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[REVIEW]: KRZYSZTOF BRACHA, *MARIA MEDIATRIX – MARIA ADIUTRIX. POBOŻNOŚĆ MARYJNA W NAUCZANIU KAZNODZIEJSKIM W POLSCE PÓŹNEGO ŚREDNIOWIECZA. SERMONES DOMINICALES ET FESTIVALES Z TZW. KOLEKCJI PIOTRA Z MIŁOŚŁAWIA*, WYDAWNICTWO DiG, WARSZAWA 2023, PP. 328.

Monographs devoted to the issue of preaching, or based on preaching source material, are rarely published in Poland. The publication of Krzysztof Bracha's book on Marian piety, as it was presented, created and transformed in late medieval sermons should therefore be welcomed with great satisfaction. The main subject of detailed analyses and interpretations of the reviewed publication is a set of six Marian sermons from the postil of Peter of Miłosław. Attentive readers will undoubtedly find that the subtitle is identical to the subtitle of Krzysztof Bracha's earlier publication – *Preaching in Late Medieval Poland*.<sup>1</sup> The author explained in the "Introduction" that although he had already devoted an extensive study to the *Postil*, it did not cover Mariological issues. The current monograph is therefore a continuation of that research, a second part of an erudite lecture on Polish preaching and religiosity in the late Middle Ages, this time focused on the figure of Mary. The author has therefore briefly summarised the results of the codicological research. All who would like to learn more about the collection itself, its copies, about the art of preaching and its implementation in the case of Poland, and finally about many other topics

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<sup>1</sup> Krzysztof Bracha, *Nauczanie kaznodziejskie w Polsce późnego średniowiecza. Sermones dominicales et festivales z tzw. kolekcji Piotra z Miłosławia* (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Akademii Świętokrzyskiej, 2007).

and themes addressed in Piotr of Miłosław's sermons, need to look into author's previous monograph.

In the fifteenth century there were at least 10 copies of the *Postil* of Peter of Miłosław, of which four manuscripts have survived: Warsaw, National Library Mss III 3021, III 3022, Częstochowa, Jasna Góra Monastery Archive Ms II 17 and Kórnik Library Ms 53. When it comes to a handwritten collection of sermons, this is quite a significant number, indicating its moderate popularity. The analysed collection of sermons is a so-called *ad populum* collection, intended for the local audience. In accordance with the usage of the time, it has the character of a compilation, because a number of sermons belonging to it can in fact be attributed to a group of fifteenth-century Polish and Czech preachers. The author of the monograph described the issues of attribution of individual sermons in more detail in the aforementioned book *Preaching in Late Medieval Poland* (pp. 58–71). The number of copies of the collection, the fact that it was in fact a compilation, and the Polish recipients confirmed in the addresses, all testify to the representativeness of the selected source material for the undertaken study of piety in Poland in the late Middle Ages. The book reviewed here analyses a series of six sermons: *De conceptione Virginis Marie*, *De purificatione*, *De annuntiatione*, *De visitatione*, *De assumptione* and *De nativitate*. This list does not exhaust the source material used, because the author has taken care to situate his analyses and conclusions in the context of a wide range of sources from the era, the list of which in the bibliography takes up 21 pages.

The content of the book includes an introduction, two main parts, divided into five chapters in total, a conclusion and a two-part source annex, containing the disponendum of the six aforementioned sermons by Piotr of Miłosław and an edition of one of them – *Sermo de purificatione Beate Marie*. Additionally, the book provides a table of contents and a summary in English, as well as a personal index. The arrangement of the chapters of the monograph does not correspond with the order of Marian feasts in the liturgical calendar. They should rather be treated as separate studies devoted in the first part to the general motif of Marian assistance (*Adiutorium*) and in the second part – to Mary as an ideal to be imitated by the faithful (*Imitatio*).

In the "Introduction," the author explains why, out of the extremely rich range of Marian invocations, he decided to focus mainly on two of them, i.e. *mediatrix* and *adiutrix*. He therefore pointed out that "Mary

as a mediator, co-redeemer, guardian, defender, to whom one should resort in times of need and danger, are the most frequently repeated motifs in preaching.” The choice of the source basis was dictated by its significance for the formation and dissemination of the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, this significance did not translate into researchers’ interest, because so far there have been few studies devoted to Marian preaching texts. It should also be emphasised that they mainly concerned dogmatic and liturgical issues. The issue of the current state of research in both Polish and foreign humanities is discussed exhaustively by the author of the monograph in the “Introduction.”

In the first part, following Piotr of Miłosław, the author examines moralising scenes presented in sermons, explains the sublime names, invocations and titles of Mary, and presents the virtues and graces attributed to her. This part is an almost complete compendium of medieval Marian apologetics. In the opening chapter, with the telling title “The Shield,” the image of Mary the defender, guardian and mediator is drawn – following the words of the preacher. Some of the issues discussed in it were already raised by the author in an article published over ten years ago.<sup>2</sup> The same applies to the remaining chapters, in which one can find echoes of Bracha’s earlier publications on preaching and Marian piety.<sup>3</sup> Based on a wide range of comparative source material, including iconography, the author explains in the first chapter the meaning of allegories and invocations of Mary appearing in sermons as, among others, refuge, as a shield protecting against demons (*scutum*) and as a wand (*virga*). The author shows how speculations from the Christian

<sup>2</sup> Krzysztof Bracha, “*Tutissimum scutum* w kazaniach maryjnych z tzw. kolekcji Piotra z Miłosławia (II poł. XV w.),” in *Sic erat in fatis. Studia i szkice historyczne dedykowane Profesorowi Bogdanowi Rokowi*, 2 vols, ed. Elżbieta Kościak, Rościław Żereklik, Piotr Badyna and Filip Wolański (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2012), I: 127–148.

<sup>3</sup> Krzysztof Bracha, “*Vires herbarum*. O właściwościach ziół w tradycji średniowiecznej,” in *Człowiek i przyroda w średniowieczu i we wczesnym okresie nowożytnym*, ed. Wojciech Iwańczak and Krzysztof Bracha (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), 173–194; Idem, “Maryjny ideał pobożności w kaznodziejstwie polskim późnego średniowiecza,” in *Staropolska literatura dewocyjna. Gatunki, tematy, funkcje*, ed. Iwona Dacka-Górzyńska and Joanna Partyka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2015), s. 63–78; Idem, “O poczęciu i dziewictwie Marii w kaznodziejstwie polskim późnego średniowiecza,” in *O przeszłości. Czasy, miejsca, ludzie. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana Profesor Jadwidze Muszyńskiej*, ed. Waldemar Kowalski (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, 2016), 123–135.

mysticism of the holy names of Mary were translated in the sermon into specific practices related to them, aimed at, for example, effectively expelling demons. He inscribes the sermon of Piotr of Miłosław into the rich tradition of Christian thought, and at the same time identifies those elements that should be associated with unofficial religiosity, which particularly corresponded to the preferences of simple believers.

Elements from the sphere of Marian folklore dominate the next two chapters, devoted to the holidays of the Purification and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is evidenced by the titles of the chapters: “Gromniczna” and “Zielna,” i.e. the Polish names of both holidays, in which the native customs and practices related to them resonate. The author expertly explains the etymology of the Polish, or more broadly Slavic, names of holidays and the history of both celebrations and the customs related to them. Analysing the sermon discourse, he precisely indicates how the preacher referred to temporal, extra-liturgical practices from the sphere of folk customs. Finally, in the context of individual holidays and customs, he traced the subsequent versions of the Marian image, in which she appears as a remedy for all evil and misfortune.

The second part of the book reviewed here is devoted to another topic strongly exposed in Marian sermons, namely Mary as the ideal woman, a model of purity. In the first chapter of this part, entitled “Pure,” the author traces how complicated dogmatic and philosophical issues of immaculate conception, holy conception and perpetual virginity of Mary were presented in sermons by Piotr of Miłosław. It must be admitted that due to the limited perceptive capabilities of the intended recipients of the sermons, i.e. simple believers, laypeople, the preacher did not delve too deeply into the dogmatic complexities. Instead, the author presents how Peter explained hermetic content using more down-to-earth comparisons closer to the faithful.

The last chapter presents the Marian moral model proposed to the faithful in sermons. The figure of Mary served to model behaviour in everyday life, especially in relation to women of various states. The author cites scenes from the life of Mary outlined in the sermons, which were to show how women should behave in specific situations. The image of Mary thus constructed consisted not only of a model of piety, but also of a model of social attitude, referring in many elements to the monastic lifestyle. The author points out that although the criticism of women’s behavior presented in the sermons easily revealed

the misogyny typical of medieval literature, it was the figure of Mary who broke this narration and served to ennoble women.

To sum up, it should be emphasised that despite the enormous achievements of Mariological studies, Marian preaching remains a niche area of research interest. In this respect, the reviewed work makes a significant contribution and opens up prospects for intensifying the research on Marian sermons. The author himself stipulates that the publication should be a starting point for further studies based on a broader source base, which could, among other things, show the polemical echoes of the Marian cult in Polish medieval preaching. He also indicates the opportunities that Marian sermons create for in-depth research on female piety and the role that Marian ideal played in shaping it.