

**A SURVEY OF
POLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

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A SURVEY OF
POLISH LITERATURE
AND CULTURE

by

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Translated from the Polish by

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PREFACE

This book aims to present a general picture of the development of Polish literature, from its beginnings in the Middle Ages to the end of the Second World War, as seen against a cultural background which includes important historical and political events, the life of society, intellectual trends, education, and the arts. The main purpose of the book is to serve students and in part scholars not only in Polish, but also in the other Slavic literatures and in comparative literature. Since the study of Polish on the graduate level includes literature in the proper sense, social history, and culture, and since many literary historians are interested in cultural problems, it seemed desirable to give them at least general information about these subjects. This was done for purely didactic reasons, although not in accordance with the author's theoretical attitude concerning the autonomous character of literature and its development according to its own specific and to a large extent independent 'laws'. This is also the reason why the term 'literature' has been conceived, for the purpose of this book, in the broader sense, including not only poets, novelists, and dramatists, but also political, social, and moral writers, as well as historians and literary critics.

However, literary works in the strict sense are treated mostly from the literary point of view, and the choice of authors is based on their artistic significance and achievements. Literature, too, constitutes the bulk of the book, while historical and cultural developments are treated less thoroughly.

The present English version is by no means a simple translation of the author's *Literatura polska na tle rozwoju kultury* ('Polish Literature and its Cultural Background') published in New York by Roy Publishers in 1945. On the contrary, it is a thoroughly reworked and revised version of the Polish original adapted to the new purpose of the book and its new readers. Among other things, it is shorter, contains fewer excerpts and quotations from Polish (unavailable in English translation) and omits that material which would appear to be of little interest to the foreign reader. On the other hand, the English version is provided with more of

the usual scholarly apparatus, such as dates, bibliographical data, footnotes, as well as the views of other scholars on particular problems. The English version, of course, also takes into account all the new developments in both Polish and foreign critical literature during the past ten years.

The initiative for preparing this book is due to Professor Ernest J. Simmons, to whom the author is grateful also for his interest, encouragement, and valuable advice, as well as for a grant from the Department of Slavic Languages, Columbia University, to cover the expenses of the translation. The author wishes to express further his gratitude to the Stanwood Cockey Lodge Foundation for a subsidy to aid in the publication of the book in the United States; to Professor Cornelis H. van Schooneveld, Leiden University, who kindly accepted the volume for his series 'Slavistic Printings and Reprintings'; and to Mrs. Olga Scherer-Virski for its translation. Acknowledgements are also due to the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America for permission to reprint eight poems and excerpts from G. R. Noyes' *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz* (New York, 1944); to E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, for authorization to quote from *Pan Tadeusz* by Adam Mickiewicz translated by George Rapall Noyes (Everyman's Library, No. 842); to the Cambridge University Press for permission to include a quotation from Monica Gardner's *The Anonymous Poet of Poland, Zygmunt Krasiński* (Cambridge, 1919); and to Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., for authorization to print excerpts from Władysław St. Reymont's *The Peasants*, translated by M. H. Dziewicki (New York, 1925).

New York, February, 1956

M. K.

GUIDE TO POLISH PRONUNCIATION

PREPARED BY THE AUTHOR*

In Polish the accent falls as a rule on the penultimate syllable except in some words of foreign origin [matemátyka, fízyka] and in certain composed words.

VOWELS

- a as in father, arm: Asnyk, Anhelli.
- o as in horse, lord: Opaliński, Orkan.
- u as in true: Kubala, Ulana.
- ó equals u: Gomółka – Gomullka, Górnicki – Gurnitske.
- e as in met, end: Berent, Fredro, Zemsta.
- i like e in eve, be: Kiliński – Kelenske, Lipiński – Lepenske.
- y similar to English i in it or y in copy: Dygasiński, Irydion.
- ą similar to French om, on in comte, mon in some positions [Oda do wásów]; in others like Polish groups om, on: Dąbrowska – Dombrofska, Trąba – Tromba, Kołataj – Kollontaj.
- ę similar to French im, in [impossible, interdit], but replaced in the same conditions as ą by the Polish groups em, en: Świętochowski – Svientohofske, Porębowicz – Porembovetsch.

CONSONANTS

- c like ts or tz: Bohomolec – Bohomolets, Pac – Pats.
- d as in English except at the end of a word and before voiceless consonants: Norwid – Norvit, Chodkiewicz – Hotkievitsch.
- g as in gallant, gun except at the end: Strug – Struk, Ostroróg – Ostroruk.
- j like y in yard, yellow: Janicki – Yanetske, Jadwiga – Yadvega.
- l soft l like the French le, la.
- ł hard l [ll] like in will or pronounced like a labial u similar to the English w before vowels: Stanisław – Stanesllaf or Staneswaf, Łaski – LLaske or Waske.
- w like the English or French v, except at the end: Bolesław – Boleswaf and before voiceless consonants: Twardowski – Tvardofske.
- ć a soft c near to the English ch in much, but considerably softer; marked by an accent ['] or by an i before vowels: Rodoć, Cieszkowski [Ceshkofske]
- cz nearest to German tsch [Nietzsche]: Czartoryski – Tschartoryske, Karłowicz – Karllövetsch.

* This is very general and popular information dealing only with main problems of pronunciation, omitting many details.

- ck equals tsk: Mickiewicz – Mitskyevitsch, Słowacki – Sllovatske.
 ch equal h: Chmielowski – Hmyelofske, Mochnacki – Mohnatske.
 dż is d plus a soft ż: Dziady – Dżady, Rodziewicz – Rodżevetsch.
 ń soft n like French gn [Bagne, vergogne]: Pigoń [gne], Broniewski.
 ś soft s approximately like the English s in sure: Śniadecki, Sienkiewicz.
 sz like sh but harder: Szujski – Shuyske, Pan Tadeusz – Pan Tadeush.
 szcz . . . English sh and ch put together: Goszczyński – Goshchynske, Szczucka – Shchutska.
 rz like French j in jamais: Rzewuski – Jevuske; after voiceless consonants and at the end equals sz [sh]: Krzycki – Kshytske, Przybyszewski – Pshybshefske, Łaskarz – LLaskash.
 ź soft z: Zimorowicz – Z'imorovetsch, Zieliński – Z'elenske, Zyelenske.
 ż equals rz: Żeromski – Jeromske [Zheromske], Żółkiewski – Jullkyefske.

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**A SURVEY OF
POLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF POLISH CULTURE

The nucleus of Polish culture was formed at the time when individual Slavic tribes began to emerge from the proto-Slavic community, each with its own language, beliefs, and customs, and to settle in particular territories. This occurred in a very early period, and the process of formation was slow. We can give only approximate dates and very general information. We know that Europe was for a long time inhabited by an unknown people and that they were later replaced by the so-called Aryans, forefathers of all the Aryan peoples of Europe. In the course of centuries these primitive Aryans separated into individual groups of related tribes, among them the proto-Baltic group, from which eventually emerged the proto-Slavic group. The latter originally constituted a group with a common religion, language, and mores, traces of which may still be found in the languages and customs of the various Slavic peoples. This unity lasted for centuries, probably until the fifth or sixth century A.D. It was then that the individual Slavic tribes, among them the Polish tribe, began to form, and Polish culture dates from this period.

We learn most about the culture and life of prehistoric Poland from archaeology,¹ linguistics, and the information we have about the other Slavs; we suppose that the life of all the Slavs was originally similar in character.

The seat of the national ancestors of Poland was a country situated in the basins of the Oder, Warta, and part of the Vistula rivers, covered for the most part by tremendous forests and marshes, but with wide fields

¹ Especially from the excavations done since 1934 on the territory of Western Poland and Pomerania under the direction of Professor Józef Kostrzewski. The above presentation of the beginnings of Polish culture takes advantage of the findings collected in his book, *Kultura prapolska* (Poznań, 1947), and of Zygmunt Wojciechowski's *Państwo polskie w wiekach średnich* (Poznań, 1945).

and open meadows amidst the forests. It is from the word *pole*, *polana* ('field', 'plain') that the ancient name of the Poles, *Polanie* (later *Polacy*) is derived. Originally it designated only one of the Polish tribes, while the others took their names from rivers or territories, such as the Wislians from the Wisła (Vistula), Silesians from Silesia, Pomeranians from Pomerania, Kujawians from Kujawy, etc.

Racially they belonged to the so-called Nordic group, that is, they were characterized by tallness, an oblong shape of the skull and face, fair hair, and blue eyes.

Their chief occupations were farming, hunting, fishing, beekeeping, gardening, and cattle breeding. Their life was hard, like that of most primitive peoples who have to fight for their existence. Because they did not move from their original territory during the period of the Slavic migrations, they remained surrounded, though distantly, by Slavs and were cut off from contact with other peoples. This means that the Poles enjoyed for at least a few centuries a relatively peaceful existence.

There was a great deal of variety among their primitive settlements. The oldest were groups of little huts made of earth; these were followed by lake dwellings built on piles; the most numerous, however, were the villages with huts forming two rows along a main road or grouped in a circle. There also existed numerous towns (known since the seventh century A.D.), fortified like citadels and surrounded by palisades, which were used for the defense of the country and served as residences for the leaders of the tribes. Even in prehistoric times there may have been as many as one hundred and fifty such fortresses on Polish soil. Craftsmen and farmers settled around these fortresses. The construction of these settlements naturally advanced from the most primitive shelters dug in the earth to wooden houses, with windows and doors, consisting of two rooms with wooden floors and stoves. Wooden or iron keys were also known.

Food and clothing were probably the same as those known among the other Slavs. Vegetables, milk, and meat products were used, bread was made from stone-ground wheat, and sieves were also known. Salt had long been used for seasoning, as had vegetable and animal fats in cooking. Beverages, such as beer, bread alcohol, and mead were known to the Slavs. As for clothing, judging from linguistic and ethnographic information, we assume the existence of such materials as linen, wool cloth, and felt. These materials were used for shirts, kerchiefs, trousers, skirts, long russet coats, belts, fur coats, and caps. Various wool dyes were used. Shoes were made of bast, bark, or leather. There were many

adornments, especially for women, such as earrings, beads, necklaces, bracelets, pins, and rings.

The high level reached by the Polish crafts in the early Middle Ages, confirmed both by contemporary and subsequent foreign testimonies, must have been based on an earlier tradition. Evidences from the excavations and other sources indeed confirm the fact that the proto-Polish products were of a relatively high quality. In the beginning, every house owner was by necessity also a craftsman; but the profession of such crafts as those of the wheelwright, blacksmith, cooper, potter, carpenter, cobbler, goldsmith, tailor, or weaver began at an early date. Those early masters had special tools, some of which were of relative precision, a fact attested to by the production of wheels and carts, barrels of various shapes, dishes, pots, and especially objects of wrought silver. One of the most advanced crafts was shoemaking; the products of Polish cobblers were later known and highly appreciated in Western Europe. In France in the fifteenth century, shoes 'à la Poulaine' (*Pologne*) were worn; in England certain kinds of boots were called "cracoves."

The weapons of the time included bows and arrows, spears, battle axes, and shields. Armor was worn only by the retainers of princes; swords, which were of Frankish or Scandinavian origin, were worn by distinguished warriors. Methods for poisoning the blades of weapons were already known.

Rivers, river valleys, roads, and paths served for transportation. Dams, bridges, rafts, ferries, and canoes were used even in the oldest times. The Poles also used boats large enough to accommodate forty-four persons and two horses. Along these roads the people sometimes undertook expeditions to distant lands, for the purposes of barter, a type of commerce which was well developed in prehistoric times. The middlemen in the barter business were Slavic tradesmen, Vikings, and Jews, who were specialists in the slave and fur trade. The word *placić* (to pay) is derived from pieces of linen (*platy*), which was one of the most popular 'currencies' of the time. In the tenth and eleventh centuries large numbers of silver coins were already in circulation; mostly foreign coins, they were weighed, not counted by the piece. It was not until the second half of the eleventh century that Polish money appeared in larger quantities.

The Poles maintained their oldest commercial relations with the Avars and later with their successors, the Magyars, in the Hungarian plain, and with Kievan Russia, which furnished, among other things, helmets, amulets, and earrings. From the more distant East, with which the Poles had only indirect relations, bronze scales and later tropical fruits, spices,

and fabrics were imported. From Scandinavia and Germany came weapons, as well as bronze coins and dishes; from Bohemia came coins, ceramic products, and wool fabrics.

The wealth of the people at that time is demonstrated by the considerable quantity of silver objects found in excavations. In Wielkopolska (Great Poland, in the region of Poznań), over a hundred such treasures (sixteen to twenty pounds of silver) have been found; in Pomerania, ninety. In Podlasia (Eastern Poland) a treasure of Roman gold coins of the third century A.D. was discovered.

We have no direct information about either the religious beliefs or the general spiritual culture of the ancestors of the Polish nation. There are some accounts of the Pomeranians, Polabians, and Eastern Slavs from which we can deduce by way of analogy some general ideas of Polish religious culture. The Poles practiced a cult for the dead, which was performed in various ways: the so-called *stypa*, which has been preserved until the present day, was a feast which followed the funeral and involved games and wrestling 'to calm the souls.' Food and drink were offered to the souls of the dead, and heaps of straw or branches were burned to "warm" them. The *Polanie*, like other pagan peoples, worshiped both the good and the bad as unintelligible forces of nature. Generally speaking, the Polish Olympus was certainly less magnificent than that of the Greeks, the Romans, or the ancient Germans. There was the cult of Swarożyc, the god of the sun and of fire (a kind of Zeus or Perun, revered also by other peoples), and the cult of Dadźbóg, also a god of the sun. Possibly they also honored Pogwizd, a divinity of the wind. It is certain, however, that prayers were directed to the moon and the stars, and that rivers, lakes, springs, mountains, groves, and trees were believed to be inhabited by divinities. All nature was full of nymphs and various little goddesses, phantoms, ghosts, demons, and water sprites. These beliefs were connected with various magical practices and with a whole ritual to ward off and subjugate evil spirits. Many of these practices survive today in the form of superstitions, which are not confined to the simple peasants. This early world was mysterious, gloomy, full of fears and apprehensions, but probably it also was imbued with a carefree spirit, for the Slavs were later given the name of 'dancing slaves' (*sclavus saltans*).

Religious rites took place in groves, and they employed statues of divinities as well as altars. These rites consisted in prayers, offerings, prophecies, and common feasts. The worshipers offered to the gods the so-called first fruits: the first-born calves or lambs, the first sheaves of wheat, the first fruits, berries, and mushrooms, as well as mead, twisted

loaves, fish, and linen. They celebrated the holidays of autumn and spring (preserved until today in harvest-home parties and St. John's Eve bonfires). The winter holiday was called the 'feast' (*gody*), and it corresponded to the Christian Christmas.

The early Slavs, including the *Polanie*, had a conception of the universe that was similar to that of other primitive peoples. They imagined the sky as a kind of vault leaning against an enormous pole, and the earth as a disc floating on the sea. Time was measured by the position of the sun and the stars and the phases of the moon. The heavenly constellations were known, and many of their ancient names have been preserved in the language. The time of night was also measured by the crowing of cocks, the first cry indicating midnight, the second one or two o'clock, and the third dawn.

Whether the Slavs divided the year into months is a controversial question. The fact that today similar and even identical names designate different months in the several Slavic languages is attributed to climatic differences.

Measures of length were taken from the various parts of the human body, such as elbow (yard), span (the distance from the end of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger), foot, and step. Measures of volume were the pinch (what could be taken with two or three fingers), the handful, the bushel, the gallon (potful). Counting was done, as among other primitive peoples, on the fingers, from which the decimal system originated.

The ornaments made of wood and metals that have been excavated indicate a relatively highly developed artistic sense and a great deal of technical skill. Some painted and sculptured objects have also been preserved. Creative originality was revealed primarily by potters and goldsmiths; both pottery and gold work had reached a high level in Poland as early as the middle of the tenth century. Only ruins remain of the old temples, but from them we may deduce that in Pomerania their walls were painted and sculptured. As for the Christian architecture of the tenth and eleventh centuries, we know that there existed pre-Romanesque stone churches—rotundas with a central construction. The remains of a pre-Romanesque basilica have been recently discovered in Poznań.

Little is known about the music of the time. Byzantine, Arabic, and German sources from the seventh to the tenth century mention Slavic lyres or lutes, probably referring to the ancient instrument called the dulcimer. There is no evidence that viols existed, but we know that the Slavs used flutes, fifes (with side openings), bagpipes, horns, and drums made of wood covered with thin leather. Less is known about singing,

for none of the religious songs, and only a few of the traditional secular songs, have been preserved. Equally little is known of their dances, which, if one may judge from their later development, must have been numerous and varied in the earliest times.

There is one more characteristic phenomenon in the artistic culture of the ancient Poles. The fact that Polish poetry has no folk epic — a form which became the glory of the Germanic and Romance peoples, was represented in Russia by the *byliny* and the *Igor Tale*, and also flourished in Serbia — makes one believe that proto-Polish culture established no rich tradition in this genre.

The basic social unit was the family, which was led by the eldest man and included the sons and grandsons together with their wives and children. The words used to designate kinship originated in proto-Slavic or even proto-Aryan times and have generally been preserved until today: *ojciec* (father), *matka* (mother), *syn* (son), *córka* (daughter), *stryj* (paternal uncle), *wuj* (maternal uncle), *teść* (father-in-law), and so on. The same is true of such expressions as betrothal, marriage, dowry, and matchmaker. Many of the present customs connected with family life go back to these prehistoric times.

The family system was patriarchal; no traces of a matriarchal society have been found. Marriage was in principle monogamous. References in Arabic and German writings to the polygamy of the Slavs probably are to princes and magnates. The first Polish prince, Mieszko, had seven wives before he was converted to Christianity; Wracisław, in the twelfth century, had twenty-four wives. The husband's authority was unlimited, and punishment for a wife's infidelity was severe and cruel. A young married woman occupied a secondary position in the household until she gave birth to her first son. Every family celebration—birth, haircut (when a boy reached the age of seven his hair was solemnly cut), betrothal, marriage, or wedding — was associated with ceremonies, many of which have survived.

The old view about Slavic anarchy, that there was no organized power, has been proven erroneous. Although we lack written documents, certain remains in historical times plainly indicate that a certain clan organization existed and that the clan was the elementary nucleus of the social system. All free men belonged to a clan. This clan included people who held one ancestor in common, those women who entered the clan through marriage, and adopted persons. The leader of the clan was its eldest member, known as the 'elder' (*starosta* or sheriff); the highest power rested with the 'meetings' (*wiece*) of the male members of the

clans. These meetings, however, were less frequent among the Poles than among the other Slavs. The characteristic traits of the clan system were the common ownership of the land (originally); clan solidarity and common feuds; ancestor worship; and the internal structure of the clan, which subordinated the individual to the clan organization. As a social category the clan is older than the individual or even the family. There were also broader organizations, the so-called *opole*, which included several villages.

In time, the clan community began to be replaced by the family community. In connection with this gradual change began the hereditary use of part of the clan lands and the first signs of family and individual property. Such lands were probably distributed by drawing lots.

Thus the Polish tribe created certain forms of individual and social existence at a very early period; these forms became the foundation of its subsequent historical development. Originally this organization must have been quite loose, taking in clans and *opola* rather than whole tribes; whatever the details of this organization, it is certain that there was no anarchy. In a later stage the consolidation and strengthening of the polity was effected by the rise of princely power. Probably individual clans joined together, frequently under the threat of external danger, and in time of war elected a leader (usually an 'elder' of some clan), who sometimes became the founder of a princely dynasty. There is reason to believe that as early as the ninth century a state of the *Wiślanie* (Vistulans) existed and was ruled by a prince now unknown. This state was conquered in the same century by Great Moravia, but the trend toward the concentration of tribes and the creation of political organisms did not cease. The state of the Piasts, who were to govern Poland until 1370, must have been created in the same way, that is, by the unification of several tribes and their submission, perhaps enforced, to the power of one prince. It is not known exactly when this occurred, but one may surmise that it happened in the course of the ninth century. The first historical Polish prince was Mieszko, who is mentioned in a German chronicle of 963 as ruling over a relatively extensive and already organized state. It is certain, therefore, that this state had existed a long time before Mieszko; there are also some references elsewhere to his princely ancestors.

The hypothesis defended by some German historians (Schulte, Holtzman, Brackmann), that the Polish state developed as the result of a Norman conquest, is untenable. It is denied both by the names of Mieszko and his predecessors and by the structure of the Polish towns, which reveals no trace of any Northern influence. Furthermore, excavations

have yielded no significant objects of Norman origin, and there is a conspicuous lack of any Northern elements in the Polish language.

Primitive society in Poland was divided into castes. The social hierarchy was headed by a prince or *włodyka*, followed by a class of overlords who were the descendants of the 'elders.' Then came the warriors, followed by the peasants, and finally the slaves. The sense of clan solidarity was preserved among the overlords and knights, as may be proved by the so-called crests or emblems the clan groups held in common. The situation of the peasants, who originally were freemen, grew worse with time; from being landowners they gradually became land tenants.

The administration of the state was centred in fortified towns, which belonged to the prince, and was carried out by employees later known as castellans. The population under the government of each castellan was obliged to give tributes and services. There were whole villages obligated to service, in addition to prisoners' settlements. A smaller administrative unit was the *opole*, which watched over public security, made decisions in boundary disputes, and fulfilled other administrative functions.

Many ranks were created at the prince's palace — such as commander-in-chief (*wojewoda*), chancellor, cupbearer, master of the pantry, master of the hunt, sword-bearer, treasurer, standard-bearer — and these men constituted the prince's advisory council.

The national revenue originally came from tributes in crops and cattle, court fines, market fees, customs duties, sale of salt from the saltworks belonging to the prince, and war booty. The population was held for various public services, such as repairing fortresses, bridges, and roads, and guarding the village and the princely court. It also had to furnish carts, to serve the knights, and to pay church tithes.

Jurisdiction in the proper sense of the word was a later institution. In the earliest times, criminal matters and investigation of crime were settled by summary justice and by composition. There also were some forms of jurisdiction exercised by the clan councils, the 'elders,' or the *opole* leaders in cases of boundary disputes. Later the prince himself or his aids, the *żupans* (castellans), the *wojewodas* or judges, administered the law. In lands belonging to the knights or to the Church, the law was administered by the property owners. It was based on the common customary law and on the ordeal by fire and water. Punishment was generally very severe and ranged from the stocks to incarceration in dungeons, the cutting off of limbs, burning alive, decapitation, and crucifixion.

The defense of the state depended upon the fortresses. The knights were summoned by the so-called *wici*, a call to arms symbolized by passing a coil

of rope from one knight to another, or by burning fires on mountain tops. The army was formed from a mass levy, but there probably were also some permanent troops belonging to the prince. The army was divided into regiments, which possessed their own emblems, and the clans always remained together. Wars were conducted, as they have always been, in a cruel manner: the enemy lands were devastated and plundered, the population massacred, and prisoners taken. Such chroniclers as Thietmar, Mauritius, and Ibrahim write about the great valor of the Slavs and the Poles.

Cultural relations with other peoples were extensive, but they are known to us only from historical times. They were maintained by trade, princely marriages, the foreign clergy and religious orders sent to Poland, and finally by those who traveled in foreign lands. The Poles early had close relations with the Czechs, from whom they adopted Christianity. Mieszko's wife was a Czech, as were St. Wojciech (St. Adalbert), one of the first Polish Christian martyrs, and his brother, the first archbishop of Gniezno. It was from Bohemia that Poland received its first liturgical books and took the architecture of its churches and chapels as well as the organization of its army. Three quarters of the Polish liturgical vocabulary comes from the Czech language and, indirectly, from the German and Latin.

German influence was felt through Bohemia and Moravia, and also directly from Germany. It was reflected in church architecture and in the language, and increased at the time of German colonization (see p. 17). Poland had several German bishops and some Germans in the clergy and army. The first Piast monarchs traveled in Germany a great deal and some married German women.

Poland was tied to Kievan Russia from the earliest times by political and cultural relations. There were some disputes (over eastern borderlands, for instance), but there were also periods of friendship and mutual assistance between the Kievan and the Polish rulers. There were also some marriages between the Piasts and the Ruriks. Many trade imports came from Russia, to which Poland owed an improvement in the arts of ceramics and gold work.

Relations with Italy in this early period were limited mainly to the ecclesiastical sphere. When Poland was converted to Christianity, the Polish church was brought under the jurisdiction of the Holy See, and monks came from Italy. Jan, the first bishop of Wrocław (Breslau), was an Italian. The Cistercians as well as other orders and several bishops came to Poland from France. The first Polish chronicler of the twelfth century was the so-called Gallus Anonymus, a Frenchman. Even Ireland and Spain furnished Poland with monks.

Jews in pursuit of trade arrived sporadically in Poland as early as the tenth century; it was not until the eleventh century that they began to settle in larger groups and play an important part in the economic life of the country, becoming the bankers of the princes, tenants of the monopolies (saltworks and inns), and minters. There are some early Polish coins with Hebraic inscriptions.

Coins, silver, and various *objets d'art* came to Poland from the Arabs, and their chronicler Ibrahim also provides us with valuable information about primitive Poland.

Among the historical figures of this early period who played a certain part in the history of other peoples we should mention two women. Adelaida, sister or daughter of Mieszko I, married the Hungarian Geza, influenced his conversion, and brought up her son, St. Stephen; one of the daughters of Mieszko I was the mother of Canute the Great of Denmark, and she also won her husband over to Christianity.

CHAPTER II

EARLY LITERATURE AND CULTURE

THE TENTH THROUGH THE THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

The conversion of Poland to Christianity in 966 was of fundamental significance in the development of its culture. Mieszko I, the first historic Polish prince, embraced Christianity when he married the Bohemian princess, Dubrawka. Thus the young Polish state immediately gained access to the European family of Christian nations, enjoying with them equal rights at least in the moral sense. Furthermore, by adopting Christianity of the Latin or Roman rite in preference to the Greek, Poland came under the influence of the West rather than the East, in contrast to Russia and some of the South Slavic peoples. This was decisive for the growth of Polish culture, which is Western European in character; it does not mean, however, that the Poles did not absorb any eastern or northern characteristics. Such elements began to appear particularly after Poland had begun to expand toward the east and the north and to include into its political and social organism both Ruthenian, White Russian and Lithuanian peoples. There resulted the traditional and considerable differences between the Polonism of the Wielkopolska (Great Poland) and Małopolska (Little Poland, the southwestern part of the republic) regions on the one hand and Masovia (Central Poland) and the Lithuanian and Ruthenian territories on the other. National unity created through the centuries was in no way endangered by those differences, but this unity was always a 'unity in variety,' characteristic for Poland, and a source of great interest to foreigners who have known Poland closely.

Conversion to Christianity was relatively smooth in Poland, without any of the violent shocks or struggles which occurred among other pagan peoples. But the peasantry long preserved many of its ancient beliefs and ideas and translated the old attitudes into the new Christian forms. The spread of Christianity was made difficult by the fact that the clergy was, at first, necessarily foreign — chiefly Czech and German. Further, this

clergy, which had not yet been forced into a strict discipline, lacked the authority and influence which it later acquired. Nevertheless the Church played an essential part in the development of Polish culture in this early period. The founding of an archbishopric in Gniezno in the year 1000 made the Polish church independent of foreign influence, allowed a closer unification of clerical and lay powers, and raised the prestige of the Polish kings, who appointed bishops and had judicial power over them. The influence of the Church penetrated all branches of cultural growth: education, learning, writing, the fine arts, architecture, and music. Education was first organized in cathedral and parish schools, in collegiate churches, and in monasteries. The curriculum included reading and writing in Latin, grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric, and in higher grades music (mainly singing), arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The task of the schools originally consisted in preparing the pupils for a career in the church (a Polish clergy had to be created to replace the foreign), but in time secular subjects were taught in these schools and other youths, for the most part the sons of princely or lordly families, began to study. The teachers were almost exclusively priests, for they were the only educated men in those times.

The first monuments of architecture were cathedrals and monasteries. From the early, modest structures made of wood, there eventually evolved impressive stone buildings, adorned with sculpture and paintings. Of these early buildings, unfortunately, only traces remain, such as the vault of St. Leonard at the Wawel Cathedral in Kraków, the Cathedral at Łęczyca, the famous sculptured doors of the Płock and Gniezno cathedrals (from the twelfth century) and some fonts. Nonecclesiastical buildings of the time were made of wood, and nothing remains of them because they were all destroyed by fire. The stone St. Florian's Gate and the Barbican (part of the medieval fortification), still standing in Kraków, were built toward the end of the thirteenth century. The beginnings of painting are seen in the illumination of books and in the paintings on church walls. The beginnings of music also had a religious character; pupils in the schools were taught mostly liturgical music originating in the West, where music was already highly developed. Secular music for dancing, hunting, or war must have existed also, but was probably in a very primitive stage of development.

Polish writing originated in monasteries and chapters, where the earliest Polish annals were recorded. These records were a kind of calendar in which were noted, in a brief, almost laconic style, all the more important historic and dynastic events under their respective dates. The

oldest is the so-called *Rocznik Wielkopolski* (Annal of Wielkopolska) from the end of the tenth century, which is preserved only in a copy dating from the fifteenth century. The earliest original manuscript is the *Rocznik Świętokrzyski* (Holy Cross Annal) of the twelfth century. Among later annals the most important is the *Rocznik Kapituły Krakowskiej* (Annal of the Kraków Chapter), from the thirteenth century. Naturally, all the annals were written in Latin.

It was also in Latin that the first lives of the saints were written between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries. The life of St. Wojciech was written five times. St. Stanisław is honored with two lives composed in the thirteenth century. There also exist several accounts of the lives of other saints, Jadwiga, Salomea, Kinga, and Jacek.

Meanwhile a new and more highly developed type of historical record appeared in the chronicles, which give a continuous, chronological account of either the whole course of Polish history or of just one period. The oldest of these was written by one Gallus, whose real name is unknown. It consists of three books written in Latin around 1115, and it contains the history of Poland from the beginning of the Piast dynasty to the year 1113. The last editor of this chronicle, Julian Krzyżanowski,¹ points out the lack of balance in the distribution of the historical material and maintains that Gallus's work is a kind of 'Gesta of the three Bolesławs,' that is, Bolesław the Brave, Bolesław the Bold, and Bolesław the Wry-mouthed (see p. 17). He finds in this work certain similarities with the French epics of the twelfth century, because this chronicle is not only historical but also literary in character. Each book is preceded by an epistle, a kind of epic 'argument,' and is summarized in verse. We also find in it occasional poetic forms, such as 'cantilenes' and 'carmina.' Its prose is rhythmic and often rhymed. The author is distinguished by a considerable literary culture; he knew ancient and modern literature, both ecclesiastical and secular. In spite of its panegyric quality, his chronicle is of great historical value. Research has confirmed the fact that Gallus neither invented nor dressed up his material but reported accurately on people and events; he did not hesitate, for example, to call the Kraków bishop, Stanisław, who was killed by King Bolesław the Bold, a traitor, although subsequent tradition made the bishop a saint and condemned the king.²

In the thirteenth century a chronicle was written by a Pole, Wincenty,

¹ *Galli Anonymi Chronicon* (Warsaw, 1948).

² See Tadeusz Wojciechowski, *Szkice historyczne z XI wieku*, 3d ed. (Warsaw, 1951).

known as Kadłubek, who was born around 1160, studied at Paris, was first a parish priest, then bishop of Kraków, and ended his life as a Cistercian monk. His chronicle contains the history of Poland from its earliest beginnings to the year 1206, and it is completely different in character from Gallus's work. Its aim was not so much to present real historical facts as to give a moral object lesson. The didactic element is very strong; the historical narrative is frequently interrupted by moral examples taken from the history of other nations, fables, sententious remarks, and moral treatises. Morality is identified with Catholic doctrine and, more specifically, with obedience to the Church. An example of this may be found in the account of the quarrel between King Boleslaw the Bold and the bishop Stanislaw. Kadłubek blames the king for it exclusively, calling him a monster and the bishop a martyr.

Another characteristic of this chronicle is its tendency to color the facts, which makes us skeptical of many events reported in it. Kadłubek writes, for instance, that the Polish state was founded before the birth of Christ, that the Poles warred with Alexander the Great, and that one of the Polish princes married the sister of Julius Caesar. He also made use of folk legends as though they were historical truths.

Kadłubek's style is rhetorical and flowery, and the text includes several poems. His chronicle was used as a textbook for the study of rhetoric as well as ethics.

Of the other historical works written in the thirteenth century one should mention *Kronika powszechna* (The General Chronicle) by Marcin Polak, a Dominican brother and later archbishop of Gniezno, a similar chronicle by Dzierzwa (who lived in the second half of the thirteenth and at the beginning of the fourteenth century) and the so-called *Księga Henrykowska* (Book of Henryków), a history of the Cistercian monastery and its property in Henryków near Wrocław, which is an important source for the study of economic history in Poland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is also important for the study of the Old Polish language, for it contains the earliest sentence written in Polish and many Polish place names and proper names.

The early Middle Ages also enriched Polish culture with a unique song, written in the Polish language. It is a hymn *Bogurodzica dziewica* (Mother of God and Virgin), and it contains a plea to the Holy Virgin that she should win her Son to the side of men and send Him down to earth. The second stanza appeals to Christ and asks him to hear this prayer and to grant men a pious life on earth and salvation in heaven.

These are the two oldest stanzas of the song, the earliest copy of which

is kept in a Latin codex of 1467. The song itself, however, was certainly written much earlier, though it is impossible to fix the date exactly. The oldest hypothesis attributed it to St. Wojciech, placing it in the tenth century. Later scholars, however, were more cautious and shifted the date of the song to the beginning of the fourteenth century. Recently the date was again set in the earlier period, when Józef Birkenmajer attempted to revive the St. Wojciech hypothesis.³ T. Lehr-Spławiński subjected the language of *Mother of God* to a thorough scrutiny, showing that it contains linguistic elements of an earlier and a later period; he concluded that the oldest version must be dated at least as early as the first half of the twelfth century.⁴

Whatever the final conclusion may be, it seems certain that *Mother of God* was known and sung in the thirteenth century. The song is of great linguistic and literary significance. Its language contains expressions which are not to be found in the oldest Polish texts and illustrates therefore an older form of the language. The literary value of the work is high, and the style and versification are most impressive. The style is sublime, in the manner of medieval Latin and Greek hymns, with which *Mother of God* has a certain kinship;⁵ it is, furthermore, simple and expressive. The rhythmic structure of both stanzas, which may be considered as a single stanza in two parts,⁶ is elaborate for a medieval work and was unsurpassed in Poland before the time of Kochanowski (sixteenth century). The lines, which are of varying syllabic length, are divided by caesuras into two or three parts; the rhythm is emphasized by this distribution of caesuras and by the rhyme which is used not only at the end of the line but also internally with occasional assonances.

The song, moreover, possesses historic and national importance. Its popularity is attested by the large number of manuscripts in which it exists (four from the fifteenth century and fourteen from the sixteenth); in the fourteenth century it became the national anthem and was sung by Polish knights when they went into battle. By the sixteenth century it had lost its popularity, but it was still sung in churches even during the following century, and in the Gniezno Cathedral until quite recent times. The melody of *Mother of God*, written in musical notation on the oldest manuscript, is composed for one voice part and strictly modeled on the Gregorian chant.

³ *Bogurodzica dziewica* (Lwów, 1937).

⁴ *Uwagi o języku Bogurodzicy, Księga pamiątkowa dla uczczenia Ignacego Chrzyszowskiego* (Kraków, 1936).

⁵ See Birkenmajer, *Bogurodzica dziewica*.

⁶ Maria Dłuska, *Studia z historii i teorii wersyfikacji polskiej* (Kraków, 1948), I, 77, 78.

In the later manuscripts we find approximately twenty additional stanzas, of which only a few have any real place beside the first in subject matter and poetic value. Their linguistic forms also belong in general to a later period.

The oldest monuments of Polish prose, which are also from the thirteenth century, though the first copy is from the fourteenth, are *Kazania Świętokrzyskie* (The Holy Cross Sermons) so called because the Latin manuscript in which the sermons were found belonged at one time to a monastery in the Holy Cross Mountains (Góry Świętokrzyskie). In 1890 the distinguished Polish philologist, Aleksander Brückner, found them in the Imperial Library in St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, part of the parchment on which these sermons were written had been cut up into strips which were sewn into the binding of the manuscript. From over a dozen such strips which were saved it was possible to put together only a few pages of a larger original collection of sermons. On these pages we have three sermons which are probably complete (for the feasts of St. Michael, St. Catherine, and the Three Magi), and three more of which only the beginning or the end was preserved. It is possible to deduce that these sermons were composed according to a traditional medieval pattern: first the text from the Bible, which gave the subject; then an introduction in which the priest would tell in Polish from which part of the Bible the fragment was taken and explain it briefly; then the sermon itself, which paraphrases the subject, explains its significance, and draws a general moral lesson.

In the *Holy Cross Sermons* we find very old linguistic forms which are almost unknown in other Old Polish texts, such as the old imperfect and aorist tenses. The work also contains much useful material for the historical study of phonetics, etymology, inflection, and syntax.

The texts discussed above are not the first in which we find Polish words inscribed. Even in the Latin diplomas of the early twelfth century we find isolated Polish words. In 1136 a bull of Pope Innocent II to the archbishopric of Gniezno contained over four hundred Polish names, mostly those of persons and places. The same is true of the *Book of Henryków*, mentioned above, which contains documents issued by various popes and princes stating the privileges of bishops and monasteries, besides many juridical documents. Although they are less significant than the longer texts, they also provide valuable material for the history of the language, especially in phonology and etymology.

There is some meager material and an occasional historical reference to indicate that there must also have existed at this time some secular poetry, such as ballads, sung by wandering singers and jugglers who were called

by the German term 'Spielmann.' There was also some oral folk literature, such as wedding songs, including the old and immortal song about hops, the old harvest songs, various exorcisms and adjurations put into poetic form, and even some early legends about the Holy Virgin and the saints.

From the political point of view the Polish state had a checkered career during the first three centuries of its existence. Founded by Mieszko I, organized, fortified, and expanded under Bolesław the Brave (992–1025), it lost these acquisitions under his successor, Mieszko II (1025–34) and again rose to power during the reigns of Bolesław the Bold (1058–79) and Bolesław the Wry-mouthed (1102–38); after the death of the latter it broke up into parts as a result of the unfortunate division effected by the last Bolesław among his five sons. This marked the beginning of a period called that of 'quartered Poland,' which lasted until the unification of the country under one rule by Władysław the Short (Łokietek) at the beginning of the fourteenth century. For more than a century and a half Poland was not a political unity, although nominally the Prince of Kraków possessed sovereignty over the other princes. These princes fought between themselves, having no interests higher than their own provinces, and frequently succumbing, as in Silesia, to Germanic influence. The political prestige of Poland must have deteriorated at this time. The influence and power of the clergy and the lords was intensified, because every prince needed help in the domestic struggles of his own province.

At about this time the gentry class began to form from the knights and those freemen who still owned land; the burghers also were established as a class and enjoyed many privileges; urban culture began to prosper. The peasants were divided into three categories: freemen (with or without land), half-freemen or *glebae adscripti* (settled on church and knight lands and obliged to render services) and slaves (who descended from debtors and war prisoners); the latter made up the majority of the working class.

German colonization also dates from this period, and it assumed considerable proportions in some parts of Poland, affecting a transformation in the character of cities and rural areas. Attracted by the privileges to be had in the organization of new cities and villages, the Germans appeared in Bohemia and in Poland as early as the end of the twelfth century. They appeared in larger numbers towards the middle of the thirteenth century. Previously the Polish cities, or more specifically the settlements of enslaved workers who lived around the fortresses, had had neither organization nor autonomy. Now the princes gave them a judiciary and economic self-government, their own bailiffs and aldermen, German law, and partial exemption from tributes and services. The cities were reorganized and

built according to a fixed plan: in the center there was a square with a town hall and parish church, from which led a number of principal streets. The city was surrounded by a wall or a ditch with a palisade. It is certain that these new cities helped to improve the economic and cultural life of the country, to increase trade, crafts, and industry, just as the colonization of the countryside by the Germans increased its productivity. This affected only the principal cities and agricultural lands of Western Poland. Many German writers have written extensively about the civilizing role of German influence in Slavic countries. An objective judgment must recognize the many advantages brought about by German colonization, especially in the cities; but, on the other hand, it should also take into consideration the fact that the growth of Polish cities and the bourgeoisie was not the work of Germans alone, but that of the administration and the Polish population as well. The city owners, that is the princes and bishops, took an active part in the organization of their cities, and the city population was not composed of Germans exclusively, though at first they did play a dominant part. These German arrivals were assimilated in the course of the fifteenth century, and they became not only loyal citizens of the country but very often ardent Polish patriots. In the sixteenth century there were such outstanding Poles of German origin as Cardinal Hosius (Hose) and the historian, Kromer. In later years we find a long list of Polish scholars, statesmen, and patriots with German names, as (to mention only a few) Linde, the author of the first dictionary of the Polish language; Lelewel (Loelhoeffel), the most distinguished Polish historian of the nineteenth century; Libelt; Kremer; Estreicher, the author of the modern Polish bibliography; and Brückner, the distinguished philologist. Innumerable Polish families of German origin have continued to the present day to contribute much to the growth of Poland's civilization and to give a truly Polish character to the life of her cities. Like all other nations, Poland absorbed many foreign and kindred elements, such as the Ukrainian and Lithuanian. It was from the Lithuanian part of Poland that the greatest Poles were to come. This is evidence for the vitality and attractiveness of Polish culture, for a weak and undeveloped culture can never assimilate foreign or even related elements.

Further evidence of the vitality and resilience of Polish culture is seen in the fact that even in the early Middle Ages it never ceased to develop, if slowly, in spite of the unfavorable political conditions produced by the division of the country into principalities. In spite of this division the cultural ties between the provinces were maintained, and each of them contributed to the common cultural heritage.

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

In the fourteenth century Poland entered a period of gradual growth in both internal and external strength. This strength was established by three major developments: the unification under the rule of Władysław Łokietek (1306–33), the splendid administration of Kazimierz the Great (1333–70), and Poland's union with Lithuania. Kazimierz's merits were so remarkable that of all the Polish kings he was the only one who won the title of 'Great.' His services to the country include the codification of law in the Statute of Wiślica; the creation of a central administration; the imposition of military duty on every landowner; the incorporation of mercenaries into the army; the construction of approximately forty fortress towns, which defended the country from invasions; the walling of cities (hence the popular saying that the king had found Poland in wood but left it in stone); the stabilization of a sound currency; the assurance of a lasting peace, and the founding of the Kraków Academy. Another feature both of Kazimierz and of his successors' reigns was that they directed Poland's policy of expansion toward the East rather than toward the West to oppose the Germans; this change of direction greatly influenced the further development of the country and its society, pushing the frontiers farther to the east and then to the north. Later, however, this policy caused wars with Muscovy, inclusion into the Polish state of a great number of 'national minorities,' and, ultimately, wide expansion at the expense of internal consolidation and national unity. The union between Poland and Lithuania was a significant act which had far-reaching consequences; the first step toward this union was the marriage in 1386 between the Grand Duke Władysław Jagiełło of Lithuania to the Polish Queen Jadwiga of the Hungarian dynasty of the Anjou line. Initially this union was no more than personal, and Lithuania remained a separate state. Eventually, however, in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the relationship between the two states grew closer, until it culminated in the creation of a unified Polish-Lithuanian state by the Union of Lublin (1569). This was one of the few instances in history of the federation of two nations and the expansion of a country's territory by peaceful means. In addition to dynastic and political interests, such as the common cause against the Teutonic Knights and the creation of a powerful state, this union was also inspired by moral aims: the conversion to Christianity of pagan Lithuania and the expansion of Western culture to the east and north.

Among the other far-reaching political and social developments of the

period we should also mention the following: as early as the end of the fourteenth century the gentry secured its first privileges in the so-called Pact of Koszyce (1374), when it was exempted from all taxes and duties (except for a small amount per acre); it was then established that public offices in the country might be occupied only by persons who came from the locality in question, and that the gentry was entitled to special remuneration for taking part in wars conducted abroad. These exceptional privileges raised the gentry high above all other classes. They were followed by others, which were presented to every newly elected king for confirmation. The dynasty of the Piasts, which had reigned in Poland from the beginning of its historical existence, came to an end with the death of Kazimierz the Great in 1370. The first elected king was Ludwik the Hungarian, with whom the Pact of Koszyce had just been signed. His daughter Jadwiga succeeded, and finally Władysław Jagiello ratified the privileges of the gentry. He and Jadwiga founded the Jagiello dynasty which reigned until 1572.

The primary educational system continued as before in cathedral and monastery schools; the number of parish schools was increased, and by no means were all the students who graduated from these schools committed to a religious profession.

The most important factor in the growth of education was the foundation by Kazimierz the Great of the Kraków Academy in 1364. Until that date the Poles had had to go abroad to study; the majority went to Italy (Bologna, Padua), some to Paris, and others to Prague, where the university has existed since 1347. Kazimierz the Great conceived the project of organizing a school of higher learning at home, to supply among other things the need for educated lawyers to codify Polish law. To found a university in those days required the pope's consent, because in all universities the most important faculty was theology. The pope consented to the foundation of a university in Kraków, but he did not permit a faculty of theology, probably because of the insufficient number of qualified professors. That is why the academy as founded by Kazimierz the Great was not a full university and had only three faculties: law, medicine, and philosophy. Originally there were twenty-one chairs, eight of which were occupied by professors of law. The further growth of the Academy was interrupted by the death of the king, from whom it had derived its financial support. In 1397 the pope permitted the creation of a faculty of theology and Queen Jadwiga supplied the funds for the maintenance of a full university; in 1400 the formal foundation of the school was solemnized. The school has since been called the Jagiellonian University, and it is the

second oldest European university north of the Alps (if its date of origin is taken as 1364), for the University of Vienna was not founded until 1365.

The majority of the writings of the fourteenth century were still in Latin and included mainly religious works, sermons, and chronicles. In the latter genre there is the so-called *Kronika wielkopolska* (Wielkopolska Chronicle), by an unknown fourteenth-century writer, which describes the history of Poland from legendary times to the year 1271, and the *Kronika oliwska* (Oliva Chronicle), which is a history of the Monastery of Oliva, near Gdańsk (Danzig) up to the middle of the thirteenth century.

The most outstanding chronicler of this century was Janko of Czarńków, the son of a bailiff of the Wielkopolska region; a canon of Poznań and later archdeacon of Gniezno, he finally became vice-chancellor under Kazimierz the Great. He played an important part in the foundation of the Kraków Academy. His chronicle covers the period from 1333 to 1384, but it is chiefly devoted to the reign of Władysław the Short. It is in the form of a diary, in which the author notes contemporary events in which he personally has taken part. Hence his chronicle is important as being an authentic document, although it is only relatively reliable because the author does not try to conceal his personal sympathies, prejudices, and even hatreds.

The most important monument of the Polish language of this century is *Psalterz Florjański* (St. Florian's Psalter), so called because it was kept by the St. Florian Abbey near Linz in Upper Austria. Before the last war the Polish government bought it from the Abbey and deposited it in the National Library in Warsaw. In this we need not deal with mere fragments, such as the *Holy Cross Sermons*, for it is a long, parchment manuscript containing 297 pages, written in Gothic script and very beautifully illuminated. It contains the complete translation of the Psalms of David in three languages: Latin, Polish, and German. It is most likely a copy done towards the end of the fourteenth century of an earlier manuscript of the thirteenth century, but with the obsolete earlier forms replaced; for instance, only a few of the aoryst and imperfect forms remain.

Another valuable Polish text of this period is *Kazania Gnieźnieńskie* (the *Gniezno Sermons*), which are now kept at the Library of the Chapter in Gniezno. The manuscript of these sermons also comes from the end of the fourteenth century and may be considered as a copy of an older original. It contains 103 sermons in Latin and ten in Polish, which are written on 190 pages in large format. Of the Polish sermons four are Christmas sermons, two are about St. John the Evangelist, and the rest are devoted to John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, St. Lawrence, and

St. Bartholomew. These sermons are not original works, but rather adaptations or imitations of Latin sermons and legends, for instance, the *Legenda aurea* of Jacob de Voragine. The author is unknown, but the uniform style and tone suggest that all the sermons came from the same pen. The language is at least a half-century later than that of the *Holy Cross Sermons*, though it does contain some older words.

The Easter song in one stanza, *Chrystus zmartwychwstał je* (Christ Was Resurrected), may be considered a fourteenth-century work, and the poetic production of this period must in general have been much richer than the few pieces which remain to us. There are also some songs which cannot be dated accurately but which may have been created in the fourteenth century or in the first half of the fifteenth, for instance *Jezus Chrystus Bóg-człowiek* (Jesus Christ, God and Man). The same is true of the supposed remains of books which, according to Długosz, were read by Queen Jadwiga; these contain fragments of sermons, a fragment of the visions of St. Brigid, and the life of St. Błażej. Apart from these texts we have, as in preceding centuries, very many place and proper names in the Latin court accounts and other documents. The documents which are especially important for the historical study of the language are the formulas of court oaths, that is, brief testimonies of the parties and their witnesses, frequently written in Polish. They are dated and record the spoken language of the time, which often shows interesting dialectal peculiarities.

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The fifteenth century is occupied by the second half of the reign of Władysław Jagiełło (until 1434), the reigns of his sons Władysław of Warna (1434–44) and Kazimierz the Jagiellonian (1447–92), and the latter's son Jan Olbracht (1492–1501).

The first result of the Polish-Lithuanian Union was a terrible defeat inflicted on the Teutonic Knights by the armies of the two nations in the Battle of Grunwald (in Pomerania) in 1410. This victory was followed by others, as a result of which the Teutonic Knights lost the northern part of Lithuania. To the southeast the boundaries of the country now reached the Black Sea. The initial difficulties connected with the consolidation of the union (the opposition of Witold, Władysław Jagiełło's cousin, who aspired to the Lithuanian crown, the conflicts following his death, and the civil war in Lithuania) were subdued during the reign of Jagiełło's second

son, Kazimierz the Jagiellonian. After a difficult and long war, which lasted for thirteen years, this king finally fought it out with the Teutonic Knights and regained Pomerania together with Gdańsk, Marienburg, and Warmia; East Prussia remained within the Teutonic Order as a Polish feudal fief. Poland's relations with the Czechs and the Hungarians were friendly. Władysław of Warna, Jagiełło's elder son, was king of Hungary until his heroic death at Warna in a battle with the Turks. Later another Władysław, the son of Kazimierz the Jagiellonian, occupied both the Czech and the Hungarian thrones. In the East the situation was less favorable, because of Muscovy's policy of expansion and the Turkish occupation of the Black Sea coast toward the end of the century. The campaign conducted against the Turks by Jan Olbracht ended in defeat in Moldavia, and in 1500 a considerable part of the eastern provinces in Lithuania was lost to Muscovy's Ivan III.

The beginnings of Polish parliamentarism, which grew out of conclaves of the gentry known as dietines, took definite shape when the Diet (*Sejm*) and the Senate were organized as permanent institutions toward the middle of the fifteenth century. The Diet seated representatives of the entire gentry, elected by the dietines, while the Senate included secular and clerical dignitaries appointed by the king. Poland thus had one of the earliest parliamentary systems in Europe. The right of representation and voting at that parliament was, however, limited to the gentry, and the burghers were almost completely excluded from any part in it (they later had two representatives). Poland was becoming a country with a unique regime, for it had a king and was at the same time a 'republic' of a sort — a republic of the gentry, governed by the Diet, which gradually curtailed royal power and in reality combined both legislative and executive power. This polity was shown in a less favorable light in the later course of Polish history, but in its time the gentry estate, which represented 10 percent of the population, enjoyed liberty and freedom to a degree that did not exist elsewhere in western Europe, not to mention eastern Europe.

At the same time, the character of gentry society itself was changing. Having been formed from an old knightly class, it had hitherto preserved a chivalric character; the chief occupation of the gentry, their profession so to speak, had been the pursuit of chivalry, to which the whole education and life of a gentleman was devoted. With the change in economic conditions, the growth of culture, and the resultant increase in demands on a farming economy which expanded to meet these needs, the knightly gentry society gradually began to transform itself into an agrarian society. As Jan Kochanowski later complained, swords were turned into spits,

helmets became nests for chickens, armor served as containers for the horse's hay. Prosperity grew, the national income increased and was drawn chiefly from trade in crops and lumber (wheat went through Gdańsk to the distant countries of Europe), and the standard of living was raised. The gentry was drawn toward learning and the university, and as early as the fifteenth century it produced scholars of great stature.

In spite of the political handicaps imposed on the burghers, cities also grew in wealth and culture. Kraków in particular was distinguished by the number of its inhabitants and its wealth, its social and intellectual culture. Kraków was the equal of many cities in western Europe, possessing the courts of the kings, bishops and magnates, the palaces and stately homes of the rich gentry and burghers, and the University, which was the center of learning and the arts. The guilds contributed to the colorfulness of city life. They were organizations of craftsmen, the aim of which was to protect the professional interests of the crafts, to give mutual assistance, to care for the disabled, and to help with the military defense of the city. Each craft had its separate guild with its hierarchy of craftsmen (pupil, apprentice, master), its officers, its own buildings often remarkable for their beautiful architecture, its own patron saint and a chapel devoted to him. Kraków has preserved to this day certain streets — the Cobblers' Street, the Potters' Street — where the different groups of craftsmen used to congregate.

The church gained in both moral and material strength. It already had such distinguished representatives as Zbigniew Oleśnicki, bishop of Kraków and a cardinal, who fought for the independence of the Church and the superiority of its authority over the state; Trąba, the archbishop of Gniezno, and Andrzej Łaskarz, bishop of Poznań, took active part in the Council of Constance (1414–18) and won the high respect of the other representatives. This participation in the Council not only raised the prestige of the Polish clergy in the eyes of Europeans but also had a great cultural significance, for it helped to establish intellectual relations with the West and to bring Western learning into the country. Many valuable parchment manuscripts on different learned topics, which are now kept at the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, were brought to Poland at that time. Naturally, the entire clergy did not attain to such a high level of intellectual influence. We know from reports issued by the bishops themselves that they had to fight against ignorance, simony, immorality, and neglect of duties among the lower clergy.

The Jagiellonian University was at the peak of its development. The organization of the University differed greatly from that of the present day.

It was a kind of community of professors and students who lived together; frequently they shared the same quarters and dressed in the same kind of costume, rather like a cassock. There was not the differentiation that there is today, mainly because nearly every lecturer was at the same time a student who attended other lectures and was preparing to receive a higher university degree. After a two-year course a student could take a 'bachelor's' examination, and after another two years the 'master's.' The next degree was the doctorate. It frequently happened that a doctor of medicine or law became a professor, but if he wished to pursue a doctorate in theology he had to study theology for several additional years; a doctorate in the faculty of theology was very difficult to obtain.

As we have seen, the academic titles were much the same then as they are now in Europe. There was a further similarity in the fact that each faculty was an autonomous body, electing its own dean and the rector, who administered the university together with the deans of the faculties. The rules governing the number of courses, exercises, and disputes, as well as the choice of subjects of study, were stricter than those of today. The university was in part secular, but the clerical element dominated because theology was considered the queen of all the disciplines, and the professors were almost exclusively priests.

During the first thirty years of the existence of the Jagiellonian University, 4,300 students enrolled in it, of whom 800 were from abroad -- Hungarians, Silesians, German, and Swiss. Within the fifteenth century the number of students exceeded 18,000, 8,000 of them foreigners. Thus we see that the university became an important and serious center of learning which attracted many foreign students. Among the professors there were several outstanding scholars (see below), while counted among the student body were such famous men as Nicholas Copernicus, Zbigniew Oleśnicki, Jan Długosz (see page 26), and the German humanist, Celtes. The University educated not only world-famous scholars but also better teachers for secondary schools; the level of education among the clergy was also raised.

Great progress was also made in all fields of writing, scholastic philosophy, theology, church oratory, mathematics, astronomy, and the natural sciences.

Mateusz of Kraków (1330-1410) was active at the end of the fourteenth century; he was professor of theology in Prague, Kraków, and Heidelberg, and he later became a bishop and cardinal. In addition to his *Dialogus rationis et consciencie* he also wrote in 1404 his major work, *De squaloribus curiae romanae* (The Squalor of the Roman Curia), in which he attacks

simony and advocates that the church council should have powers superior to the pope's. Paweł Włodkowic (died 1435), rector of the University at Kraków, presented to the Council of Constance in 1415 and 1418 two very important treatises against the Teutonic Order and the conversion of infidels by force (*Tractatus de potestate papae et imperatoris respectu infidelium* and *Tractatus de Ordine Cruciferorum*). Jakób of Paradyż was an outstanding theologian. He was of peasant origin, and rose to become a professor at Kraków, a representative at Church Councils and supporter of their superiority over the pope. In addition to sermons he wrote approximately eighty treatises concerning Church reform and other theological and moral questions. Jan of Głogów was considered the most distinguished representative of scholastic philosophy at the Kraków University; he left behind a great many works in philosophy, dialectics, classical philology, and other fields.

The Kraków professors, Michał of Bystrzyków and Jan of Stobnica, were the first men in Poland to take up the teachings of Duns Scotus. The Polish astronomers of the time were Mikołaj of Kwidzyń and Wojciech of Brudzew, both teachers of Copernicus. There was also a distinguished natural scientist, Jan Stanko, the author of a medical dictionary. Great progress was also made in historiography.

One of the students of the Jagiellonian University, Jan Długosz (1415–80), was the most distinguished Polish historian until the eighteenth century. He was the secretary of Bishop Oleśnicki, became canon of Kraków Cathedral, and finally archbishop of Lwów. He was also tutor to the sons of king Kazimierz the Jagiellonian. He was often employed in diplomatic missions to the Teutonic Knights, the Czechs, and the Hungarians. He was the author of several historical works in Latin, the most important of which is his chronicle of Poland (*Annales seu Chronicae Regni Poloniae*). It is divided into twelve books which include the geography of Poland, the prehistorical epoch, and the history of Jagiellonian Poland to the time of the author's death. It differs from earlier chronicles primarily in the accumulation of historical sources on which it is based, which was great and varied for its day, and by a definite, though necessarily timid, criticism in their evaluation. Długosz rejected many of the myths that had been created by earlier chroniclers, but he inevitably lacked sufficient training in methodology to avoid creating some myths of his own. So, for instance, all the Polish mythology, modeled after ancient mythology without factual foundations, is the work of Długosz's imagination. All his 'Ładas,' 'Nijas,' 'Dziewannas,' and 'Marzannas,' which were supposed to be relative to the Greek and Roman gods, never existed

in Polish paganism. These names probably come from folk songs, where they had an altogether different meaning. The same is true of his accounts of Lech, Popiel, and Krak, the alleged first Polish rulers. They are today considered to be no more than legends; however, a number of them are colorful and interesting and could inspire the poetic imagination, as they often did, though they lack authenticity.

In spite of these deficiencies, Długosz's bias in the evaluation of people and events, and the exclusively theological point of view from which he considers the causality of historical events, his chronicle became the most important source for the study of the Middle Ages in Poland. Although it is not yet a historical work in the modern sense of the word, neither is it a chronicle of the medieval type; rather it is somewhere between the two genres.

Another interesting figure is the first political writer of Poland, Jan Ostroróg, who was at the same time Poland's first outstanding secular writer (he died in 1501 as the *wojewoda* of the province of Poznań). His work, also written in Latin, is entitled *Monumentum pro Reipublicae ordinatione* (Memorandum for the Organizing of the Republic) and expresses criticism of various institutions of church and state. Ostroróg first demanded a reform of the law courts and of legislation. He considered it an anomaly for the Polish state to apply different codes of law: Polish law for the gentry and the peasants and German law for the burghers. He advocated a common Polish system of law for everybody, though he did not favor equality of all beneath this law; on the contrary, he preferred a legal discrimination between the different classes. His penetrating judgment and political sense is seen in his keen feeling for this legal anomaly and his criticism of it. His independent attitude may also be seen in his criticism of the Church. He would have preferred the country to be less dependent on the Catholic Church and the Polish Church to depend on the Polish king rather than the pope, naturally not in matters of faith, but with regard to questions of law and administration. The king rather than the pope should, in his opinion, appoint bishops, the so-called Peter's pence paid to the pope by the dioceses should be abolished and the clergy should not enjoy special privileges. These opinions undoubtedly reflect the new humanistic trends which had come from the west and were soon to be strengthened by a tendency towards reformation, as well as a specific animosity on the part of the Polish ruling class against the prerogatives that the Polish clergy had been able to acquire in the course of centuries and which limited the influence of the gentry on deciding national issues.

Ostroróg also proposed reform in economic matters, such as the abolishment of guilds which raised the prices of their products and special taxation on nonagricultural goods, as well as the repair of roads and bridges, making coins out of pure silver, etc. Most of these reforms aimed at the protection of agriculture, which was the gentry's chief occupation.

All the authors discussed above wrote in Latin, but Polish poetry and prose were also enriched in the fifteenth century. One of the longest and most decorative manuscripts of that century was *Biblia Królowej Zoffi* (Queen Sophie's Bible), also known as the *Sáros-Patak Bible* because it is now kept at the Library of the Calvinist Church in Sáros-Patak in northern Hungary. This manuscript probably contained the translation of the entire Old and New Testaments, but more than half of the pages were torn out so that only 185, containing the Old Testament, were left. The work exists in a copy made in 1455 from an original manuscript that is now lost. This translation was made from a Czech original, which has not been identified, by Father Andrzej of Jaszowice for Queen Sophie, Władysław Jagiełło's last wife. The language still uses the old dual form, observed both in the declensions and the conjugations, but the aoryst had already gone out of use; Polish orthography is also improved, with the nasal and palatal vowels generally indicated.

Another important Polish text is the so-called *Psalterz Puławski* (Puławy Psalter), a fifteenth-century version of the *St. Florian Psalter*, which modernizes the language of the older version and allows us to follow the changes the language had undergone in the course of a century. The 'religious romance,' *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa* (Meditations on the Life of Jesus), belongs to the second part or even the very end of the fifteenth century. Although it is based on foreign material (the Latin poem *Vita Mariae Virginis et J. Christi rythmica* and others) and utilizes the commentaries of Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, which was very popular in the Middle Ages, it does contain a great deal of original material. This is seen particularly in the fictional elements, in the combination of apocrypha and legends with passages from the Bible or the writings of the Church Fathers, in passages written in verse, and in certain observations and meditations which are interspersed with Latin phrases. The anonymous writer first tells the life of the Holy Virgin, then the birth of Christ, His youth and work, and finally His passion. The account breaks off at this point and remains an incomplete and unequal work, full of repetition and redundancy.

Among the other religious texts written in Polish one should mention

Kazanie na dzień Wszech Świętych (The Sermon on All-Saints Day) and *Modlitwy Waclawa* (The Prayers of Waclaw, translated from the Latin). There were, of course, many similar books of sermons and prayers. There were also translations of the medieval Latin prose romances, such as *Powieść o papieżu Urbanie* (The Story of Pope Urban), *Alexandreide*, and others.

Other Polish texts preserved from the fifteenth century are additional court formulae and the translations of the statutes of Kazimierz the Great from the Latin original. The first two of these translations date back to 1449 and 1450. Many other laws were contained in these codes. There are finally such interesting linguistic documents as dictionaries of the Bible, collections of the names of months and plants, and genealogical tables, in addition to 'glossaries' of Polish terms written in between the lines or in the margin of Latin texts to translate the more difficult words and expressions.

Polish poetry, religious as well as secular, lyric as well as epic, is already quite diverse in the fifteenth century. It is still difficult to find artistic wholes, but we often find passages in which religious and other feelings are expressed in a sincere and moving manner. Thus in *Skarga Matki Bolesnej pod Krzyżem* (Mary's Complaint under the Cross) the feelings of the Mother of God speaking to her Son are expressed in touching tones; if He were 'lower,' she would try to help Him, she would hold up His 'little head' which is falling down, she would wipe off His blood and would give Him water to drink: "But it is not allowed to reach Your Holy Body."

Pieśń o Zwiastowaniu (Song of the Annunciation) expresses admiration for Mary by praising her above the whiteness of a lily, the beauty of a rose, the scent of a narcissus, and the 'preciousness' of an exotic flower.

One of the interesting manifestations of Polish medieval poetry is *Pieśń o męce Pańskiej* (Song of Our Lord's Passion), the earliest copy of which is dated 1420, although it was written much earlier, probably towards the turn of the fifteenth century. It is a translation of the Latin hymn *Horae Canonicae Salvatoris*, which describes the taking of Christ in the garden, the trial under Pontius Pilatus, and the Passion. Although it is only a translation, it possesses a certain significance in the development of Polish poetry for it introduces for the first time (following the original) the thirteen-syllable line with a regular caesura after the seventh syllable.⁷ The rhythm of the work is nearly flawless, and the language reveals a relatively advanced sense for 'poetic conception.'

⁷ Dłuska, *Studia*, p. 13.

Other religious songs show a great variety of structure, with anything between five and ten syllables to a line, but with a general tendency towards irregularity. Most rhymes are 'grammatical' or based on assonance. The structure is sometimes elaborate, as in the alphabetic poems (in which each stanza begins with a successive letter of the alphabet), in the acrostics (the first letters of each line form words), or in poems in which each stanza begins with the successive words of a prayer.⁸

It is difficult to establish the dates of individual poems and decide which are strictly medieval and which later works, for pieces of all periods are included in collections made in the fifteenth, and even the sixteenth, century. One also has to take another circumstance into consideration, namely that they originated and disseminated in the same way as folk songs. Their authors are usually anonymous, the lines and stanzas of different songs often run into one another, and the original version is often abbreviated or enlarged upon, as in the case of *Mother of God*.

As to literary genres, we have among these songs works of a lyrical character, like the Lenten and Easter songs, Christmas carols, songs for Corpus Christi and the Holy Ghost, and songs for the Holy Virgin, as well as others of an epic character, such as the legends and songs about the saints. Among the former we should mention also the *Żoltarz Jezusów czyli piętnaście rozmyślań o Bożem umęczeniu* (Psalter of Jesus or Fifteen Meditations on God's Passion) by Władysław of Gielniów, a Bernardine monk who was a popular preacher and writer of Latin and Polish songs. The *Psalter* is dated 1488, but it has not yet been ascertained whether it is an original work or an adaptation from Czech.⁹ In either case, this poem is among the more interesting and may be included in the same class with the *Song of Our Lord's Passion*, with which it has not only analogies of subject matter, but the same syllabic, binary rhythm: the thirteen-syllable line with the caesura after the seventh syllable. The *Hymn o Duchu świętym* (Hymn about the Holy Ghost) was probably written towards the end of the fifteenth century by an unknown author; the song worships the third person of the Holy Trinity as the source of heavenly grace and contains a plea for eternal life.

The most remarkable fifteenth-century epic is *Legenda o świętym Aleksym* (Legend of St. Alexis). The fifteenth-century text is included in a Latin code, but this is probably a later copy; it contains 240 lines, is

⁸ See Aleksander Brückner, *Średniowieczna pieśń religijna polska* (Kraków, 1923).

⁹ Brückner, *ibid.*, is of the first opinion. The second is defended by S. Dobrzycki, *Z dziejów średniowiecznego piśmiennictwa polskiego, Prace filologiczne*, V (Warsaw, 1895).

unfinished, and its author is anonymous. It is not an original work; the life of St. Alexis was the subject of many Greek, Latin, French, and German legends which began in the eleventh century. It portrays the ideal ascetic life which is based on absolute negation of all material goods and even denial of human dignity. Alexis, a young Roman lord, abandons his young wife, riches, and a comfortable life; taking some gold with him, he goes wandering into the world. He distributes his gold among beggars, priests, and students, and lives by alms given him as he sits on the steps of the church. After many years he returns to his home, where not even his father recognizes him. He picks a little corner under the staircase of his father's palace as his dwelling ("Here under the stairs he lay, Everybody poured slops and foul water on him" – goes the Polish version of the legend), and he lives on the remains from his father's table. Many years pass in this way until Alexis' death, when a miracle occurs: all the bells of Rome begin to ring by themselves, and the mystery of the aristocratic beggar is uncovered. This legend has no literary value, but it is interesting as a symptom of the introduction of ascetic ideology into Poland.

Among the epic works describing the lives and passions of the saints we have songs about St. Stanisław, St. Catherine, St. Christopher, and St. Dorothea. They deal with the legends of the saints in a simple and naive manner. The story of Stanisław, the bishop, tells of his conflict with King Bolesław the Bold, his death, and the miracles connected with it. A legend in verse tells the story of Catherine of Alexandria, the 'wonderful maiden' who in her youth knew Christ and 'disdained wordly values.' The emperor sent 'learned masters' to her, that they might 'talk her out' of it. But the maiden 'talked them out of it' so well that they were converted, with the result that the emperor had them bound in the city square and burned alive. In return they were given 'a happy dwelling' in heaven. Now it was the emperor's turn to try to reconvert Catherine; he did not succeed, and Catherine was decapitated; after her death, milk flowed from her severed neck and the angels carried her body to Mount Sinai.

In comparison with religious poetry, secular poetry is relatively poor in the fifteenth century. Its significance is mainly cultural and its literary value minimal. It is a treasury of the Old Polish language, a collection of examples illustrating the mores of the time as well as other aspects of contemporary life, for it touches upon immediate social and political problems. This kind of secular literature must have existed in the pre-Christian era in Poland, as we have already suggested, in the form of myths, fables, tales, and songs of all kinds. There were also the so-called

'historical songs,' which narrated important historical events, and 'ballads,' which treated such traditional themes as the lady who kills her husband, the suitor, and the ghostly lover. Only fragments of this mass of popular literature remain.

One of the earliest and most interesting didactic works of the time is *O zachowaniu się przy stole* (Table Manners), a poem by a certain Słota (or Złota), which dates back to the beginning of the fifteenth century. Nothing exact is known about the author, but it is supposed that he was a young student in Kraków of gentry origin. The work itself is reminiscent of similar Latin, German, Czech, French, and Italian works. Its subject is proper behavior at the dinner table. From the author's recommendations as to what is and what is not proper at table, a vivid picture of reality emerges; the faults which offended good manners seem to have been: sitting down at the table 'like an ox,' 'getting hold of the serving dish first,' reaching over the heads of others, 'eating with dirty hands,' and the like. The author recommends that 'ladies should cut their food into small morsels'; the knights and gentlemen should pay attention to the women and offer them what is best on the table.

However, the poem is not devoted exclusively to these matters. It begins by singing of the charms of eating in general, and the second part is devoted to praise of the fair sex, a reflection of the Western chivalric code. There is nothing better than maidens and ladies, the poem says, 'the charm of every party depends on them'; 'all goodness derives from them,' they are the crown of all things and should be respected by all.

The work is arranged in the medieval pattern within a framework of two prayers, the verse is octosyllabic and irregular, the rhymes are grammatical or assonantic and in couplets. The style is very simple, but it is filled with forceful and picturesque expressions.

The *Rozmowa Mistrza ze Śmiercią* (Dialogue between the Master and Death), from the end of the fifteenth century, also has a moralizing character, though in a different vein. It is based on the Latin treatise in dialogue form, *Colloquium inter mortem et magistrum Polycarpum*, and its subject is the implacable power of death, an engrossing problem to the people of the Middle Ages. Polycarpus, 'the wise man,' begged God that he might see death personally. One day his plea was satisfied, when, as he was alone in a church, a being 'of female nature' and with a terrifying countenance appeared to him; not in the form of a skeleton (as is usually the case) but of a mouldering corpse, which is described in very expressive details. The impression was so strong that Polycarpus fainted and fell to the ground with such force that 'he moaned.' When he comes to, the

dialogue begins. The master would like to run away from Death, and he wants to bribe her with presents. She, however, will not hear of it, for she despises all property and does not care for the raisins and almonds, velvets and other expensive fabrics which he offers. She presents him the picture of her omnipotence: she 'tortures all human species without regard to age, sex, or social class.' But she is particularly anxious to punish corrupt judges and lecherous monks. The master timidly asks her the purpose of doctors, if she has so much power; to this Death replies: 'Every doctor is a cheat, his ointments nothing do defeat.' In the Polish version the *Dialogue* is unfinished, but we know from the Latin original (and its Ukrainian adaptation) that the master inquires about the final judgment, and Death teaches him how to live in order to avoid going to hell.

This work is characteristic and interesting for many reasons. Besides her peculiar external appearance, Death is also distinguished by humor and vivacity, which are unusual traits in such a character; she tells the master to smell her scythe to see how sharp it is, she assures him that he may die at any moment, she speaks with him quite frankly and even calls him 'very stupid.' When she describes her pursuit of the animals she talks like a gentleman at a hunt. Her attitude towards physicians, judges, and monks is also that of the gentry. The pictures of the monk who runs away from the monastery in search of adventures and of the curates with 'meaty necks' and 'double-chins hanging on their breasts,' are full of verve and color. Inn-keepers are attacked for the bad beer they serve; the higher clergy and office holders are also attacked. The poem is not only didactic; it is also a satirical picture of the mores of the day.¹⁰

It is written in octosyllabic verse, with a trochaic metre and rhymed in couplets; being loosely constructed, its action is often interrupted; there is much repetition and often whole catalogs of Death's trophies are quoted.

A similar subject is found in *Skarga umierającego* (A Dying Man's Complaint) which is written in the same manuscript as the preceding work. The dying man is tortured by anxiety for the salvation of his soul, because he realizes that he has not much deserved it during his life, which was devoted to acquiring money and enjoying physical pleasures. The author consoles him, saying that with contrition, confession, and the acceptance of the Sacrament he can open the path to heaven. The work is composed of twenty-two four-line stanzas; the first letters of the stanzas are arranged in alphabetical order.

¹⁰ See Stefan Vrtel-Wierczyński, *Średniowieczna poezja polska świecka* (Wrocław, 1949).

Satyra na chłopów (Satire on the Peasants) is of particular interest because, unlike the numerous later satires against the gentry, it is directed against the laziness and unfriendliness of the peasants; it must surely have been written by a country gentleman. He complains that the peasants 'take excessive rest,' while pretending to work hard; when they go out to work they stop on the way, supposedly to repair their ploughs; 'they hitch sick cattle to the ploughs'; on purpose they allow their masters' crops to be poor; they think up all kinds of troubles in order to avoid work; sometimes they deliberately lose a part of the plough in order to go off to the forest, pretending to look for a piece of wood with which to make a new part but in reality lying down behind a bush to take a rest. The conclusion implies that, although the peasants pretend to be simple people, they are in reality very shrewd.

This poem of animosity towards the peasants may be compared to another in which the gentry expresses its indignation against the burghers, *Pieśń o zabiciu Andrzeja Tęczyńskiego* (The Song of the Murder of Andrzej Tęczyński). This murder actually took place in Kraków in 1461. The knight, Tęczyński, was preparing to go to war and gave his armor for repair to a city craftsman; dissatisfied with his work, Tęczyński whipped him heavily. This provoked great indignation among the populace, and crowds marched on Tęczyński's home; the knight found shelter in the Franciscan Church, but the mob caught him there and murdered him ruthlessly. Six burghers were decapitated.

This work is not strictly epic in character, for it portrays only a few of the facts involved and treats even these in a very general manner: the murder in the church, the dragging of the corpse along the gutter, the delegation to the burghers of Wrocław with a complaint, the publication of the list of the names of those guilty in the riot, the punishment of the murderers. On the other hand, the poem is filled with lyrical elements: complaints, sorrow, indignation, praises for the murdered man and his son, satisfaction with the just punishment. The poem is composed of twenty-six irregular lines, with a clear, though uneven division of each into two parts. Next to a few full rhymes we also find several that are limited only to the final syllable or assonantic rhymes.

Pieśń o Wicklefie (The Song of Wyclif), written toward the middle of the fifteenth century by Jędrzej Gałka of Dobczyn, a Bachelor and Master of Arts in Kraków, is significant because it reverences John Wyclif, the spiritual father of Hussitism, and sharply attacks the Catholic clergy. This is apparently the only surviving song in Polish modeled on Czech Hussite songs.

A few words should be said about love poetry. Because there was in Poland no feudal knighthood (or feudalism in general), the concept of 'Frauendienst' or chivalric gallantry, so widespread in the West, was virtually unknown; there were neither troubadours nor minnesingers. Poland lacked both the rich love poetry and the treatises about the 'art of love' which were so numerous elsewhere. The authors of the few Polish love poems written were not knights but university students and scribes. In one manuscript of the Bible, for instance, a certain scribe, having finished his work, gives his thanks to Christ and ends with the wish: *Scriptori pro penna dabitur ei pulcra puella...*¹¹ Love songs, letters, and tales frequently may be found in collections of sermons, theological treatises, statutes, and glossaries. On the whole, they are rather naive both in the feelings they express and in the manner of their expression.

The verse form was used not only for poetry in the strict sense of the word but also for practical mnemonic purposes. Formulas of the catechism, medical prescriptions, grammatical rules, calendars, and dictionaries were versified — even the treatise on orthography by Jakób Parkosz in 1460.

Polish architecture entered a Gothic period in the fourteenth century. Such outstanding buildings as the Wawel Cathedral, the Church of the Virgin Mary, the Dominican Church, and the Church of St. Catherine in Kraków were all built in the Gothic style, as were many secular structures. The royal buildings on the Wawel, originally of Gothic architecture, were later reconstructed in Renaissance style. The beautiful Jagiellonian Library (the former University building), built in Gothic style in the fifteenth century, exists to this day. Traces of the Gothic are also preserved in the town hall and other buildings in the main square of Kraków. The sarcophagi of the kings in the Wawel Cathedral, those of Władysław the Short, Kazimierz the Great, and, above all, Władysław Jagiełło (made in red marble) are magnificent examples of this style.

The reign of Kazimierz the Great saw a lively development in painting. The Kraków Cathedral and the rooms of the Wawel Castle were probably decorated with frescoes at this time, and in the churches of other cities similar wall paintings were also being made. Toward the end of the fourteenth century the painting of pictures and altars began; depictions of the homage of the magi, in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Toruń, and the descent from the cross (middle of the fifteenth century), painted on wood, are well preserved. Several panels representing the stigmatization of St. Francis and the scene of the Annunciation also date from this period.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

There are also triptychs and portraits of the saints. The Kraków painters were already well known at that time, as they were often commissioned to do work abroad.

The National Museum in Warsaw has several beautiful and valuable monuments of Polish Gothic art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There are, among other things, polyptychs, paintings, sculptures, and portraits from Pomerania and Małopolska (Little Poland, Southern Poland, of which Kraków and Lwów were principal cities).

One of the greatest sculptors of the time in Europe was Wit Stwosz, who came from Nuremberg to Kraków in 1477 and spent the next twenty years there. He soon became the leader of a sculptors' school, and it was in Kraków that he achieved his masterpiece, a triptych altar carved in wood, on which he worked for twelve years together with a group of his pupils. He found in Kraków a congenial atmosphere, conditions suitable for his work, and burghers who furnished him with the necessary financial means to create this tremendous work, which is now considered one of the finest examples of medieval art. The altar, which is now in the Church of St. Mary in Kraków, is built in three parts, with two wings which may be shut and which are covered with bas-relief on both sides. The altar is forty feet high and thirty-three feet wide. The central part depicts the death of the Virgin Mary, and the wings represent twelve scenes from the life of the Virgin and her Son. The sculptures are all painted and gilded. The figures, which number about two hundred, are more than lifesize (the tallest measure from nine to ten feet), with striking expressions, full of life and movement. Among them are the apostles, saints, angels, scholars, hangmen, and devils. The piece is worked with extraordinary expressiveness and precision of detail, which may be seen not only in the wealth and variety of the spiritual emotions expressed in the faces of the figures but also in the folds of their garments, in their hands, hair, clothes, shoes, weapons, tools, and furniture, as well as in the plant and animal decorations. Even before Stwosz, Poland had had triptychs of medieval character that were high in value, but neither before nor afterward did the country have such a masterpiece as this one. In the art of sculpture it is the precursor of the renaissance, for it reveals the influence of the Flemish masters, although traces of medieval traditions (for instance, in the treatment of the landscape) are still visible.

Stwosz also executed a number of the tombs in the Wawel and Gniezno Cathedrals. Another outstanding sculptor of the period was Piotr Vischer the Elder, who also carved several sarcophagi in Kraków and Poznań.

The music of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was mainly religious

in character. It remained relatively undeveloped in the fourteenth century but began to make better progress in the next, when whole collections of religious songs were written. Unfortunately, only a small number of them were notated. Some of them are sung to this day, but the melodies must have been radically changed in the course of centuries. The composers of these songs are unknown. The first known composer was Władysław of Gielniów, who has already been mentioned; he wrote the music for his *Psalter of Jesus* and introduced the custom of having it sung in church after the sermon.

With the firm establishment of the Roman Church, liturgical music began to flourish in Poland. Hymns and the so-called Latin sequences in honor of St. Wojciech, St. Stanisław and St. Kinga were sung in churches and monasteries. Jan Kempa, bishop of Poznań in the first half of the fourteenth century, is recognized as the first known author of such sequences. They were soon translated into Polish in order to make them accessible to the common people. The translation of the famous hymn, *Dies irae, dies illa*, was made in the fourteenth century. Poland also had many songs in honor of the Virgin Mary, the so-called Marian Hymns.

Significantly, a treatise on music, more specifically on choral music, was written in Poland as early as the first half of the fifteenth century. Its author is Szydlowita, master of the Jagiellonian University. Research by musicologists shows that Kraków Cathedral held the lead in the field of choral music in Poland. Polish liturgical songs followed closely the old church tradition and West European models, but they also reveal some originality and a great variety of melody.¹²

The foremost Polish composer of the fifteenth century was Mikołaj Radomczyk (Nicholas of Radom), about whose life, unfortunately, very little is known. It is supposed that he was in close contact with Władysław Jagiełło's court because one of his compositions is dedicated to the king on the occasion of the birth of his second son. It is a vocal monody with an accompaniment for two instruments. Mikołaj Radomczyk also wrote five other musical compositions: three parts of the Mass (two Glorias and a Credo), a Magnificat, and one composition without words, probably an instrumental work.

According to Polish and foreign musical specialists, Mikołaj Radomczyk was well versed in the most progressive techniques of his time; he knew

¹² See Zdzisław Jachimecki, *Muzyka polska w rozwoju historycznym* (Kraków, 1948) I, 40 ff. Jachimecki also quotes works by W. Gieburowski about Szydlowita (Poznań, 1915) and W. Poźniak about choral passions in Poland (Kraków, 1947).

the works of contemporary Italian, French, and English masters, but, as a composer, he did not submit to any one style exclusively.

In the manuscript collection which contains the above works there are also several other musical compositions of the same century; among them are a Latin hymn in honor of the city of Kraków (with words by Stanisław Ciołek, vice-chancellor to Władysław Jagiełło), the students' song of the Kraków Academy, and hymns to the Virgin.

On the threshold of the sixteenth century Poland was already territorially an extensive country, internally consolidated, and cherishing great hopes for the future. Considering the fact that Muscovy was not yet playing an important role in European culture, that the Czechs were torn by religious (Hussite) wars, and that the Balkan Slavs were in virtual servitude under the Turkish yoke, Poland was at the time the only great state among the Slavic peoples. As has already been mentioned, its culture developed slowly but continuously, a fact which, as the strength of the Polish state increased, allowed the country to exercise its influence on neighboring countries and to assimilate the foreign elements which formed part of the republic. This process had begun in the fifteenth century, but it reached its peak in the following century; we shall speak about it more extensively in the next chapter. At this time mention should be made of another characteristic of Poland's internal life, namely the considerably different levels of culture in the various Polish provinces. Even then Małopolska (Little Poland) and Wielkopolska (Great Poland) surpassed the culturally poorer Masovia and the even poorer eastern provinces. It was only later that Masovia assumed significance (when the Polish capital was transferred from Kraków to Warsaw), while the so-called 'eastern confines' have throughout the history of Poland been neglected both materially and culturally.

Another characteristic trait is seen in the variety of physical types, customs, dialects, and costumes of the Polish and non-Polish population of the various provinces of the republic. From Western Wielkopolska through Małopolska and Masovia to Ruthenia, White Russia, and Lithuania was spread the large and colorful panorama of the gentry, the burghers, and the peasantry, who all cultivated their own traditions and customs. All this certainly made for a highly colorful and interesting picture; in Poland's subsequent historical development each of the Polish provinces contributed valuable elements to the national culture, and it should be remembered that many of its outstanding figures were men of German, White Russian, or Lithuanian origin.

CHAPTER III

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: HUMANISM AND REFORMATION

The sixteenth century is called the 'golden' age of Polish culture, for in that century the growth of Poland's political strength coincided with a lively progress in all fields of intellectual endeavor and a particular achievement in literature. The internal policy of the Jagiellonian dynasty was prompted by the idea of an increasingly close union between Poland and Lithuania, as a result of which the creation of a unified Polish-Lithuanian state was signed in the act of the Union of Lublin in 1569. The external policy strove to maintain the prestige that Poland had gained even during the preceding century, when the Jagiellonian monarchs sat on the Hungarian and Czech thrones. Poland was faced with great and difficult tasks both externally and internally: to consolidate a vast country, to raise the standard of living, to reconcile the interests of the people with those of the state, to assure the safety of the frontiers and remain vigilant in foreign policy. Poland in the sixteenth century was in no position to fulfill all these tasks with equal success, but it achieved many significant and durable results.

Zygmunt I (1506–48), who came to the throne after the short reign of his brother Aleksander (1501–06), was faced with difficult problems both in the East and the West. Muscovy had signed a treaty with the Emperor Maximilian I and occupied Smoleńsk. Moreover, Maximilian supported the Teutonic Order against Poland, and the grand master of the Order refused to continue paying homage to the Polish king. The Congress of Vienna, in 1515, reached a temporary agreement according to which Albert of Brandenburg, Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, was converted to Protestantism and thereafter paid his homage to the Polish king as a secular prince. The Order thus ceased to exist, but it gave rise to the Hohenzollern dynasty which later harrassed not only Poland but all of Western Europe. The relationship with Muscovy, however, remained unsolved, which gave rise to new military conflicts. Furthermore, the

Jagiello lost the Hungarian and Czech thrones, when Władysław's son, Ludwik, was killed in a battle against the Turks, and a Habsburg prince was elected as the monarch of Hungary and Bohemia. The danger of a combined aggression by the Turks and the Tatars was warded off by the Polish victories over the Tatars and the fortification of the south-eastern frontiers.

Zygmunt August (1548–72), the son of Zygmunt I, maintained peace in the south, avoiding war with Turkey and improving Tatar-Polish relations. The relations with Muscovy, however, remained tense because of Ivan the Terrible's desire to acquire Livonia. Poland forestalled Ivan by taking that region under its protection. This step caused a new war with Muscovy, which ended in compromise: the northern part of Livonia was occupied by the tsar, while the southwest, with Riga and Courland, remained in Poland's hands. In this way Poland's position on the Baltic was strengthened. One of Zygmunt August's important achievements was to succeed in unifying Poland and Lithuania finally into one state with a common Diet and a monarch elected jointly, though both countries preserved a separate administration, army, treasury, and codes of law.

Zygmunt August was, the last of the Jagiello. He left no successor, and after his death the epoch of elective kings began in Poland. Although even the Jagiello were officially elected as kings of Poland and grand dukes of Lithuania, these elections had kept the royal line within the limits of one dynasty. After an interregnum which lasted for two years, the French candidate, Henry of Valois, was elected. After spending only a few months of the year 1574 in Poland, he returned to France, upon the death of his brother, in order to occupy the French throne. The Polish gentry then voted the election of the Transylvanian prince, Stefan Batory (1576–86), who turned out to be one of the wisest and bravest of the Polish kings. He strengthened Polish authority in Gdańsk, and he conducted three victorious campaigns against Ivan the Terrible, thus winning back Polotsk and insuring Poland's rule over the whole of Livonia. In internal affairs, his greatest deeds were the creation of courts of appeal, which made the organization of jurisdiction more efficient, and the founding in 1579 of a university in Wilno (in place of the old Jesuit Academy). The king's closest collaborator was his chancellor, Jan Zamoyski, one of Poland's foremost statesmen, a soldier, humanist, and educator. After Batory's death, Zamoyski was instrumental in the election of the new king, Zygmunt III (1588–1632), who was of the Swedish Vasa dynasty and a nephew of Zygmunt August.

The transformation from an absolute monarchy into a republic of the

gentry, a process which had begun in the course of the preceding century, progressed further in the sixteenth century. The gentry secured new privileges, reaching the summit of its acquisitions in the Constitution 'Nihil novi' of 1505, which laid down the rule that the king could not decide anything new (*nihil novi*), even in cases of great emergency or national danger, without the consent of the Diet, that is, the gentry at large. 'Nothing concerning us without us' became the political watchword of the ruling class. This liberal and democratic principle, unfortunately, concerned only one social class, which consistently and stubbornly refused to grant rights to the burghers and peasants, despite the advice of the most enlightened groups in the country. The Polish gentleman was one of the freest men in Europe, and he was proud of the fact that he owed nothing to his king except 'a realty tax, war duty, and the use of the royal name in court summonses'; the latter always began with the words: 'In the name of his Majesty the King. . .' The concept of divine right, of the king anointed by God, which still prevailed in the rest of Europe, had disappeared in Poland a long time before. Together with the fall of monarchical power, worship of the king, who was only a nominal ruler, also disappeared. This feeling of independence with regard to the monarch strengthened even more when, after the death of Zygmunt August, the kings were elected not by the Diet but by the gentry at large (*viritim*). Every gentleman considered himself as the king's personal elector, to whom the king owed his position and was therefore obliged to be grateful. This 'gratitude' was formulated at every election into the legal form of the so-called *pacta conventa*, a kind of contract between the elected and the electors. Only on his solemn affirmation of this contract could the candidate be elected. In this way the gentry secured increasing privileges, and they came gradually to adopt a belligerent attitude towards any form of power. Stefan Batory, who struggled against this autocracy of the gentry, though generally without success, on one occasion said to a gentleman named Kazimierski: 'Silence, you clown!' He received the following answer: 'I am not a clown, but I elect kings and I do away with tyrants!'¹ What would have been the fate of a French or Spanish gentleman of the time, had he dared to answer his king in this manner?

Credit for emancipation from mystical reverence for monarchic power must go to the Polish gentry. But, on the other hand, the gentry did not realize that Poland required the strong executive power personified by

¹ Aleksander Brückner, *Dzieje kultury polskiej*, 1st ed. 3 vols. (Kraków, 1931) ; 2d ed. 4 vols. (Warsaw, 1939-46).

a king and that the gentry's autonomy was beginning to assume dangerous proportions.

In the sixteenth century Polish cities were still at the height of their development, especially the larger cities, such as Kraków, Lwów, Poznań, Lublin, and Wilno. But at the same time the legal handicap of the burghers was increasing: they were not allowed to buy land and were forced to sell the land they already owned; in the Diet they had only two delegates, a representation which in practice eliminated their influence in the government. The life of a burgher was valued lower than that of a gentleman; the murder of a gentleman entailed a fine of 120 *grzywnas* and a prison term of one year and six weeks, while the murderer of a burgher got away with a fine of ten *grzywnas* and served no prison term.

The situation of the peasants grew worse with every century. They were burdened with gradually increasing duties and work. Formerly the peasant had worked for the landowner only one or two days a week, but in the sixteenth century this was increased to four and even five days a week. The literature of that period is full of vivid portrayals of the plight of the peasants, against which poets, political and social writers, and preachers expressed their feelings of indignation and embitterment.

The intellectual and literary life of Poland in the sixteenth century was influenced mainly by three forces: (a) the political activity of the gentry who were striving for control of the state, (b) humanism, and (c) the Reformation. We have already noted the political activity of the gentry, which not only contributed to political and oratorical refinement (almost every gentleman was an orator who liked to display his eloquence, and Latin was a language he mastered as freely as Polish) but gave birth to a literature in which political and national problems were discussed, the aims of the gentry class justified, and polemic controversies conducted with opponents.

In order to understand the character and significance of humanism, we must pause for a brief analysis of the intellectual life of the Middle Ages. Recent research has shown that the Middle Ages were not quite so simple, primitive, or 'backward', as was formerly imagined. In addition to the magnificent development of architecture, art, and music in western and southern Europe, there was also a lively intellectual and literary movement and a flourishing social ethos. Within the framework of a strict religious and ecclesiastical discipline there was still room for lively and varied personalities to express themselves, for an intensive spiritual life.

The official doctrine, or method, as it were, of reasoning and investiga-