

Summary

Dux fabulosus. On Historical Tradition Surrounding Leszek Czarny from „Gesta Lestkonis” to the Works of Bartosz Paprocki

The starting point for this book is the question Professor Henryk Samsonowicz asked me many years ago: Why prince Leszek the Black, who was one of the many Polish princes of the period of the greatest political fragmentation of Poland in the second half of the 13th century and was not politically successful, in the 16th century began to be considered one of the greatest creators of knight families in the history of Poland? It was particularly evident in Bartosz Paprocki's *Nest of Virtues*, published in Cracow in 1578. The issue is even more interesting as the sources well-known in the 16th century say that the knights from the Lesser Poland revolted against Leszek the Black. The prince succeeded in suppressing the rebellion thanks to the support of the Cracow burghers and military help of the Hungarian king.

In my opinion, to answer the question about the reasons for such good judgement of Leszek the Black's actions in the 16th century, it is necessary to examine the formation of historiographical tradition from the times in which he lived to the end of the 16th century. Therefore, this book is conceived as a source study of subsequent versions of Leszek the Black's story, which appeared within three hundred years from his death. I compare them with each other in order to understand the meaning of changes in some threads and the duration of others. I often combine narratives about Leszek the Black with other sources to understand literary structures used by the authors. I also search for historical circumstances which shaped the image of Leszek the Black.

In the first chapter I explore the narrative which – taking into account the whole historiographic tradition devoted to Leszek the Black's deeds – did not play a significant role. What I mean is the story of his rebellion against his father from the 14th century *Chronicle of the Greater Poland*. Neither Jan Długosz, the most eminent Polish chronicler of the 15th century, nor any of the 16th century chroniclers linked it to other threads in the story of the prince. I attempt to explain why this happened. The whole first chapter tests the method, which allows to determine what is important for the growth of Leszek the Black's importance in the 16th century. In the second chapter I use the sources from the Lesser Poland in order to look at the notes concerning the relationship between the Prince of Sieradz and his wife, princess Gryfina.

It allows to see a clear contrast between the notes on marital life – either very laconic or unfavourable to the Sieradz ruler – and panegyric stories linked to Leszek the Black's court in Cracow.

Moreover, in the reflections in the second chapter I allowed myself for digressions, resulting from an attempt to look at the analysed sources from the perspective of princess Gryfina, and the cultural context of her gender. This is encouraged by the historical uniqueness of the princess's conduct. Public accusations of her husband's failure to fulfil his marital duties juxtapose the image of Gryfina with the stories about Queen Rycheza. I am bothered by the question concerning the reasons why the annalist described the treatment of Gryfina and Leszek due to his impotence, after the reconciliation of the princely couple. I believe it can be answered showing stereotypical accusations against women in various medieval sources when the marriage was not consummated due to the fault of the husband. The second digression concerns the black legend of Gryfina, which, on the one hand, was built from the elements present in the black legend of Leszek (see Chapter 4), on the other hand, was a sum of typical misogynist prejudices.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the so called *Gesta Lestkonis*, i.e. a group of notes on the deeds of the prince, which may have come from an alleged historiographical text, written in the inner circle of the prince. The notes are best preserved in the *Annals of Traska* from the mid-14th century. To clarify them, it is vital to indicate convincingly the glorification of the ruler's deed in the source text. Various threads are intertwined in this fragment of my argument. It was essential to examine in detail the meaning of the story in comparison with knowledge about the course of events coming from other sources. It allowed to explore the topic of legal election to the Cracow and Sandomierz throne as a guiding idea for deprecating the pretence of the Halicz knyaz Lev to Cracow and to prove the wickedness of rebels who betrayed Leszek. This type of analysis was also used to explain the mystery of the two most extensive notes on the rebellions of the nobles and knights of the Lesser Poland in the *Annals of Traska*. The tradition of monumental victories of Leszek the Black, probably derived from *Gesta Lestkonis* and showing his extremely close relations with Cracow burghers is of great importance to the role attributed to the prince in the 16th century historiographical writings.

In Chapter 4 I look at the sources putting Leszek the Black in the bad light, mainly to explain why Jan Długosz painted such gloomy picture of the last years of Leszek's rule. In the context of the 16th century historiographical discourse, the allegation of over-favouring Germany is equally important. In Chapter 5 I return to the question asked by Henryk Samsonowicz. I attempt to show how different phenomena in the 16th century historiography were conducive to the appreciation of Leszek the Black. Of particular importance is the idea of the gallery of Polish kings and princes as a formula defining the structure of both the monumental and lapidary works on the history of Poland. Even more important seem the political ambitions of the Cracow patricians,

which resulted in a particular historiographical vision, whose first narrative expression was *Contenta*, a work published in 1521 by Decjusz, a German patrician from Cracow.

The analyses conducted in this book lead to the conclusion that the popularity of the prince in the 16th century would not be possible without the tradition formed and written most probably in his court office. The decision to tell about the ruler's deeds from his perspective in a strongly panegyric tone, turned out to be truly historic. On this basis Jan Długosz described the first half of Leszek the Black's rule in Cracow and Sandomierz as a series of great successes. Only when the rebellion of the Lesser Poland nobles was quelled in 1285, did the over-favouring of the Cracow Germans and the excessive thirst for revenge on the candidate of rebels, Konrad II of Mazovia, lead to the degeneration of the prince. Długosz formed the idea of a false crusade, which Leszek the Black was to lead to Mazovia instead of the pagans. God punished the prince with numerous misfortunes which fell on his country at the end of his reign. The worst of them was the Tatar invasion in December 1287.

The historians of the 16th century judged Leszek the Black less harshly. It resulted from several factors. Maciej from Miechów in his chronicle divided the history of Poland into the periods of rulers, taking into account the rule of Leszek the Black in Cracow. In this way the canon of Polish kings and princes was formed, which in fact led to a historical equalization of the rank of all monarchs functioning in it. This is particularly well seen in popular works presenting the achievements of rulers in a very short form. The appreciation of "king" Leszek the Black influenced both oral ancestral traditions and Bartosz Paprocki, who collected them. In a short poem, composed by the heraldist, which recapitulated the deeds of this ruler in the *Nest of Virtues*, the glory of military triumphs prevails the unjustly undertaken fight against Christians, mentioned in the last verse of the poem.

The most important factor in Leszek the Black's image was the rehabilitation of his goodwill towards the Cracow patricians. It was initiated by Decjusz, who presented the privileges of the Germans in Cracow as the greatest achievement of the prince, which was of fundamental and absolutely positive importance in the history of Poland. Therefore, for the city of Cracow, remembering Leszek's special favour became a historic argument in the fight for the equality between the privileges of the patricians and nobility and for the right to send representatives of the city council to the sejms. In the middle of the century, it made Marcin Bielski, the author of the first history of the world and of Poland written in Polish, believe that Leszek the Black ennobled all inhabitants of Cracow. In my opinion, this is why Bartosz Paprocki was convinced of Leszek's special merits in creating knight families. The strongest argument seems to be Bielski's interpretation undertaken by Paprocki in *The Heraldic Arms of the Polish Knighthood*, published in 1584.

Translated by Bożena Lesiuk