

Women of Power from the Old–Polish Era in Polish Historiography of the Annexation Period

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Summary

The thesis *Women of Power from the Old–Polish Era in Polish Historiography of the Annexation Period* contains the analysis on how the historians working in the years 1795–1918 displayed Polish female rulers, i.e. queens, princesses, wives and mothers of monarchs living from the beginning of the Polish state to the fall of the First Polish Republic. The author tries to answer the following questions: did women in the Old–Polish era really have power or were they only used as a tool by real male sovereign? How were they viewed and evaluated by the nineteenth century historians and what influenced their opinion?

The author analyses historical syntheses and other writings created in the late Enlightenment, Romanticism, Positivism and Young Poland. These four culture periods make four chapters the thesis consists of. In the first part of each chapter the most important historical syntheses have been examined with regard to women of power, i.e. books by Adam Naruszewicz, Jerzy Samuel Bandtkie, Joachim Lelewel, Jędrzej Moraczewski, Henryk Schmitt, Józef Szujski, Julian Bartoszewicz, Michał Bobrzyński, Władysław Smoleński, August Sokołowski, Feliks Koneczny, Józef Dąbrowski, Artur Górski and Antoni Chołoniewski. However, the syntheses are not a conclusive evidence of the scholars' real interest in the women of power issue. In such books, references to women of power apparently occur by necessity, that is why the second part of each chapter contains the analysis of some other historical works like articles and essays, in which Old–Polish women of power are the main characters. In the process of exploring historiographical portraits of Polish princesses and queens, they were assigned to four categories: 1. saintly rulers and founders of the Church, 2. mothers, 3. ambitious spouses reaching for power, 4. loved wives and unwanted ones. All in all, 12 historical syntheses and over 350 articles in periodicals and other sources have been a subject of inquiry.

The subject of the author's analysis are mainly works by renowned historians. To get a more comprehensive picture of the Old–Polish women of power (especially with regard to historiography of the Romanticism period), the author has also analyzed works by history enthusiasts and popularizers. The reviews published in historical magazines or popular newspapers have also been included in the research material because they show the reception

of discussed works and often complement information concerning women of power. The core texts about women of power were supplemented by a concise presentation of their creators, as well as a historical and cultural context, in order to present works about women against the background of general trends in historiography. In the thesis we can also find fundamental source publications created in the Old–Polish era which refer to Polish women of power.

The author points out which princesses and queens were most popular among the historians and how they were introduced into the narration of historical syntheses. To fully analyze the characterization of women of power, the author used descriptions of their appearance and features of character, as well as general assessments.

Most numerous separate works on women of power, which have been discussed in the thesis, were published in historiography of Romanticism. Such a result matches the spiritual atmosphere of this culture formation, the leading motive of love in literature, ideas of kinship and brotherhood of souls. Individualism which dominated in Romanticism, in all likelihood contributed to enriching portraits of Old–Polish women of power who were given unique features. In greater extent than in the Enlightenment period, the historians presented their temperament, motivation of activities and the entire emotional sphere.

In historical writings of Romanticism the wives of Jagiellonian dynasty rulers were presented more often. In Positivism, additionally more attention was paid to women of power from the Piast period. Moreover, because of the progress in mediaeval sources research, wives of the first Polish rulers started getting more approving assessment.

In the entire post–partition historiography most works were devoted to Jadwiga of Poland, Marie Casimire d'Arquien and Barbara Radziwiłł. These three extremely different personalities show us how diverse interests of the nineteenth century historians were. They were interested in such dissimilar women of power like Jadwiga of Poland – regarded as a saint, although not canonized at that time, the first female monarch in Poland, Marysieńka – very much loved by her husband but unloved by the Polish people, and finally Barbara Radziwiłł, a woman for whom Sigismund Augustus risked his crown. Other women of power who were most often presented in historical writings are: Hedwig of Silesia, Marie Louise Gonzaga, Anna Jagiellon and Bona Sforza. Accordingly, the historians' favorite women characters were usually saints or rulers of expressive personality who had some influence on political events.

The author mentions substantial limitations of women's influence on governing the country in the Old-Polish era. Ambitious female rulers who tried to influence public affairs were treated by Polish people with reluctance. At the same time, in the thesis we can find the evidence that the authors of historical syntheses generally characterized Polish women of power in accordance with the opinions of the Old-Polish chroniclers: Długosz, Kromer and Strykowski.

From the portraits of Polish women contained in works by historians of the nineteenth century and reconstructed in the thesis, the conclusion can be drawn that the stereotype vastly influenced scholars of that period. In over one hundred years of national servitude the changes in the situation of Polish women occurred: they became more independent (although patriarchalism in social life was still dominant), the level of women education improved, they were more active in economic and cultural life of the society. Nevertheless, the personal role models created by historians generally remained constant. The destiny of a woman had always been viewed in terms of being a good wife, a housekeeper subservient to her husband, and a good mother.

On the pages of the post-partition historiography and at the same time in reality of this period, most women were a quiet companion of their man who was very much active in outer sphere. Of course, in historiography of Positivism and Young Poland, under the influence of progressing research on historical sources, changes in morality, as well as specific social programs, the revision in presentation of some women of power occurred, e.g. with regard to Bona or Richeza of Lotharingia. However the general trends in assessment of wives and mothers of Polish monarchs remain similar. With constant esteem – despite isolated opinions questioning her sacrifice – Jadwiga of Poland is shown as a role model of sanctity and Elizabeth of Austria as a model of motherhood.

The works of nineteenth century scholars show that some Polish princesses and queens had their share in public life. Being at the side of a monarch they usually fulfilled representative functions. After the death of their ruling husband they took the responsibility of governing the country in the name of their children. In the absence of the king they led mediatory missions. A special role in the state was played by those ambitious spouses who were able to predominate over their husbands and have a share in politics through them.

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