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Wives, Mothers, Female Warriors. The Image of Polish Women in Nineteenth Century American Historiography

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In the nineteenth century, the lands which had formerly been part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were under the rule of three states – Russia, Austria (Austro-Hungary), and Prussia. However, despite the efforts of the partitioning powers, this did not mean that the Polish question disappeared from Europe along with the independent state. On the contrary, it was, as one American author writing about Poland states, the ever-present spirit of every European conference. Therefore, as the international position of the United States became stronger, Polish history began to arouse some interest among historians and politicians from that country. Of course, the scale of this phenomenon should not be overestimated as the number of American publications about Poland throughout the nineteenth century was very small, but the closer we get to the end of World War One, its growth is clearly evident.

While the question of the general image of Poland and Poles in American historiography has been the subject of detailed research, little attention has been paid in the literature to the presentation of Polish women. Polish history is usually seen through the prism of warfare, with Poles sometimes being credited with significant contributions to the defence of European civilization and Christianity, but at the same time this is accompanied by allegations of a virtual domination of the Polish past by wars, often fought not in the country's own interests and bringing it no benefits. This highly

militarized view is consequently also strongly masculinized, which corresponds perfectly with the dominant vision of the his-history of that time. Conversely, the aim and purpose of this text is to look at nineteenth-century American historiography in terms of the image of Polish women presented in it. Therefore, works of American authors on Polish history published before 1918, i.e., before Poland regained independence, are analyzed in detail to identify the issues reflected most comprehensively in American historical writing of this period.

Moreover, since relatively few American publications on Poland produced in the nineteenth century are present in contemporary historical discourse and because of the ambiguous character of a number of concepts used in this text, including such key ones as American historiography or the Polish woman, it is necessary to make extensive reference to these issues. As a result, the text presented here consists of the following: the characteristics of the adopted methodology and sources (I), the presentation of overall features of the image of Polish women (II), an analysis of the most frequent *topoi* of the Polish woman: wives, mothers, and female warriors (III). This characteristic will then be compared to the image of Polish women and their virtues in the only work on Polish history by an American woman written in the period examined (IV). The research, structured thus, makes it possible, in conclusion, not only to identify the most significant characteristics attributed to Polish women by American authors, but also to confront the slightly more numerous male points of view with the interpretation presented by one of the first women in the United States who dealt with history professionally.

I. Methodology and sources

The term "American historiography," essential for the question under consideration here, can be perceived in various ways.[1] The adjective American itself can refer both to the continents of North and South America and only to the United States, and it is in this more narrow sense that it will be used here. Nevertheless, because of the specific character of the United States, a country which, in the nineteenth century, received numerous migrants from all over the world, it seems reasonable to specify that the inclusion of a given author in American historiography results from his or her biography, and more specifically from his or her place of birth. Works on Poland written by Europeans,[2] although often

[1] Barbara Klassa, *Obraz Polski i Polaków w historiografii amerykańskiej XIX i początków XX wieku* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2012), 11–13. See also: Tomasz Pawelec, *Z drugiej strony Atlantyku: „młodsza Europa" w dawnych syntezach amerykańskich. Ze studiów nad historiografią Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w Stanach Zjednoczonych* (Cieszyn 2013), *passim*.

[2] I have not found any books discussing Polish history published in the US and written by authors from continents other than Europe or North America.

published on the other side of the Atlantic, were excluded from the source base of this analysis because of significant differences in perspectives between authors from the countries of the Old Continent, which approached the Polish question as an element of the political game, and the United States, which was not involved in this matter. Thus, the statements relating to Poland included in the works of American authors are, to a lesser extent than in the case of European historians, a consequence of their country's policy towards Poland during the partitions and in the contemporary times of given authors, and reflect to a greater extent the personal views and value systems of the authors.

A second part of the notion of American historiography also deserves some attention. This is because the term is used in a variety of senses, from a very broad one, encompassing all historical writing understood as non-fiction and concerning the past, to a narrow one, which limits historiography to the work of professional historians fulfilling certain formal and methodological criteria. Adopting a narrow definition would result in the elimination of most texts concerning Poland from the study, as their authors were not historians, and their works were usually compilations enriched with the authors' own reflections or observations. In the American historiography of the time, this was not an unusual phenomenon. Although in the first half of the nineteenth century there were already some Americans who obtained professional research training at German universities, they were few; moreover, these historians did not deal in their research with Polish history. As late as the 1850s, in American universities historical education relied on reciting designated textbooks.[3] It was not until the close of the nineteenth century that the process became professionalized.

However, the clarification above does not close the question of the definition of American historiography stemming from the ambiguity of the term of national historiography itself. The term can be applied to the entirety of historical writing about a given nation (irrespective of who the author of a particular work is), to all non-fiction on the past published by authors of a given nation (irrespective of the subject matter they deal with), and in the narrowest sense, as works written by representatives of a given nation on to the history of that nation.[4] In view of the subject matter addressed here, the only relevant way of defining American historiography is the second option, i.e., including in American historiography the entirety of historical writings by American authors, regardless of the subjects they deal with. Following this definition, throughout the period examined there were few publications on the history of Poland in American historiography.[5] Information about Poland was often

[3] Hugh Hale Bellot, *American History and American Historians. A Review of Recent Contribution to the Interpretation of the History of the United States* (London: The Althone Press, 1952), 1. See also: Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 96.

[4] Ian Tyrrell, "The Great Historical Jeremiad. The Problem of Specialization in American Historiography", *The History Teacher* 33/3 (V 2000): 372.

[5] Poland and its past are obviously also present in works on universal history, yet their authors hardly ever mention Polish women. Cf. Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, *passim*.

included in works covering general history, but these were usually perfunctory mentions, and only exceptionally do they refer to women. For example, a two-volume publication by Caleb Cushing (1800–1879)[6] introduces American readers to the events in Europe in 1830–1831.[7] The first volume refers to the French revolution and the second to other European countries. Four of the twelve chapters in Volume II discuss the background and course of the November Uprising. In this extensive account, information on Polish women is very limited. For the pre-insurrection period, the author writes about Grand Duke Constantine's renunciation of his rights to the throne following his marriage to a Polish woman (no details about her are given[8]); furthermore he mentions the wife of a Polish nobleman unjustly repressed by the Tsarist regime.[9] Reporting on the events of 1830–1831 in the text, he writes only about Emilia Plater, portraying her as an ardent patriot and heroine;[10] additionally, he mentions several other patriotic women in a footnote.[11]

Cushing devotes more than 120 pages to the November Uprising but makes only a few brief references to women. Other publications on general history usually focus less attention on the history of Poland, so information about women appears there only exceptionally. The analysis of the image of Polish women in nineteenth century American historiography is therefore based on works devoted entirely to Poland and its history. However, not many of them were written in the period under discussion; three appeared before 1914 (by Luther Calvin Saxton, Nevin Owen Winter, and Louis Edwin van Norman)[12] and two during World War I (by Robert Howard Lord and Julia Swift Orvis).[13]

The author of the earliest of these was Luther Calvin Saxton (1806–after 1866). Little is known about his life; he was born in Massachussetts and graduated from

[6] Lilian Handlin, "Cushing Caleb", in: *American National Biography,* eds. John A. Garraty, Marc C. Carnes, vol. 5 (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 909–910; *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, eds. J.G. Wilson, J. Fiske (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 2, 38–39; Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 24.

[7] Caleb Cushing, *Review, Historical and Political, of the Late Revolution in France and of the Consequent Events in Belgium, Poland, Great Britain and Other Parts of Europe* (Boston–Newburyport: Carter, Hendee & Co., Tomas B. White, 1833), *passim*.

[8] *Ibidem*, 2, 88.

[9] *Ibidem*, 2, 89.

[10] *Ibidem*, 2, 160.

[11] *Ibidem*, 2, 139–140.

[12] Furthermore, *History of Poland* by H.A. and G.W. Poole (Mechanic Falls: Poole Brothers) was published in 1890; however, this work does not deal with Polish lands, but with the area around the town of Poland in the state of Maine.

[13] Several articles are also devoted to Polish history, but their authors pay no attention to women, cf. Archibald Cary Coolidge, "A Plea for the Study of the History of Northern Europe", *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the year 1895* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 445–451; James Breck Perkins, "The Partition of Poland", *The American Historical Review* 2, 1 (October 1896): 76–92; Herbert A. Miller, "Nationalism in Bohemia and Poland", *North American Review* 200 (July/December 1914): 879–886.

Hamilton College in 1825. He is described in dictionaries and biographical compilations as a historian (in addition to his publications on Polish history, he also dealt with the history of slavery)[14], and also as a fraudster. Saxton is best known for the notorious affair that ended his collaboration with the eccentric millionaire, Aristarchus Champion.[15] Saxton's two-volume, somewhat forgotten work, *Fall of Poland*, was published in 1851 by the renowned New York publisher Charles Scribner. The text is arranged by topic, not chronologically, but it contains a cross--section of Poland's overall history from legendary times to the end of the eighteenth century, with commentaries on the first half of the nineteenth century. The picture of Polish society painted by Saxton was highly critical: the nobility was selfish and blind, the peasants were deprived of basic human rights, and all Polish production and trade were in the hands or under the control of the Jews. Despite this, the overall tone of the work is not negative, which is intriguing given the time when the work was written, as the last chapter is devoted to the prospect of Poland's rebirth, which the author believes is, if not certain, at least highly probable.[16]

The subsequent work on Poland by an American author that appeared a half a century after Saxton's publication is somewhat different. The change was largely due to the popularization of Poland and its history in the United States as a result of translations of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novels. This very factor is pointed out by the author of this work, Louis Edwin van Norman (1869–1956).[17] This American journalist and traveller was personally connected to Poland through his wife, Daniela née Kotnowska. On his journeys, he visited Polish lands, and one of his aims was to explore the places described by Sienkiewicz in his novels. The book based on this expedition entitled *Poland, a Knight Among Nations* was published in 1907 with an introduction written by Helena Modrzejewska. It is worth noting that one of the chapters of Norman's work is entitled significantly "What Poland owes to her women."[18]

Saxton and Norman differ in their opinions of Poland and the United States, particularly regarding the analogies and dissimilarities between the nations. The former author repeatedly emphasizes the differences between the two, trying to convince the reader that all similarities are only apparent. According to Saxton, in fact the United States is a democracy, while the system of the pre-partition

[14] Luther Calvin Saxton, *History of liberty and slavery: in all ages and nations, from the earliest historical accounts, to the middle of the 19th century* (New York: Union Book Co., 1862). This information comes from the WorldCat catalogue, and the only copy noted there (of the first volume only) is in the holdings of the Boston Public Library.

[15] Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 57; *A Dictionary of North American Authors deceased before 1950*, ed. W. Stuart Wallace (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1951) 401; *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, 5, 410.

[16] Luther Calvin Saxton, *Fall of Poland* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1851), 2, 588–599.

[17] Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 67–68; *Who Was Who in America* (New Providence: Marquis Who's Who, A Red Reference Publishing Company, 1994), 3, 875.

[18] Louis Edwin van Norman, *Poland. The Knight among Nations* (New York–Chicago–Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907), 221–231.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was an aristocratic government of the worst kind,[19] which had nothing to do with democracy. It is also worth referring here to the symptomatic issue of slavery, which is of great interest to Saxton. In the chapter on this subject, the author, succinctly presenting the history of slavery from antiquity to the nineteenth century, writes about the abolition of slavery in England and France after more than ten centuries of its existence, and also mentions the existence of slavery in the United States, at the same time emphasizing that during just 60 years of its existence, this state abolished the slave trade and demolished the institution, albeit with a few, lingering, modified exceptions, which, he predicts, are doomed to die at no distant day.[20] On the other hand, he describes the situation of Polish peasants before 1795 as "outright slavery of the worst kind that led to the ignorance and moral degradation of 13 million Polish slaves."[21] Norman makes diametrically opposed assessments, identifying the similarities between the United States and Poland, and recalls the common heroes of Kościuszko and Pułaski as a factor linking the two countries.[22]

An intermediate position, less enthusiastic than Norman and less critical than Saxton, is adopted by Nevin Owen Winter (1869–1936),[23] the author of the third American work devoted entirely to Poland published before 1914. Educated as a lawyer, Winter travelled extensively and was particularly interested in Central and Eastern Europe. He was the author of two works devoted entirely to Poland – *Poland of Today and Yesterday* published in 1913, and *The New Poland* published in 1923. The latter was written after Winter's visit to Poland in 1919, so chronologically and thematically it is beyond the accepted framework of analysis, while the former, published as part of a series presenting various countries, offers the reader an interesting, balanced picture of Polish lands at the turn of the nineteenth century and their past.[24] The coverage is quite concise, but at the same time comprehensive. Of the twenty chapters of the book, three are descriptions of Polish society divided into nobility, peasants, and Jews. In addition, one chapter contains basic information about the artistic achievements of Poles, and the last chapter presents the American Polish community. It is worth noting that in each of the chapters characterizing individual groups of inhabitants of Polish lands, the author discusses the position of women.

During the First World War, two books by American authors were published that were exclusively about Poland. They differed from the works cited above primarily in that their authors had professional backgrounds and were historians.

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[19] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 117.

[20] *Ibidem*, 1, 237.

[21] *Ibidem*, 1, 238.

[22] Norman, *Poland*, 326.

[23] Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 72; *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 8th ed., 1981), 1, 1367; Wallace, *A Dictionary*, 513.

[24] Nevin Otto Winter, *Poland of To-Day and Yesterday* (Boston: L.C. Page & Company, 1913).

Both texts deserve attention although for different reasons. Chronologically, Robert Howard Lord's (1885–1954) monograph on the Second Partition of Poland,[25] published in 1915 by Harvard University Press, was slightly earlier. The historian, later to become a professor at Harvard University, was the only researcher who was allowed to use Russian archival sources on the events of the 1790s, and as a result his monograph has been used by historians tackling this issue ever since.[26] At the same time, however, the author's work focuses on diplomatic issues, while the depiction of Poland and its society at the end of the eighteenth century is rather superficial, and Polish women are practically absent (the author mentions mainly female rulers, above all Catherine II; the only exception I noted is Maria Augusta, unnamed several times as the Polish Infanta). As a result, the usefulness of Lord's work for identifying the image of Polish women and their virtues in American historiography is negligible.

Far more significant is the last of the works reviewed, *A Brief History of Poland*[27] by Julia Swift Orvis (1873–1949).[28] She was one of the first women to undertake a professional career in history in the United States, and she was also the first professional female researcher in American historiography to take up Polish issues, although she herself admits that her work is a compilation. Nevertheless, Orvis's publication provides an opportunity to confront the image of Polish women in the works of male authors with that of women through the prism of New Historicism. Hence, this work was subjected to an analysis analogous to the works mentioned previously, but it is presented separately. In the conclusions, this permits not only identifying the feminine virtues attributed to Polish women in American historiography, but it also provides an opportunity to point out the differences and similarities between the female and male points of view on this issue. However, it should be emphasized that Orvis's book is the only publication written by a woman about Poland in the period studied; thus, it is impossible to compare it with another work on a similar subject written by a female researcher.

Obviously, the very concept of studying women, the ways in which they were perceived, their role(s) in society, and the confrontation between the male (for a long time

[25] Robert Howard Lord, *The Second Partition of Poland. A Study in Diplomatic History*, vol. 23 of *Harvard Historical Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1915).

[26] Jerzy Łojek, „Robert Howard Lord – uczony niezwykły", *in: Robert Howard Lord, Drugi Rozbiór Polski,* transl. Andrzej Jaraczewski (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1973), 13–26.

[27] Julia Swift Orvis, *A Brief History of Poland* (Boston–New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1916).

[28] Barbara Klassa, "Almost forgotten – the first American History of Poland", *Comenius. Journal of Euro-American Civilization*, 4, 1 (2017): 135–149; "Historical News", *American Historical Review* 54 (1949): 988; Wallace, *A Dictionary*, 337; *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 12 (1898): 92. See also: Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 50, 76, 223.

absolutely dominant) and female points of view is not a new phenomenon. In the United States, the tradition of such research dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. The writings of the well-known abolitionist and women's rights activist Lydia Maria Child[29] are one example, especially her two-volume history of women[30] published between 1840 and 1841. A milestone in this research, however, is the much later, famous work by Joan Wallach Scott *Gender and the politics of history*[31] (1988). In subsequent years, this area of research developed rapidly, above all in the United States and Western Europe, over time gaining popularity in other countries as well. Regarding historiography, the term herstory has been promoted, serving to emphasize a non-male point of view. The comparison of different, gender-based perspectives on the role of Polish women proposed below is substantially consistent with this research trend.

The last term to be clarified is that contained in the title: "Polish women." It should be noted that American authors of the period examined rarely referred to the ethnic diversity of the population of the lands belonging to the Polish--Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1772. Norman's account is symptomatic of this. Writing about Polish society, he characterized the nobility and the people separately, presenting the Jews as a third group. Other minorities do not feature prominently in the works of American authors, which is understandable in the context of the peculiarities of the American nation that evolved from very diverse ethnic groups of migrants that had different reasons for emigrating at different times to the United States. It was not until the First World War that the minorities inhabiting the territories belonging to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1772 began to be more visible, a consequence of the pro-Russian stance of Orvis, who advocates autonomy for Poles within Russia and only on the lands she depicts as inhabited by Poles, identifying them with the territories forming part of the Congress Kingdom. Thus, in the case of most of the works analyzed, specifically those written before 1914, the term Polish women is used to refer to female persons inhabiting the territories of the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth regardless of their nationality (sometimes excluding Jews). Occasionally terms such as "a Polish girl from Ukraine" have a territorial rather than an ethnic connotation.

[29] Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic. A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham–London: Duke University Press, 1994), *passim*; Lori Kenschaft, *Lydia Maria Child. The Quest for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), *passim*.

[30] Lydia Maria Child, *The History of the Condition of Women, in various ages and nations* (Boston: John Allen & Co., 1835). Only two pages of the two volumes were devoted to Polish women in this work.

[31] Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), See also: Joan W. Scott, "Gender. A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review* 91, 5 (December 1986): 1053–1075.

Furthermore, nineteenth-century American authors refer relatively often to the wives of Polish rulers. No distinction is usually made as to the origin of the duchesses or queens, but positive (or negative) role models are portrayed through their characters. Their inclusion in the analysis presented here was therefore essential with the proviso that if the author reports on a person's origin, it is referred to in the text.

II. Polish women

In some of the works analyzed it is possible to find comments referring to all Polish women, and sometimes to women in general. For example, Saxton states that a careful reader of history will always note that in all nations and tribes, high and low, on all continents and in all countries, the community of women is always superior to the social condition of men in moral development, both individually and as a group. "This principle has ever remained one of the omnipotent laws of social existence," although he adds that sometimes women abuse their positions.[32]

Polish women were generally praised for their beauty; this issue is present in almost all works by Americans writing about Poland and is accompanied by an emphasis on their naturalness and an avoidance of, as one author put it, "the hypocrisy of the toilet."[33] Norman recalls in this context Bismarck's statement that he would rather have two regiments of hussars opposed to him than one Polish woman since the latter would cause him more trouble by her fascinations.[34] Only once, however, did I note a remark of a different nature. According to Saxton, the wife of August III (Maria Josefa, who came from the Habsburg dynasty, but the author did not give her name or family) was supposed to be one of the ugliest women in Poland.[35]

Statements about Polish women have often pointed to their thrift and modesty,[36] in the case of young ladies, going so far as to restrict their mobility, and, according to one account, they were not allowed to go farther away from their mothers than the sounds of the bells they were supposed to wear at all times would carry.[37] Some authors are inconsistent, at the same time pointing out the lavishness of the lives of upper-class ladies who were rarely expected to leave home other than in a carriage drawn by six horses even if they only wanted to cross the street.[38] Another immanent feature of the life of the Polish upper classes was supposed to be feasts.

[32] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 2, 175–176.
[33] *Ibidem*, 2, 207.
[34] Norman, *Poland*, 223.
[35] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 115.
[36] *Ibidem*, 2, 193; Norman, *Poland*, 227.
[37] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 2, 218.
[38] *Ibidem*, 2, 195.

Here Saxton emphasizes that the ladies usually only dipped their lips in wine cups, pouring most of it onto their plates, while the men drank excessively.[39]

Other qualities or achievements of Polish women are cited less frequently. Norman emphasizes the education of Polish women, pointing out that they usually spoke two or three languages and were good interlocutors[40] (the author does not state this explicitly, but the description indicates that this refers to women from the landowner stratum). Saxton, on the other hand, only exceptionally provides information on education. Here one can cite indications concerning the wives of Sigismund the Old, who corresponded and conversed in Latin with both his queens, Bona Sforza and her predecessor Barbara Zapolya.[41] Sporadic mention is made of Polish women's literary talents (including Elżbieta Drużbacka,[42] Izabela Czartoryska,[43] Maria, Duchess of Württemberg, Klementyna Hoffmanowa née Tańska,[44] Eliza Orzeszkowa, and Maria Rodziewiczówna[45]) and musical talents.[46]

In contrast, the patriotism of Polish women is relatively rarely indicated. The exception is Norman, who devotes the most attention to this issue.[47] His chapter presenting the merits of Polish women begins rather pathetically: "If the Polish eagle has never yet been tamed; if it bears its captivity and its wounds, but refuses to become domesticated, it is because the Polish women have nursed it and kept before it the scent of the upper air and the love of liberty." He continues by writing that Poles absorb patriotism with their mother's milk. Moreover, he states that "No people can ever be lost when its women place patriotism above their own comfort and pleasure, above everything else they hold dear. While there is a single Polish woman living, it is truly '*Jeszcze Polska nie zginela*'" (English – Poland is not yet lost).[48] He also stresses that, thanks to women's involvement, all efforts at Germanization or Russification remained ineffective.[49]

Another example of a patriotic attitude is the information provided by Saxton about Polish women from all social groups who, during the Kościuszko Uprising, distributed golden rings with the inscription "Our Homeland" to soldiers, strengthening the spirit of the defenders.[50] Sometimes one also observes a distinction among Polish women depending on their social position. According to Saxton,

[39] *Ibidem*, 2, 212.
[40] Norman, *Poland*, 228.
[41] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 440.
[42] *Ibidem*, 1, 452.
[43] *Ibidem*, 1, 466–467.
[44] *Ibidem*, 1, 475.
[45] Norman, *Poland*, 282.
[46] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 472, Norman, *Poland*, 273.
[47] Norman, *Poland*, 294; Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 71.
[48] Norman, *Poland*, 221.
[49] *Ibidem*, 222. Winter even quotes passages from Norman's book concerning Polish women (Winter, *Poland*, 262–263).
[50] Saxton, *Fall of Poland,* 1, 320.

ladies from the upper classes were distinguished by their beauty and feminine charm, while "the moral and intellectual condition of the female peasants was widely different and lamentably defective and degraded. They were bought and sold for the vilest purposes, and treated as the personal property of their masters, with the common brutality which ever characterizes slavery.[51] As a result, the character of Polish women "was never elevated to its true dignity."[52]

III. Wives, mothers, female warriors

In American narratives of Polish history, women most often appear as wives. However, marriage was not always accompanied by emotional involvement, or at least it is not recorded. Particularly in relation to the Middle Ages, the marriages of rulers are presented as strictly political actions. For example, for Casimir the Restorer, marrying the sister of the ruler of Rus was a chance to sort out relations with his eastern neighbour,[53] while Henry V was said to have given his sister's hand to Bolesław the Wrymouth as part of a treaty concluded after losing a battle.[54] Most often, no further information was given about the character or actions of these women. Exceptions include the way in which Dobrawa is presented; for example, according to Saxton, it was affection for her that made Mieszko I fulfil the condition put forward by the daughter of a Bohemian prince to accept baptism,[55] while Norman reports that the Christianization of Mieszko and his people was the aim of the marriage.[56]

One of the few women in Polish history to whom a little more attention is paid is Jadwiga of Anjou. However, there is usually no mention of her education, nor is there always a recollection of her donation of jewels to the Kraków Academy. Instead, a constant in her characterization is her youthful affection for her fiancé Wilhelm Habsburg. Saxton states that the queen secretly invited him to Poland, so that she was locked up under guard to prevent her from thwarting the plans of the nobles. He presents the marriage with Jagiełło as forced on the young monarch, where pressure, including threats and even the flash of a sabre, was supposed to cause not so much a change in Jadwiga's decision as in her feelings. Under the influence of threats, she was, according to Saxton, to fall in love with the Lithuanian prince, thus giving the lie to poets' songs about the constancy of women's feelings.[57] Norman emphasizes Jadwiga's voluntary devotion to her

[51] *Ibidem*, 2, 178.
[52] *Ibidem*.
[53] *Ibidem*, 1, 81.
[54] Bolesław the Wrymouth's second wife was Salomea, daughter of Henry I, Count of Berg.
[55] Saxton, *Fall of Poland* 1, 78, Winter, *Poland*, 23.
[56] Norman, *Poland*, 224.
[57] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 91.

country and to Christianity, while he is critical of Jagiełło, who repeatedly accused his wife of infidelity, so that she had to clear her name publicly.[58] Winter was most laconic in stating that Jadwiga's affection for the Habsburgs played no role for the Polish magnates.[59]

In addition to Jadwiga some authors also mention Bona Sforza. Saxton's assessment is very characteristic in this case. He states that the queen was her husband's most dangerous enemy, whom she completely subjugated through intrigues.[60] While Sobieski is one of the most widely cited figures from Polish history, and the Battle of Vienna is the only event recorded in virtually every school history textbook used in the United States in the nineteenth century,[61] information about his wife is rare. Saxton is one of the few who wrote about Marysieńka. He notes the king's deep affection for his wife, stressing that Sobieski rejected a proposal to divorce Marysieńka to marry the queen dowager, which was to be a condition of the election, and later wrote her letters every day during his travels and expeditions.[62] Like Bona, Marysieńka also often led her husband away from the path of duty; Sobieski's superiority over Sigismund the Old was manifested in the fact that the victor from Vienna was always expected to come to his senses quickly.[63] Winter also mentions Marysieńka, portraying her as a very beautiful woman in her youth, but also as ambitious, idle, constantly scheming, and suspicious.[64]

Occasionally, the wives of rulers proved to be a convenient tool for authors. For example, when reporting on the marriage of Sigismund Augustus to Barbara Radziwiłłówna, Saxton writes only that the queen died shortly after the wedding, and uses the whole theme to highlight the way in which the last Jagiellon openly and against all odds remained faithful, not to his wife, but to his own word and commitments.[65] Maryna Mniszchówna functions in a similarly impersonal way; her father was said to have pressed for his daughter's marriage to Dmitri, and Saxton also notes that Maryna '"recognized" another self-proclaimed son of Ivan the Terrible,[66] but in reporting these so-called "dry facts" the author does not comment at all on the tsarina or her character.

Apart from female rulers or the spouses of rulers, women are rarely mentioned in the works examined, and if they are referred to, it is usually instrumental. For example, Saxton reports that August Czartoryski gained wealth through his marriage to a rich widow. Maria née Sieniawska Denhoff Czartoryska functions

58 Norman, *Poland*, 224–225.
59 Winter, Poland, 35–36. Winter uses the term "the Diet" – *sejm*.
60 Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 95.
61 Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 219–225.
62 Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 312–313.
63 *Ibidem*, 1, 292.
64 Winter, *Poland*, 76–77.
65 Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 95.
66 *Ibidem*, 1, 102.

anonymously (Saxton does not provide her surname)[67] as a financial backer of the family's political influence.

It is worth noting that negative patterns also sometimes appear. One of these is Mieszko II's wife, Ryksa/Rycheza. Saxton points out that she shamefully abused the regent power entrusted to her, imposed enormous taxes, and, forced to flee the country, took the national treasure with her.[68] Saxton thus attributes to her greed, lust for power, and a lack of moderation, and he also accuses her of theft.

Another negative example sometimes cited in American publications is marital betrayals. Here the situation from the times of Bolesław the Bold is most often indicated, when women abandoned by the participants of the king's Kiev expedition after seven years of waiting (sic) were unfaithful (impatient and faithless)[69], for which, after the return of the ruler, they were punished by imprisonment.[70] Only incidentally, however, are extramarital relationships mentioned, such as that of Casimir the Great with Esther (invariably described as a Jewish woman)[71].

In some respects a different example is Kościuszko's beloved, but this time it is of a would-be spouse. The leader of the insurrection of 1794, previously a participant of the American War of Independence and a personal friend of some US Founding Fathers (such as Thomas Jefferson) is of great interest to American authors and attention is also paid to his personal life. So the theme of his failed love is obviously present, although it is described in various ways. According to Saxton, the girl, recognising the moral superiority of the future leader of the insurrection, rejected him for money.[72] Norman writes that Kościuszko's affection was reciprocated, and the young officer tried to win the king's support for his candidacy for the hand of Ludwika Sosnkowska; it was Poniatowski's actions, however, that led to the immediate end of their acquaintance.[73] Winter devotes the least attention to the affair, presenting the feeling as mutual, but in the conditions of the time doomed to failure, and he attributes the end of their acquaintance to Ludwika's father, adding at the same time that Kościuszko "remained true to his first love, and never married."[74]

The role of mother, which is so often referred to in Polish literature (not necessarily in historiography), is clearly less visible in the works of American authors than that of wife. Only Norman devotes slightly more attention to mothers and emphasizes their influence on the shaping of patriotic attitudes of Poles and on the maintenance and development of the Polish language, despite the loss of

[67] *Ibidem*, 1, 116.

[68] *Ibidem*, 1, 80.

[69] *Ibidem*, 1, 82.

[70] He also describes the situation of marital infidelity in a similar way in another place, but there is no reference to chronology there, cf. *Ibidem*, 1, 240.

[71] Norman, *Poland*, 248.

[72] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 313–314.

[73] Norman, *Poland*, 159.

[74] Winter, *Poland*, 132.

independence and the efforts made by the partitioning states to denationalize Poles.[75] Mother-educators are sometimes mentioned in the context of outstanding sons. One example is the mother of Jan III Sobieski. The victor from Vienna was one of the most (next to Copernicus[76] and Kościuszko) recognized Poles in the United States. Saxton mentions that his mother (her family name is not given) was the granddaughter of Hetman Żółkiewski, and after her husband's death she became the guardian of her sons.[77] Here Saxton creates an inadequate description of the role of the mother of Jan Sobieski in his life and fails to mention that at the time of his father's death, the future king was almost 17 years old and had studied at the Kraków Academy and travelled around Europe with his older brother (he received the news of his father's death in Paris). Upon his return to the country (after the outbreak of the Chmielnicki Uprising), Sobieski and his brother enlisted in the army. Thus, it is difficult to know what role his guardian would have played and for what purpose Saxton introduces this isolated information. Interestingly, the same author mentions that Copernicus's mother was the sister of the Bishop of Warmia.[78] Although he does not attribute to her a conclusive influence on the astronomer's upbringing or education, through her family he shows that Copernicus had significant parental connections.

Another mother to whom Saxton devotes some attention is the mother of the last Polish king. The author emphasizes her descent from the Czartoryski family and her personal involvement in the education of Stanisław, of whom an Italian impostor was said to have predicted that he would be king. Saxton writes little about Poniatowski's father, but states that his mother read him treatises on war and politics and on the virtues and qualities essential to good rulers.[79]

The role of mothers in the lives of Polish national heroes is mentioned sporadically by other authors. Norman briefly recalls Tekla née Ratomska, a strong and beautiful woman to whom her son, Kościuszko, "owed his lofty views and steadfastness of purpose."[80]

A characteristic element of Polish history is the country's permanent involvement in wars; according to American authors, the struggle is also familiar to Polish women. In Saxton's opinion, Poland's continuous participation in wars, waged in its own and (more often) in the interests of others, inevitably led to the evolution of a whole society dominated by military tyrants and carefree Amazons.[81] There

[75] Norman, *Poland*, 221–222.

[76] Of course, it should be remembered that Copernicus's nationality – Polish or German – was not interpreted unambiguously in American historiography of the nineteenth century, cf. Klassa, *Obraz Polski*, 269–271.

[77] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 272.

[78] *Ibidem*, 1, 251.

[79] *Ibidem*, 2, 460.

[80] Norman, *Poland*, 155.

[81] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 2, 188.

are not many specific examples, but they relate to very different periods of Polish history. The earliest cited female ruler at the head of her own troops is said to be Wanda, known in Polish tradition as the one who did not agree to marry a German (this is also how Norman depicts her)[82]. Saxton proposes a completely different version of this legend: when a German monarch who was in love with her arrived at the head of an army and offered her the alternative of war or love, Wanda woman-like, resolved not to be coerced in her love beyond the natural dictates of the tender passion, buckeld on her armour and mounted her trusty charger to meet the foe. Surprisingly, the German knights refused to fight that battle, reserving their arms for the defence of their country. Their monarch committed suicide, and Wanda returned to Kraków. However, a few years later "the cold-hearted princess saw the folly of single blessedness, and losing all pleasure in her martial and masculine occupations, so unnatural to the more refined feelings and employment of her sex – separated herself from her associates" eventually committing suicide.[83] This passage of Saxton's text piques one's attention primarily because of its strong emphasis on a certain inappropriateness of warcraft for women. This is rather unique in *Fall of Poland*; the examples below are of a completely different nature.

Interestingly, some American works contain information on the now forgotten heroine of the Turkish wars, Anna Chrzanowska. In Saxton's work her name is admittedly distorted and the description of events is also questionable, but nevertheless her role in the defence of Trembowla in 1675 is noted. In Saxton's account, the defence of that place was commanded by Samuel Chrasanowski, a Jew, but the key role was played by his wife "who was the greater warrior of the two." When the "cowardly Polish nobles of this station, as usual, began to plan a surrender" Anna overheard them and immediately moved into the centre of the fiercest fighting to inform her husband of the threat. The commander managed to convince the nobles to continue defending themselves. As the walls of Trembowla began to crumble under Turkish artillery fire, "the Jewish heroine [...] seizing two poniards, said to him [her husband – B.K.] 'One of these is destined for thee, if thou surrenderest this town; the other I intend for myself.'"[84] At this crucial moment Sobieski's army arrived to relieve the town, so the threats were not carried out. Anna Chrzanowska (this time the name is correct) is also referred to by Norman, who reports that during the defence of the town a woman with her own hand "loaded and aimed the cannon and threatened to kill her husband and herself if he yielded, until, finally, Sobieski came to her rescue."[85]

Being very critical of the last king of Poland, Saxton at the same time states that genuine patriots strongly opposed his candidacy from the beginning.

[82] Norman, *Poland*, 224.
[83] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 2, 271–272.
[84] *Ibidem*, 1, 290.
[85] Norman, *Poland*, 225.

Among the most important opponents were Hetman Branicki and one of the Radziwiłłs.[86] In the face of a growing crisis, the duke's wife and sisters also joined the fight – "young, beautiful, accomplished and educated ladies [...] fired with the courage of their old Amazonian mothers, and inspired with the love of liberty [...] resolved to exchange their lives for the heart's blood of the Russian hordes." Swapping silks for armour they threw themselves into the fire of the fiercest battle with their bridles in their teeth, and a sabre in each hand [...] occasionally charming the troops with their sweet and inspiring war-songs. Moreover, during the battle one of Radziwiłł's sisters felt in love with "a most beautiful and gallant" but poor, obscure man named Moraski. Within eight days they were married. For Saxton, this anecdote provides an opportunity to state that "the female character, in its glory, possesses an excellence, seldom, if ever, found in the other sex. She can both love and hate, fight and woo, kill and cure, all at the same time."[87]

Norman's narrative is more reliable than Saxton's. This author also describes the involvement of Polish women in the struggle, but relies on verified information. He quotes specific examples: Klaudia Potocka and Emilia Szczaniecka gave up their vast estates for the Polish cause during the revolution of 1831, "nursed the sick and wounded in the field and in hospital, and sealed their patriotic devotion with exile to Siberia. Other women, such as Emilia Plater and Antonina Tomaszewska, fought on the battlefield as soldiers, commanded regiments, and died fighting for their homeland. Indeed, Polish women, while remaining intensely feminine, always performed their duties like men, joining conspiracies and following their husbands into exile without a murmur."[88]

The role of women in armed conflicts was not limited to armed struggle; sometimes they are also portrayed in more negative ways. For example, the disintegration of Bolesław the Bold's army in Kiev was caused by local women and wine. In many ways more interesting are the aforementioned events that the protracted absence of the king and his army caused in the country. In the *Vitae of Saint Stanislaus,* mention is made of the famous issue of the infidelity of deserted wives, who not only betrayed their husbands during their prolonged absence (according to Saxton, this lasted seven years), but when, alarmed by rumours, their husbands began to return to the country without the king's consent, they fought alongside their lovers against their spouses.[89] Women's involvement in military action was thus not unheard of, and they were condemned not for resisting, but for infidelity.

[86] This prince was described as having at least two sisters (Saxton uses the plural), young and unmarried. Only one Radziwill sister, Teofila, born in 1745, sister of Maciej and Mikołaj, daughter of Leon and Anna née Mycielska, was of the relevant age at the time of Poniatowski's election.

[87] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 2, 476.

[88] Norman, *Poland*, 225.

[89] Saxton, *Fall of Poland*, 1, 82.

IV. An American woman's image of Polish women

In Orvis's work women are both more and less visible than in those in Saxton, Norman, or Winter. They are more visible because there are far more of them than in the publications of the other authors discussed here; and they are less visible, because general statements about Polish women or particular groups of them are far less frequent in Orvis. For example, Orvis is the only one to mention Mieszko pushing away the women he was associated with as a pagan ruler before his marriage to Dobrawa. With regard to the Middle Ages, the author clearly mentions the rulers' wives more frequently, gives their names and the country they came from, while the anti-German attitude of the researcher is notable. Although Orvis describes Ryksa's regency in a manner very similar to that of Saxton, she also exposes the queen's alienation. As a German, Ryksa did not know or understand Poland, staffed offices with Germans, despised Polish customs, and did not care about Polish interests, and when forced to flee, took her son and treasury with her.[90] Only in Orvis is Agnes, the wife of Ladislaus II the Exile, portrayed in some detail. The researcher, while emphasizing that Agnes was German, also exposes her antipathy toward Poles and her exuberant ambition, which led to the civil war in Poland and to the anathema imposed on Agnes and her husband.[91] The German wives, mentioned here without details, were to lead to the rapid Germanization of the Silesian Piast line, which had been deprived of the Polish throne.[92]

Regarding the modern era, Orvis continues to attach great importance to the wives of Polish rulers, most often presenting marriages as activities of diplomatic significance that strengthened alliances, but that were also sometimes dynastic.[93] This information is not limited to Polish kings; Orvis also mentions the Vienna Agreement of 1515 and the marriage of Vasyl III to the niece of Mikhail Gliński, which was supposed to seal their alliance.[94] However, she rarely devotes more attention to women' s activities, and, apart from Jadwiga, exceptions include Marysieńka Sobieska (treated rather superficially, as the evil spirit of her husband, who, according to Orvis, was an outstanding commander but otherwise a man of mediocre skills)[95], and Bona Sforza. The picture of the controversial queen is ambiguous. Orvis mentions her beauty, her influence on the development of Polish culture, including the transformation of the Kraków court into a significant centre of Renaissance literature and art. On practical matters,

[90] Orvis, *Brief History*, 13.

[91] *Ibidem*, 23.

[92] *Ibidem*, 24.

[93] She states, for example, that three Polish queens were French, and that a Pole, Maria Leszczynska, was Queen of France; cf. *ibidem*, 161.

[94] *Ibidem*, 79, 82–83.

[95] *Ibidem*, 152.

the author notes Bona's organizational activities in Podolia, the building of fortresses, and the effective protection of the population against Tartar invasions. In addition to her merits, the faults of Sigismund the Old's wife are also presented including lust for power and money and the unscrupulous pursuit of both, which caused her to lose popularity over time. Moreover, Orvis mentions that in later years Bona was said to have cheated on her husband and was also suspected of poisoning her daughter-in-law, Barbara Radziwiłłówna.[96]

One element that is quite visible in Orvis's narrative is the connection between women and religion. This theme applies not only to Dobrawa, but also to Olgierd's wife, the Princess of Vitebsk, and to some extent to Jadwiga of Anjou. The daughter of Louis of Hungary is portrayed both very positively and relatively thoroughly. Orvis mentions her feelings for the Habsburgs but emphasizes her voluntary sacrifice of her love for a man for the love of her country; Jadwiga's marriage to Jagiełło was, according to Orvis, the most important event in the history of Poland.[97] The scholar also writes about Jadwiga's charitable and Christianizing activities, including her founding of the Lithuanian College in Prague and the donation of her jewels to the Kraków Academy. Orvis also records the lesser-known fact that Jadwiga took command of a military expedition to Ruthenia (though she states that the Hungarians attacked Poland). The subsequent marriages of Jagiello are also usually omitted, but in the *Brief History of Poland* they are noted.[98] Moreover, Orvis also portrays Barbara Radziwiłłówna in an unusual way; she was supposed to have been received badly by the Polish nobility and the church as a follower of Calvinism, but there are no references to her beauty, usually the most emphasized attribute of the beloved wife of the last of the Jagiellons.[99]

As I mentioned earlier, a pro-Russian approach is evident in Orvis's work, with the researcher openly arguing for a Polish-Russian agreement on the basis of Polish autonomy within Russia.[100] This is also evident in the opinion about Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich contained in her work. According to Orvis, the prince loved the Poles in his own barbaric way as was supposedly demonstrated by his renunciation of his rights to the tsarist throne in connection with his marriage to a Polish woman, Joanna Grudzińska.[101] This is the only mention I have found of the Duchess of Łowicz in American historiography of this period, and there is no further information about her.

[96] *Ibidem*, 84–85.
[97] *Ibidem*, 49.
[98] *Ibidem*, 57.
[99] *Ibidem*, 86.
[100] Klassa, *Almost forgotten*, *passim*.
[101] Orvis, *Brief History*, 256.

Conclusions

In nineteenth-century American historiography Poland was not given much attention, and apart from the history of the United States, issues related to the history of the western part of the Old Continent were taken up much more often. Nevertheless, from the middle of the century, interest in the Polish question slowly developed, and in the period from 1850 to 1918 a total of five books by American authors were published on the history of Poland and the situation of Poles under partition. While some attention is also paid to Polish women, their role is usually not explored in detail.

Most of the books examined here were published before 1914, and were written by men interested in Poland and its past, but these authors lacked the academic historical training that was becoming increasingly common and expected in the second half of the nineteenth century, primarily in Europe, but over time also in the United States. The background of their interest in Poland was usually not clearly defined (except for that of Norman), and their narratives are often characterized by the positives or negatives, depending on the author, of linking Polish history with that of the United States.

Saxton, Norman, and Winter attach great importance to the features associated with the traditional (male) perception of women, namely beauty, personal charm, grace, and talent for managing households. Sometimes, especially in *Fall of Poland*, the authors make statements of a universal nature, referring not only to Polish women, but to women in general. Interestingly, these generalizing remarks follow the traditional convention of conservative perceptions of womanly virtues, but they are invariably positive.

Furthermore, in the works studied it is possible to distinguish several *topoi* of the woman: wife, mother, and warrior. Most often, women are mentioned in the context of marriages, usually, but not exclusively, to rulers. This information is typically not accompanied by any details; the reader does not learn anything about the women's background, character, or activities. There are only a few exceptions, mostly connected with passive participation in momentous events (the baptism of Poland in the case of Dobrawa, the union with Lithuania for Jadwiga of Anjou). The authors do devote some space to the role of women as mothers and educators, but this element is included sporadically for pre-partition times and much more so in relation to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the time of the Partitions, the patriotic attitude of Polish women is presented as a conditio *sine qua non* for sustaining the very existence of the Polish nation. This refers to the educational role of mother and the determination of wives accompanying their husbands in exile. It should be noted that these statements usually concern anonymous groups of women, and personal details are rarely given. The situation is slightly different in the case of female warriors. They appear incidentally in relation to both the pre-partition era and the nineteenth century. Polish Amazons,

usually presented by name, are described as being distinguished by their heroism and bravery fighting with arms in hand for the freedom of their country.

After the outbreak of the First World War, as a result of various factors, the popularity of the Polish question in the United States increased notably. On the one hand, this was linked to the activity of the Polish community in the US, above all Ignacy Paderewski, and on the other hand, the subject played a certain role in the political disputes that divided American historians very strongly during this period. For the most part, references to Poland and its status were of a very general nature, but two works by professional historians focused on Polish history were published in the period before the United States entered the war. Lord's monograph on the Second Partition of Poland, the most famous of the American works on Poland from the period under review, proved unsuitable, while Orvis's now almost forgotten book made it possible to confront the image of Polish women contained in earlier works (by men) with that of a female historian, writing in the peculiar conditions of the fierce dispute over which side of the European conflict the United States should support.[102]

The political situation was not without influence on the portrayal of Polish women in Orvis's work; she was definitely a supporter of the Entente, so she viewed the Polish question in the context of Russia, promoting a Polish-Russian agreement with a guarantee of autonomy for Poles within the Romanov Empire. As a result, there is little information about the Polish uprisings and no reference to Polish women fighting for independence in her *Brief History of Poland*. The image of the mother-educator teaching patriotism and fostering Polishness is also absent from Orvis's book for the same reason.

The image of Polish women in Orvis's publication differs in many respects from the earlier books by Saxton, Norman, and Winter. Paradoxically, women in her text are both more and less visible. She writes about women much more often, but she practically never writes about the nameless mass of Polish women; specific persons always appear in her narrative. The author does not refer to social divisions, yet she writes about women primarily as wives, usually those of rulers. These women are often described at least briefly as important political factors, sometimes as tools to strengthen alliances or to secure peace. Emotional involvement is hardly mentioned, but this concerns both parties to marriages, thus creating a sort of equality. Consequently, there is no topos or stereotypical approach in Orvis's work regarding women. She does not address the issues of women's beauty or other gender-related attributes that are so common in her predecessors' texts; one gets the impression

[102] George T. Blakey, *Historians on the Homefront. American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington: University of the Kentucky Press, 2014); Klassa, *Almost forgotten*; Victor Mamatey, *The United States and East Central Europe 1914–1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream. The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 111–132.

that the purpose of her approach is to delete from the pages of history the absent, nameless mass of women while also preventing women from being reduced to the position and role of just their external attributes.

However, the discrepancy between the image of Polish women in the books of Orvis and her predecessors should not be perceived as a fundamental change in the approach of American historians to that subject. On the one hand, this is impossible because of the absence of other works by female historians; while on the other, it is hampered by Lord's monograph, an indisputably professional work, but one that marginalizes the role of women, despite the fact that the texts of Polish historians (namely Walerian Kalinka) Lord references contain much information about the activities of Polish women in the period he examines.

Barbara Klassa

Wives, Mothers, Female Warriors. The Image of Polish Women in Nineteenth Century American Historiography

Summary

The author analyzes selected American historical narratives published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and describes the image of Polish women presented in them. Women were not usually visible in the historiography of this period, and in fact, they are rarely mentioned, but if they are mentioned, it is mainly as rather inactive wives and/or mothers. In Polish history, however, there were important exceptions, such as Dobrawa and Jadwiga Andegawenska or, to a lesser extent, Bona Sforza and Marysieńka Sobieska. Other queens are mentioned rather rarely, and only exceptionally do women from outside the ruling families appear, which is something that applies even to aristocratic women. It is these very rare mentions of Polish women that are taken into consideration even if they are usually mentioned in single publications.

In addition, detailed research is presented to isolate certain statements about Polish women in general and their character and virtues. These statements are relatively few in number, but they are occasionally included especially when they describe customs.

These elements serve as the basis for analyzing the overall image of Polish women in American historiography with a particular emphasis on the process of its historical modification.

Moreover, the author also includes elements of comparison between descriptions of Polish women and those of women from other countries and nations with the aim of identifying any possible similarities and/or differences with regard to the Polish national (feminine) character and the national (feminine) set of virtues.