one obliged them to fulfill the feminine duties in the intercourse with their wives, putting their feet at the place of their heads (upside down).<sup>6</sup> The Polish were defeated as well later on out of the same reason of getting weak under female influence.

The second book of the chronicle begins in pagan times with the description of the Piast dynasty getting the throne. There is the description of the married peasant couple Repice (Rzepica) and Past (Piast). In the whole story the author does not make a difference between the husband and the wife, presenting the only image of this kind in the whole chronicle. The next married couple were the first Christian ruler of Poland, Mieszko I, and his wife Dobrawa. In contrast to the previous description in Gall's Anonymous chronicle, Master Vincent tries to emphasize the outstanding position of Mieszko during the Christianisation of Poland. Mieszko had seven pagan wives who, after his marriage to Dobrawa, were sent away. Mieszko decided to become Christian taking into account that the difference of religion could be an obstacle in the marriage. That way, in Gall's Anonymous chronicle the story of persuading Mieszko to become Christian is reduced to this short picture.

Bolesław Chrobry was acknowledged by Master Vincent's chronicle as the first true and right Christian Polish king. The story about the person of Bolesław Chrobry's wife Emnilda is reduced to one sentence, differently from the work of Gall Anonymous. On the other hand, Vincent did not mention the history of the violation of the Kievian princess by Bolesław Chrobry which was fully accepted by Gall Anonymous.

The picture of Repice and Dobrawa was very important for Master Vincent for introducing the image of woman not merely as the king's wives but also as the mothers of kings.

After a brief summary of the rule of Bolesław Chrobry's son Mieszko II, the author presents the lives of his wife and son. What seems to be characteristic for the way of writing of Kadłubek, is the introduction of the wife of the ruler after describing his death, without even mentioning her first name. This is due to the specific understanding of the historical genre

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem* p. 7-8.

by Master Vincent whose topic were the rulers' good or bad deeds in the field of politics or military achievements. The ruler's private life was only to be presented when it influenced the main subject. There are two versions of the above mentioned story: According to the first one, after Mieszko's II death, his son not yet being of full age, the ruler's wife took over power; she is presented as the sister of emperor Otto III. After her short rule she was driven away because she had preferred Germans to the Polish nobles. Her son was also banished according to this version because of the fear that he might take revenge for his mother.

According to the second story, the wife of Mieszko II and mother of Kazimierz died during the birth of her son. The father married a second time, although he did not stop loving his first wife, as the author says. The face of the son was the reflection of his mother and the son always reminded the king of his late wife. Therefore, the stepmother decided to kill her stepson. In order to do this she bribed a servant to kill the boy. The servant pretended to agree but in reality he hid the boy in a monastery. And there he stayed and was educated. After Mieszko's II death and his second wife's banishment, the country was left without any ruler. Then the servant put the boy's origin to light. With a group of faithful knights he got the rule over the country that was in danger to fall apart.

After the story told by Matthew, John's commentary of these happenings follows. The stepmother is compared to the mythological Medea, but this example does not give any further explanations. More interesting is the second example of queen Tomyris. After her husband's death she fights for her sons' right to the crown. But it is a slave who got power by bribery. At last Tomyris manages to win the fight against the slave by showing to her citizens the humiliating position of her sons and of herself. It is an important fact that Tomyris is not an example to be compared to the stepmother of Kazimierz, but the story only emphasizes that a servant helped him and saved his life. The problem risen is the stepmother fighting for the crown and a slave impostor who uses bribery for achieving the throne. Their enemies are in the story about Kazimierz an honest servant, and in the second story Tomyris herself. Both stories are commented by Master Kadłubek: The worst thing is when a person from lower classes gets power. From this point of view it has to be stressed that everybody has one's own place in life and does not have the right to change it. The place in society can only be changed by a person who had risen over his social class due to his virtues.

The virtues are exactly defined by Vincent and are in accordance to the stoic and Christian moral theories.

The next story about women in this part of the chronicle occurs during the reign of Bolesław Szczodry. It goes like that: The king often lead wars abroad so that his knights could not be at home for a long time. In this situation the wives and daughters of the knights were seduced by slaves and lived with them as with their husbands. The reasons for that were tiredness of waiting for their men, doubts if those would ever return, and in some cases the women were seduced by force. When the men got those news, they came back, killed the slaves and punished the unfaithful women.

We got examples concerning this case in John's commentary. The first story concerns Scyts where in an analogical situation women were punished so cruelly that some of them preferred suicide. In the second story the husbands were afraid that not enough children would be born and, therefore, conceded other men to fulfill the duties of husbands, in order to have enough soldiers for the country in future. The last example is commented as both a real virtue and a quasi virtue. A ruler deserted by his soldiers returns home and takes revenge on his knights. He lets many of them be killed. Vincent writes that Bolesław also takes revenge on women unpunished by their husbands making them feed young dogs after taking away their infants. In this situation the Cracovian bishop Stanisław threatens Bolesław with anathema. The ruler orders to kill Saint Stanisław, and when the deed fails he himself murders him. In this story, a severe punishment of women is done by the ruler Bolesław, and their defender is the future Saint of Poland Stanisław. The Saint is accused by the king as being a protector of sinful marital adultery.

In John's commentary of these deeds we have a note that every sin can be forgiven by its declaration and by penitance. As the ruler attacked the Saint even after his death, his sin could not be forgiven.

The next ruler on the Polish throne was Bolesław's brother Władysław who was shown as an unhappy man because he did not have a son. Together with his wife he sent a letter to St. Gilles Abbey in France asking for prayers for them to receive a son. It is interesting that the mother was not said to be unable to bear a son but it was a sorrow for which both parents were responsible. It is important to emphasize that such situations dealing with both parents were not common in the chronicle. This occurred only in accordance with family life; outside of it, the family was represented

only by fathers and sons. Judith, wife of Władysław, died after their son was born. This event was commented by the author as follows: The father could now learn from it, if he would prefer to be father or mother of the infant. The author shows this way the hard parts of woman's life due to which a woman could die in pains like men did on the battle field. In order not to remain widower for too long, Władysław I married the widow of the Hungarian king Solomon who gave him only three daughters. In spite of the fact that the author either doesn't mention the ruler's wives at all or gives only short notes concerning them in some places, he is clearly against a ruler being single. It is a common custom not to give the ruler's wife's name and to mention her only as part of the family.

The following ruler described together with his wife was the son of Bolesław Krzywousty, Władysław II, grandson of Władysław I. Again an example of bad influence of his wife upon him is given. The ruler himself is described as a good person who was only too much under his wife's influence. It is interesting that this wife, Adeleide, was German, and that the author did not put this against her. He treats this fact as an episode of a larger problem which was the break of the patriarchal order in the family causing disaster. The author writes that it is difficult for a man to win with his wife if he once had let her win.

The female danger is based on woman's kindness. Due to his wife's persuasion Władysław II tries to take over the heritage of his brothers, he fails and is banished together with his wife. Before, during the fight, his wife is being described as a tiger – a nickname which the author seldom gives to male rulers. John's commentary to this event mentions several stories which may enable us to understand the author himself. We have one about different birds which, despising the company of other ones, try to stay in the highest regions and even sleep in the space above the clouds. The author says that the wife made Władysław a ruler being greedy of power. The most important problem here is not the woman but the greediness of power. Władysław II is, after all, responsible for everything, as he allowed his wife to influence him. The next story which puts light to the image of women by Master Vincent is the banishment of Włodzimierz, the ruler of Halich. The action done by the Polish ruler Kazimierz Sprawiedliwy is motivated as follows. Włodzimierz invaded the bordershore of Poland and captured and led away the women of noble families. The author makes a difference between violated virgins, even not adult ones, violated married

women, and he adds the profaning of places of worship, taking priests by force and the profanation of the Holy Day of Assumption. Like in the story of the intervention and death of Saint Stanisław we have here the joining of church problems with women's problems. This joining, as it appears, enforces the requirement of a decision taken by the ruler.

We see at this point the negative connotation of the author concerning violation, profanation and other ignoble deeds. Such treatment of violation done during war is not at all typical and makes our author quite different from other chronicles. We must remember that, recognised as positive by Gall Anonymous, the violation of the Kievan princess by Bolesław Chrobry was omitted by Master Vincent. In this story we again have motivation of the omission of such a fact. The author wanted to describe the positive deeds to be followed by the chronicle's recipients. Bad deeds could be also a part of the stories when they were judged and punished.

The last woman who appears in the chronicle is Helena, wife of Kazimierz Sprawiedliwy. As before, she appears in the chronicle only after her husband's death, when she took over power. The motivation of the nobles to accept a woman on the throne is their faithfulness to the ruler's children.

A similar motivation of faithfulness to the late ruler was presented during the ruling of Wanda, daughter of Krak. Helena appears another time in the chronicle when she passes power to her husband's unfaithful brother Mieszko the Old. Describing this happening, the author explains the action of Helena by her female confidence. One must, all the same, remember that this is not mainly characteristic for women. In a similar way, Bolesław Krzywousty one of the greatest Polish rulers, was touched by it.

To conclude:

The image of the world in Vincent's chronicle is entirely hierarchical. The subject of the chronicle are first of all the rulers' actions. Everyone has his and her place, women as well. The changing of places in hierarchy is treated as something abnormal. Such a situation occurred through the lack of an heir as in the example of Judith, wife of Władysław Herman. Another case is the necessity to provide the duration of the dynasty in a situation when the only adult person in the line was a woman, like Wanda and Helena.

A woman/wife does not achieve acceptance if she tries to get influence upon her husband's political decisions. But even in such a case the husband is guilty for the consequences of his decisions. Effeminate husbands, *vir*



*uxorii* or *effeminei*, are from the beginning condemned to disaster; the woman even does not share the punishment of her husband. A good example is the fate of Popiel and his family: The ruler and his sons are eaten by mice, and there is no notice about such punishment also concerning his wife. It happens, although his wife was responsible for whole the crime. In contrast to his predecessor Gall Anonymous, Vincent is strongly against violation or other cruelties against women. The author describes St. Stanisław as women's defender, although he doesn't deny their sins. He treats marital unfaithfulness of women as a sin but, in some way, he makes the husbands responsible for their behaviour and is against any cruel revenge.

Woman's fate by its biological consequences (birth of children) is worse than the fate of man. This is, maybe, the reason for the lighter treatment of women. A woman who wants to rule is supposed to be very dangerous. The Leman ruler (*tyrannus Lemanorum*) in the fight with Wanda is being defeated and commits suicide not wishing to live under female rules. The problem of men who submitted women comes over and over again. Woman is dangerous for man's virtue and as such she is compared to the drake or the *basiliscus*. The way to avoid this danger is for men to remain in male company, and its realization is the fall of male virtue which leads to military defeats due to which women suffer as well. The presented world is lead by knights and ethical rules, a defeat is mainly due to turning against them.

MEDIUM AEVUM  
QUOTIDIANUM

33

KREMS 1995

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON GERHARD JARITZ

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER KULTURABTEILUNG  
DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

Titelgraphik: Stephan J. Tramèr

Herausgeber: Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der materiellen Kultur des Mittelalters. Körnermarkt 13, A-3500 Krems, Österreich. – Für den Inhalt verantwortlich zeichnen die Autoren, ohne deren ausdrückliche Zustimmung jeglicher Nachdruck, auch in Auszügen, nicht gestattet ist. – Druck: KOPITU Ges. m. b. H., Wiedner Hauptstraße 8-10, A-1050 Wien.

## Inhaltsverzeichnis

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Vorwort .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 7  |
| MELITTA WEISS ADAMSON, "Unus theutonicus plus bibit<br>quam duo latini": Food and Drink in Late Medieval Ger-<br>many .....                                                                                                                                                                                        | 8  |
| GERHARD JARITZ, Spiritual Materiality or Material Spiri-<br>tuality. Cistercian Inventories of the Late Middle Ages .....                                                                                                                                                                                          | 21 |
| SÁNDOR PETÉNYI, Von den Dilgen .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 28 |
| RYSZARD GRZESIK, The European Motifs in the Polish Me-<br>dieval Chronicles .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 41 |
| EDWARD SKIBIŃSKI, The Image of Women in the Polish<br>Chronicle of Master Vincent (called Kadtubek) .....                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 54 |
| PIOTR BERING, Das Publikum der Elegienkomödie und der<br>humanistischen Komödie im spätmittelalterlichen Polen .....                                                                                                                                                                                               | 63 |
| REZENSIONEN: .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 70 |
| HELGA SCHÜPPERT, Aktuelles zum Hexenthema .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 70 |
| Eine Stadt der Frauen. Studien und Quellen zur Geschichte<br>der Baslerinnen im späten Mittelalter und zu Beginn der<br>Neuzeit (13.-17. Jahrhundert), hg. von Heide Wunder in<br>Zusammenarbeit mit Susanna Burghartz, Dorothee Ripp-<br>mann und Katharina Simon-Muscheid. Basel 1995 (BRIGIT-<br>TE RATH) ..... | 72 |
| Karl Brunner, Herzogtümer und Marken. Vom Ungarn-<br>sturm bis ins 12. Jahrhundert (Österreichische Geschichte<br>907-1156, hg. von Herwig Wolfram) Wien: Ueberreuter 1994<br>(GERHARD JARITZ) .....                                                                                                               | 75 |

## Vorwort

Durch den tragischen Tod von Harry Kühnel im August dieses Jahres hat nicht nur *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* seinen Präsidenten verloren, sondern auch die Erforschung von Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters einen ihren herausragendsten Vertreter. Harry Kühnel hat in seinen wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten sowohl in methodologischer als auch in inhaltlicher Hinsicht Bedeutendes geleistet und als Direktor des *Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften vieles zur Intensivierung der Erforschung mittelalterlichen Alltagslebens beigetragen. Wir werden ihm ein ehrendes Andenken bewahren.

Das vorliegende Heft von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* bietet unterschiedliche Beiträge aus unserem Forschungsbereich, die von Mitgliedern und Freunden der Gesellschaft angeboten wurden. Das nächste Heft wird als Sonderband IV im März erscheinen und unter dem Titel "Quotidianum Estonicum" unter der Herausgeberschaft von Jüri Kivimäe und Juhan Krem (Tallinn) Beiträge aus der Estnischen Alltagsgeschichtsforschung des Mittelalters beinhalten. Ein zweiter Sonderband des Jahres 1996 wird sich unter der Herausgeberschaft von Dorothe Rippmann (Basel) Schwerpunkten Schweizer Forschung widmen. Zwei weitere Hefte werden unterschiedliche Beiträge unserer Mitglieder und Freunde beinhalten, mit manchen Schwerpunkten auf alltagshistorisch relevanten Papieren, die bei den Mittelalterkonferenzen von Kalamazoo und Leeds 1996 vorgelegt werden.

Wir wünschen Ihnen ein privat und wissenschaftlich erfolgreiches Jahr 1996!

Gerhard Jaritz, Herausgeber