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Family law of the Piast Poland - analysis of the sources

Prawo rodzinne w Polsce piastowskiej - analiza źródeł

The subject of the article are legal conditions of the family functioning in the light of selected Polish sources until 1320. The main aim of the work was to present the family as a basic social group, the principles of creating it and the inter-dependencies. Within the framework of the undertaken research survey of the family rights in the Middle Ages, the author concentrated mainly on the following issues: the principles of arranging marriages, the ways and forms of contracting marriage, the importance of marriage and the relations between spouses; the structure of the family, its functions, as well as the external factors influencing its functioning in the society. The chronological framework of the work closes in the period of the patrimonial monarchy

of the Piast dynasty. The character of the sources is not without impact of the structure of the work, since the detailed or rudimentary treatment of an issue depends on the amount of information¹.

The research was focused on the period from the 10th until the beginning of the 14th century, due to the basic sources: the *Chronica Polonorum* by Gallus Anonymus²; the *Chronica Polonorum* by Vincentius Kadlubek³; *The Oldest Collection of Polish Laws*⁴, the so-called *Book of Elbląg*, and the *Book of Henryków*⁵. The *Chronica Polonorum* by Gallus Anonymus and the *Chronica Polonorum* by Vincentius Kadlubek are narrative sources presenting the medieval framework of family life. These works show

¹ J. Baszkiewicz, *Prawo rzymskie i prawo kanoniczne w kulturze politycznej Polski XIII i XIV stulecia*, in *Historia kultury średniowiecznej w Polsce. IX Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich w Warszawie 13-15 września 1963. Referaty*, ed. A. Gieysztor, Warszawa 1963, 80-99; S. Wielgus, *Prawo w średniowiecznej Europie Zachodniej oraz średniowiecznej Polsce*, in *Prawo polskie. Próba syntezy*, eds. T. Guza, J. Głuchowski, M. R. Pałubska, Warszawa 2009, 3-38; A. Vetulani, *Z badań nad kulturą prawniczą w Polsce piastowskiej*, Wrocław 1976; J. Sondel, *Ze studiów nad prawem rzymskim w Polsce piastowskiej*, Kraków 1978.

² Anonim tzw. Gall, *Kronika polska*, eds. R. Grodecki, M. Plezia, Wrocław 2008; Anonima tzw. Galla *kronika, czyli dzieje książąt i władców polskich*, ed. K. Maleczyński, in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica, series nova*, Vol. 2, Kraków 1952; *Gesta Principum Polonorum. The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, eds. P.W. Knoll, F. Schaer, T. N. Bisson, Budapest 2003.

³ Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek), *Kronika polska*, ed. B. Kürbis, Wrocław 2008; *Mistrza Wincentego zwanego Kadłubkiem Kronika Polska*, ed. M. Plezia, in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica, series nova*, Vol. 11, Kraków 1994.

⁴ *Najstarszy Zwód Prawa Polskiego*, eds. J. Matuszewski, J. Matuszewski, Łódź 1995; see *Najstarszy Zwód Prawa Polskiego*, ed. J. Matuszewski, Warszawa 1959.

⁵ *Księga henrykowska*, ed. R. Grodecki, Poznań-Wrocław 1949.

moralistic features and refer mainly to the sphere of royal family life, although they also mention lower classes of the society. In order to supplement the information on the Polish family in the Middle Ages, the Author also paid attention to the peasant family. A positive and a negative family models were presented in the light of the outlined sources. Political changes did not bring fast changes in the social structure, particularly in its fundamental unit - the family. This was being formed in the course of long time and existed in its form, undergoing slow transformations on the basis of the common law. Although the sources of laws of the state monarchy, e.g., the Statutes of Casimir the Great or the Warta Statute, include provisions which prove the evolution of legal and family institutions, yet, this evolution was slow, with no impact on the essence of these institutions, formed during the period of the patrimonial monarchy. However, the social, cultural and economic changes influenced family life. In the work the town laws or rural laws based on German models were omitted. The sources of these laws, mainly court books, generally come from the 15th century and, therefore, are outside the period covered in the thesis. The territorial scope of the work is indicated by the borders of the Polish state in the period of the Piast dynasty.

The *Chronica Polonorum* by Gallus Anonymous belongs to the Polish literature

despite being originally written in Latin⁶. Although its author was not Polish, he wrote his work in Poland. Supposedly, it was initiated by Prince Bolesław the Wrymouth and his circle. The chronicle was translated by Roman Grodecki, with the critical comment by Marian Plezi. It probably came into being in the years 1112-1116. It includes the wealth of historical material which, to some extent, can be the basis of knowledge of the law and structure of Poland from the 9th century until the beginning of the 12th century. Gallus was not particularly interested in legal issues and his use of legal works has not been proven. It also refers to his use of classical literature. Nevertheless, he was familiar with the common law and had elementary knowledge of the church law. While describing individual people and events, he referred to the categories of the statute law and the common law⁷.

The *Chronica Polonorum* by Master Vincentius is recognised as the first Polish monument of the medieval legal and political thought, hence it is a political and historical treaty in which the problems of law supplement the story of presented events⁸. Kadłubek constructed the principal foundations of the oldest history of Poland, introducing the mythological history of the empire of Lechites - Poles into the ancient world. He placed the beginnings of the Polish culture as early as in the Roman and Greek

⁶ *Gallus Anonymus and his chronicle in the context of twelfth-century historiography from the perspective of the latest research*, ed. K. Stopka, Kraków 2010.

⁷ W. Sawicki, *Terminologia prawnicza kroniki Anonima-Galla w świetle instytucji obcych i rodzimych*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin - Polonia” Sectio G, 17(1970), z. 1, 1-23; W. Sawicki, *Wpływ niektórych praw obcych na ustrój prawny państwa pierwszych Piastów (wiek XI-XII)*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin - Polonia” Sectio G, 11(1964), z. 2, 29-62.

⁸ O. Balzer, *Studium o Kadłubku*, Vol. 1, Lwów 1934; J. Skomił, *Z problematyki własności w „Kronice polskiej” Wincentego zwanego Kadłubkiem (ok. 1150-1223)*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 56(2004), z. 1, 177-183.

period⁹. Kadłubek saw the superiority of the Roman law over the Polish common law. He did not reject the unwritten law based on tradition and custom. He strove towards the complementarity of law, using the ancient law where it could be applied, but he did not demand that the Polish law be replaced by its rules¹⁰. Vincentius, through his chronicle, tried to clear the way for the Roman law to permeate into the Piast Poland. In his work there are numerous acquisitions (borrowings) both from the Roman law as well as from the canon law¹¹.

The *Book of Elbląg*, i.e. *The Oldest Collection of the Polish Laws*, is a private collection made by an unknown writer in German, for the needs of the Teutonic Order under whose rule lived Polish people. Considering the time of its origin, it is the second oldest Slavic relic of law, after the *Rysskaya Pravda* ("Russian Justice"), written over a hundred years before the Statutes of Casimir the Great. The *Book of Elbląg* consists of unnumbered articles which were divided by editors into 29 articles, the last of which is unfinished. The place of origin of the *Book of Elbląg* was probably the territory of Polish lands of the Teutonic state. The principle of personality of law observed by the Teutonic jurisdiction guaranteed

the use in practice of Polish common law for Poles¹². The collection includes legal institutions having been in use much earlier than the writing of the book took place, before 1320. In many cases it had already been archaic: trial by combat (judicial duel), trial by ordeal with the participation of the clergy (forbidden in 1215 by Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council) or a clearing oath. *The Oldest Collection of Polish Laws* is an indispensable source of knowledge about early medieval, private and legal, relations¹³.

The *Book of Henryków*, i.e. *Liber fundationis claustris Sanctae Marie in Heinrichow* was preserved as a work divided into two books and the supplement, the oldest catalogue of bishops of Wrocław¹⁴. Around 1270 Peter, the third abbot of the Monastery in Henryków, described the history of the foundation of the monastery and its possessions. In its chapters he included the history of each of several villages or settlements (Polish: *żreb*) being the property of Henryków. Book II was continued until the end of 1310. The purpose of writing the *Book of Henryków* was to make a description of the property together with the information on legal relations which led to the endowment, as well as the preparation for effective defence of monastery property

⁹ A. Vetulani, *Prawo kanoniczne i rzymskie w Kronice mistrza Wincentego*, „Studia Źródłoznawcze” 20(1976), 35-45; see A. Vetulani, *Z badań nad kulturą prawniczą w Polsce piastowskiej*, Wrocław 1976.

¹⁰ B. Nowacki, *Poglądy prawno-polityczne w „Kronice” mistrza Wincentego*, in *Mente et litteris*, Poznań 1984, 127-134.

¹¹ B. Kürbis, *Jak mistrz Wincenty pisał historię Polski*, in *Mistrz Wincenty Kadłubek. Człowiek i dzieło, pośmiertny kult i legenda. Materiały sesji naukowej - Kraków, 10 marca 2000*, ed. K.R. Prokop, Kraków 2001, 59-78; M. Plezia, *Kronika Kadłubka na tle renesansu XII wieku*, „Znak” 14(1962), 978-994; M. Plezia, *Mistrz Wincenty zwany Kadłubkiem*, in *Pisarze staropolscy. Sylwetki*, ed. S. Grzeszczuk, Vol. 1, Warszawa 1991, 93-131.

¹² Vetulani, *Niemiecki spis polskiego prawa zwyczajowego. Uwagi źródłoznawcze*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 5(1953), 180-197; A. Vetulani, *Nowe wydanie niemieckiego zwodu prawa polskiego*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 12(1960), z. 2, 195-232. See S. Płaza, *Z badań nad wykładnią Prawa Polaków*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 14(1962), 83-137.

¹³ J. Matuszewski, *W sprawie śląskiego pochodzenia najstarszego spisu prawa polskiego*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 5(1953), 198-205; J. Matuszewski, *Normy recypowane i rodzime w Najstarszym Zwodzie prawa polskiego*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 22(1970), z. 2, 187-224.

¹⁴ J. Matuszewski, *Najstarsze polskie zdanie prozaiczne: zdanie henrykowskie i jego tło historyczne*, Wrocław-Łódź 1981, 23.

rights (against the right to retract)¹⁵. It is a source of knowledge of the old law of the Piast Poland. It is not a record of laws but it gives a description of its functioning, besides a thorough and precise presentation of the monastic property and its development. It also provides information on the right to the land of particular groups of its holders and describes the fate of villages, settlements (Polish: *żrebia*), forests, fields and people connected with them. This work is a source of private law allowing to investigate the process of formation and development of the Polish civil law. It includes the information on sales, exchange, donation between the living, and in the event of death, testament and lien. It was the will of the ruler and the interested parties themselves that had an impact on the development of civil law. The *Book of Henryków* proves that in the Piast Poland it was possible to defend one's interests through litigation¹⁶.

Chronica Polonorum by Gallus Anonymus, is considered the first important work of Polish history and literature. It came into being in Poland prior to the fragmentation of Poland during the reign of Bolesław the Wrymouth. The second source is the *Chronica Polonorum* by Vincentius Kadłubek. It is the first work written by a Pole. The next source is the earliest preserved collection of provisions of the common law, written for the needs of the Polish population under the rule of the Teutonic Order, i.e., the *Book of Elbląg*. The last source described is the *Book of Henryków - Liber foundationis claustris*

Sanctae Marie in Heinrichow. Its first author was Abbot Peter (1259-1269), and it was continued until 1310¹⁷. It includes the history of the property of the monastery together with its legal rights and information about the institutions of the private law (including the right of relationship, i.e. *ius propinquitatis*).

The legal autonomy of a family stems from the roots of Christian science and the doctrine of the canon law and Roman law connected with it and, in particular, the problem of adoption, the rite of the first haircut (Polish: *postrzyżyny*) and upbringing. This family is the type most often featured in the sources and is the link between the public and legal order and the basic unit of social life. On the one hand, it is part of the order of the dominion, on the other hand, it includes those values which should exist in every family.

The *Book of Henryków* and the *Book of Elbląg* are the sources of knowledge of the law of the Piast Poland. The first is not a collection of laws but a description of their functioning. Beside a detailed presentation of the development of the monastic property, it provides some information on the right to the land of individual groups of its holders. Whereas *The Oldest Collection of Polish Laws*, i.e. the *Book of Elbląg*, is a private collection, made by an unknown writer. The *Book of Elbląg* records a set of rules which the author of the collection did not create but recorded the common law existing on the Chełmno Land before the coming of the Teutonic knights. In both of the analysed sources there is a term „*ius Polonicum*”. In both sources

¹⁵ P. Górecki, *A Local Society in Transition: The Henryków Book and Related Documents*, Toronto 2007, 1-13.

¹⁶ J. Falenciak, *Studia nad prawem rzymsko-kanonicznym w „Księdze henrykowskiej”*, Wrocław 1966, 66.

¹⁷ W. Uruszczak, *Władza książęca, wieće sądowe i prawo własności na Śląsku w XIII w. w świetle Księgi henrykowskiej*, „Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne” 14(2002), z. 1, 85.

this law clearly differs from the German law. Whereas the *Chronica Polonorum* by Gallus Anonymous and the *Chronica Polonorum* by Vincentius Kadłubek (at the turn of the 12th and 13th century) are the narrative sources also showing the medieval structure of family life. These works show moralistic features and refer mainly to the sphere of life of the monarch family. Narrative sources refer to the legal conditions of ruling elites, while the judicial sources refer to socially wider issues. The regulatory law is to permanently and explicitly protect the family. According to Master Vincentius, the beginning of the legal order of the state is established by Krak, while the second beginning of the legal order is established by Bolesław the Brave¹⁸. In the opinion of the chronicler, the Roman law does not enter the virgin land but is supported by the Polish common law, whereas Christianity overlaps the natural law of the Slavs. The fundamentals of the family law stem, on the one hand, from the common law, the canon law under reform and the rediscovered Roman law. Master Vincentius introduces the term "Republic" (Latin: *res publica*) as the order, the legal and public system, represented by the centres of church authority, as well as state authority, and accepted by the population as just, defining its historical existence and being its common good. The chronicler speaks about the origins of the Polish law in terms of the state law and the public order, regulated by the monarchy. Here, one cannot underestimate

the chronicles by Gallus, who describes the relationship between a husband and a wife (on the example of Bolesław the Brave), the example of the relationship between a son and a father (Zbigniew and Bolesław to their father Władysław Herman) and their fraternal relationships. Kadłubek broadens the subject of family relations in the Piast family and this elaboration has an ideological foundation. It is connected with a specific vision of the state. The chronicler relies on all types of sources and, simultaneously, includes his arguments in the system of norms and ethics. He records local traditions and, simultaneously, treats the Polish law as the equivalent of, and having the value of the Roman law. For the first time the political and legal thought of Vincentius Kadłubek enacts the basic principles of national sovereignty where the source of authority is the nation, understood as all the citizens (families) in general. In patrimonial monarchy each social group was responsible for fulfilling the obligations of its state and the common obligation to defend the mother country. Rulers were bound by the law and limited in their actions by the social factor protecting the public order and justice. The society has the right to denounce their obedience to the unjust ruler - the tyrant. Whereas the ideal ruler should be endowed by the nobility of his virtues, a set of duties and moral obligations defined by public order and, in particular, with the concern for the good of every family. From the narration of both Gallus Anonymous

¹⁸ A. Lis, *Mistrz Wincenty Kadłubek - ojciec prawa w Polsce? (The master Wincenty Kadłubek - the father of law in Poland?)*, in *Prawo w Europie średniowiecznej i nowożytnej*, ed. A. Lis, Lublin 2011, 91-117; A. Lis, *Homo literatus. Studia poświęcone Wincentemu Kadłubkowi w 250. rocznicę beatyfikacji*, lublin - Stalowa Wola 2014; J. Sondel, *Wincenty zw. Kadłubkiem jako apologeta prawa rzymskiego*, in *Onus Athlanteum. Studia nad Kroniką biskupa Wincentego*, eds. A. Dąbrowska, W. Wojtowicz, Warszawa 2009, 91-109.

and Master Vincentius, it can be concluded that the welfare of the nation, whose guard is a ruler, depends on the welfare of every family, both a noble one and the poorest, since every family plays an important role in the state organism. The authority of a ruler is, in the eyes of the chronicler, based on the law, whose teacher and guard is the Church¹⁹.

From the analysed sources it can be concluded that the character of a family in the medieval Poland differed, depending on the social group, the wealth, the ownership situation (collective ownership), tradition, region and many other factors. The most important functions of a family were: reproductive, economic, educational, cultural and protective functions. Human needs in the Middle Ages were realised mainly within the family. It offered support for its individual members and it assured safety. In the work the Author also emphasised the position of a woman as the co-creator of the household.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Polska piastowska, Księga henrykowska, Księga elbląska, Kronika Kadłubka, Gall Anonim

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STRESZCZENIE

Źródłem poznania dawnego prawa Polski piastowskiej są przede wszystkim *Księga henrykowska* i *Księga elbląska*. Pierwsza nie jest spisem prawa, lecz daje opis jego funkcjonowania, prócz dokładnego przedstawienia rozwoju majątku klasztornego, przekazuje informacje o ówczesnym prawie do ziemi poszczególnych grup jej dzierżycieli. Z kolei *Najstarszy Zwód Prawa Polskiego* tzw. *Księga elbląska* - jest spisem prywatnym dokonany przez nieznanego pisarza. *Księga elbląska* rejestruje zespół norm, którego nie stworzył autor zwodu, lecz spisał prawo zwyczajowe istniejące w ziemi chełmińskiej przed przybyciem Krzyżaków. W obydwu analizowanych źródłach występuje określenie „ius Polonicum”. Prawo to w obu źródłach odróżnia się wyraźnie od prawa niemieckiego. *Kronika polska* Galla Anonima oraz *Kronika polska* Wincentego Kadłubka (przełom XII i XIII wieku) to z kolei źródła narracyjne ukazujące między innymi średniowieczny schemat życia rodzinnego. Dzieła te posiadają cechy moralizatorskie i odnoszą się głównie do płaszczyzny życia rodziny monarszej. Źródła narracyjne dotyczą prawnych uwarunkowań funkcjonowania elit władzy, z kolei źródła jurydyczne dotyczą już spraw szerszych społecznie.

¹⁹ A. Lis, *Rodzina w monarchii patrymonialnej - analiza historycznoprawna*, in *Rodzina. Powołanie - zadania - zagrożenia*, Stalowa Wola 2014, 91-118; A. Lis, *Studies on the legal culture of the 13th and 14th century - the Book of Elbląg and the Book of Henryków*, „Przegląd Prawno-Ekonomiczny” Nr 23 (2/2013), 5-12; A. Lis, *Świadectwa kultury prawnej w Polsce do 1320 roku*, „Przegląd Prawno-Ekonomiczny” Nr 24 (3/2013), 44-55.

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NOTA O AUTORZE

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