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## **Elżbieta Wiater, *Wierny pies Pański: biografia św. Jacka Odrowąza***

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*Wierny pies Pański: biografia św. Jacka Odrowąza* by Elżbieta Wiater is a book dedicated to the person of St. Hyacinth Odrowąz – a Dominican Friar who lived in Kraków at the turn of the 12th and the 13th centuries and was canonised in 1594.

The publication consists of a short introduction, six chapters, a set of 12 illustrations, timetable for St. Hyacinth's life and his canonisation process, a repertory of prayers with his intercession, an index of persons, and a list of illustrations.

The book constitutes an attempt to gather and present in a straightforward manner all the scattered pieces of information concerning St. Hyacinth Odrowąz – the spiritual father of the Dominican Friars in Poland. The author of the biography aimed not only at the well-ordered presentation of facts concerning the life of the saint, but also tried to make his figure more approachable to the readers and, hopefully, to widen the circle of his worshippers.

The first chapter is devoted largely to the Odrowąz house. Such a way of beginning the narration is in this case understandable and appropriate: the author aims at popularising the silhouette of St. Hyacinth, yet stays faithful to the historical way of narrating that demands adumbrating the roots from which the character descends and family ties a part of which he is. In the majority of cases these hereditary aspects influenced a person's way of life, potential and even personality (which, according to the author, was

very much the case of St. Hyacinth Odrowąż). In the instance of a medieval person this interpersonal bond is particularly significant: the saint lived in the epoch of people whose mentality was naturally driven by the need for collectivity, fellowship. And St. Hyacinth was a representative of two communities concurrently: the Odrowąż house and the Order of Preachers.

In this opening chapter the author provides quite a detailed narration concerning the history of Poland from the times of prince Wladislaw Herman who ruled Poland from 1079 to 1102. To a historian who reaches for this book such a description may seem unnecessary, though he should keep in mind that it's a popular science publication and the amateurs will presumably appreciate that the author leads them through the convolutedness of medieval history of Poland. The reader will also notice that E. Wiater tries to outline the relations between church and state in Poland, with all their complexity that affected both the former and the latter. The author devotes a lot of attention to the Odrowąż family crest. She not only provides its description and intellectualizing of its presumable origins, but also affords the picture of it at the end of the book. In this chapter the author devotes a lot of space to Iwo Odrowąż — the bishop of Kraków in 1218–1229 and a kinsman to Hyacinth Odrowąż, clearly attempting to imply that Iwo had a significant impact on his younger relative.

The second chapter is devoted wholly to the origins and spirituality of the Dominican Order. The author stresses the vocation of Dominican Friars as *Domini canes*, dogs of God. She does so in the context in which their community was destined to come into being: the era of Cathar heresy that began to infect the Christian West, in particular southern France. The chapter includes a thorough description of St. Dominic Guzmán's, the founder of Ordo Praedicatorum's life, and his mission among the heretics. E. Wiater gives also a lot of attention to the Dominican spirituality, its affinity to the ones of Cistercians and Franciscans and to the elements of the Dominican Friars' habit. At some point the reader loses sight of St. Hyacinth and may even forget that he is reading his biography. The question occurs: was it necessary to provide such a detailed description of St. Dominic's life at the cost of attention appertaining St. Hyacinth in a book being his biography? It seems that the author went a bit too far away in her attempt to present in detail the history of the founder of the Order of Preachers. Nevertheless, this expanded depiction may be treated as a help for the reader to gain an insight into the very Dominican spirituality and, in the aftermath of it, to get a better understanding of the person and activity of St. Hyacinth.

Only in the next chapter begins the awaited and somewhat postponed, actual story of the spiritual father of Polish Dominicans. The reader comes to know the details of the life of the young Hyacinth Odrowąż. The author confirms that the future saint and his two companions received their habits from St. Dominic himself. Then began their travel to Poland in order to found first Dominican monasteries there. The Holy Trinity church in Kraków was supposed to be the first Dominican church on Polish ground. The moment E. Wiater begins to describe the topographical details of the location of the church and the architectural particulars of the building, the reader has the opportunity to appreciate her extensive knowledge of the field and the thorough research she must have done. The description may help those readers who haven't seen the abovementioned church to at least imagine how it looks and how it was constructed. While explaining the practice of founding churches by princes and other laymen, the author emphasises the role of Iwo Odrowąż as a church founder and proceeds to discuss his attempt to forgo the bishopric, as he would prefer living in a secluded monastery. It's all very interesting, but the author once more forsakes the person of the actual protagonist of her book and shows her evident inclination for addressing his older relation. One can't negative that many steps taken by Iwo Odrowąż had a direct influence on Hyacinth Odrowąż, nonetheless it seems that the author tends to devote too much attention to the former, whose person several times overrides the character of St. Hyacinth.

The forward part of the chapter was supposedly meant to be devoted preponderantly to the missions of St. Hyacinth and his role in founding new Dominican monasteries. And, indeed, the author describes it, with particular reference to his activity beyond the northern frontiers of the 13th century Poland, but again yields to the temptation of describing in detail the related subjects. She puts forward the issues that are directly connected with St. Hyacinth's mission, such as the appearance of the Teutonic Order on Polish ground, but gets distracted, easily and frequently abandoning the chief theme of the book.

The fourth chapter is a crucial one. It provides a description of most important miracles that accompanied the person of St. Hyacinth both during his life and after his death. It constitutes a guide to understanding of the advancement of St. Hyacinth's cult. E. Wiater describes in a straightforward way one of the most important occurrences with which the saint is associated, namely the fire of the Dominican church in Kiev. It was then that the future saint escaped from the flaming church, taking with himself a tin with

consecrated Body of Christ, but also a statuette of Mother of God, asked to do so by Herself, even though he considered it to be too heavy for him to carry. The picture of St. Hyacinth carrying the tin (or a monstrance) and the figurine endures in iconography and constitutes the most characteristic and recognisable depiction of the saint. As for the statuette itself, it's widely known as St. Hyacinth's Mother of God (Matka Boża Jackowa) and, as the author mentions, nowadays there are at least four figurines considered to be the original one. E. Wiater briefly describes each of them and determines which of them is most probably the authentic one. The further part of the chapter is devoted to a description of St. Hyacinth's miracles, his death and the nascence of the legend concerning his life and his power as an intercessor.

The last but one chapter is also an important one. The author makes an attempt to characterise the beginnings of cult of St. Hyacinth and, more importantly, to describe his canonisation process, which rendered to be a travel on a bumpy road full of obstacles and stopovers. It should be appreciated that the author gathers in one place and puts in order all the details concerning St. Hyacinth's so convoluted way to become a saint. She also reveals the details of controversies concerning the uncertain burial place of the future saint. As the author ultimately provides a description of the canonisation ceremony, she makes a point of depicting the canonisation gonfalon of St. Hyacinth. It's a crucial fragment, since it concerns the oldest gonfalon of that type in the world. A great advantage of the book is that the author provides a photograph of the aforementioned object and also of several more objects connected with the worship of the saint Dominican, whose detailed description is added at the very end of the book.

The last chapter of the book is devoted mainly to discussing the growth of posthumous cult of St. Hyacinth. E. Wiater emphasises what she implied at the very beginning – that his cult is more widespread abroad than in Poland. She provides examples of his worship among others in Italy, Peru, France, Canada, USA. The author didn't forget to mention a very significant curiosity: that St. Hyacinth is the only Polish saint whose statue can be found in Bernini's colonnade on St. Peter's Square in Rome. It's definitely a considerable distinction while not many Poles are aware of this fact. The indisputable advantage of this chapter is the fact that, as E. Wiater herself suggests, there is no monograph that would present the development of St. Hyacinth's postcanonisation cult, yet the author at least tries to gather in one place the fragmented pieces of information concerning this subject.

The closing pages of the book feature a very useful timetable for St. Hyacinth's life and the progression of his canonisation process. It is followed by a repertory of prayers to St. Hyacinth, which constitutes a very suitable and attractive appendix to a book largely devoted to description of the development of the worship of the Dominican saint. The next constituent of the book is an index of persons mentioned in the book. Basically, it seems rather unnecessary, since the book is not a thick one and a personal index is rather a typical part of comprehensive scientific publications, which this book is not. A bibliography would undoubtedly be a more acceptable and usable part of this book. All the more, for the author notoriously alleges other publications, including historical sources. She discusses them, sometimes disputes with them, yet in the end the reader has no access to their listing, which must be perceived as quite a serious drawback of the book.

E. Wiater took a punt at presenting the figure of St. Hyacinth in a popular science book, written in a straightforward language. The problem is that the language sometimes gets too colloquial and the style — too slovenly, which may be a somewhat unpleasant surprise for the reader. For example, when she comments on St. Hyacinth's escape from burning church and taking with him the statuette of Virgin Mary, which he at first considered too heavy, she allows herself to place not a very sophisticated comment:

„Bracia do dziś nie potrafią się do końca zdecydować, czy cudem było to, że ją [statuetkę — D. Ż.] wyniósł, to, że była lekka, czy to, że nie dostał po uszach za sugerowanie kobiecie, że za dużo waży [...]”. Or the following fragment: „Rok, w którym święty umiera, jest ważny nie tylko z powodu jego odejścia do Pana. Zaczyna się jak w scenariuszu Hitchcocka — 31 stycznia następuje w Krakowie trzęsienie ziemi, po czym napięcie tylko rośnie”. Or: „Święci są jak bohaterowie współczesnych filmów akcji — co epoka, to kolejny *sequel*, w końcu są naprawdę nieśmiertelni”. Unfortunately, there are many more such missed fragments in the book.

Regrettably, the author can be also faulted for somewhat strange, utterly unnecessary and inappropriate irony, that contributes nothing to the narration, except for making it slightly ridiculous: “Tak więc jeśli zobaczycie kiedyś dominikanina podnoszącego do ust szkaplerz, to wiedzcie, że ma coś na sumieniu. I to grubszego niż zapomnienie serwetki”; “Niecałe dwadzieścia lat po pierwszych odwiedzinach, w roku 1259 lub 1260, Mongołowie znów zajrzeli z wizytą, która dała podobne rezultaty jak pierwsza”; “Wcześniej o ubóstwo i pełną elegancji prostotę wnętrza [kaplicy św. Jacka w krakowskim kościele Dominikanów — D. Ż.] zadbali najpierw okupujący

klasztor szwedzcy żołdacy, a potem dwa pożary: z lat 1668 i 1681". The effect is poor, but most probably the author must have had no bad intentions.

Another issue that should be raised is the author's tendency to adumbrate too wide a background while attempting to introduce a new question. Such was the case for example with the narration about the Tutonic Order or the very beginnings of Ordo Praedicatorum. Surely, the narrative demanded some contextual pieces of information, but the background itself became so wide that it overrided the foreground, the actual narration. It seems connected with the author's inclination for digressions and easy losing sight of the main subject.

Fortunately, the book has many strong suits. First of all, the very idea of an attempt to gather in one publication all the main data concerning St. Hyacinth and, secondly, aiming at presenting it in an approachable way. It seems that E. Wiater managed to reach both the goals. Reading of the book gives an impression that the author knows very well and intuitively the Dominican spirituality. It seems a merit of long hours she must have spent researching the chosen subject and the time spent in the Dominican church in Kraków and in the presence of Dominican friars themselves. That seems the reason why she clearly had no problems with describing the characteristic features of their spirituality.

A reader who is a historian himself will definitely spot and appreciate the author's wide background and a good history workshop. E. Wiater reaches for many various sources and knows how to present their content to the reader. On the one hand she quotes the fragments of sources in their original wording, on the other hand she always provides a Polish translation, keeping in mind that her work is addressed not only to historians, but to various readers. Also the extent of issues she raises makes a great impression. The author reaches for details from the field of theology, architecture, art history, geography, topography, archeology, history of education, hagiography and others. This makes her book more than a biography of St. Hyacinth, but a kind of a multiaspectual study of his times.

*Wierny pies Pański: biografia św. Jacka Odrowąża* by Elżbieta Wiater is a book, which, with some flaws and many assets, is a recommendable one. It might be a trigger for broader research on the subject of this great yet still underestimated Polish Dominican saint. The author brings this person living in the turn of the 12th and the 13th centuries closer to the contemporary reader. The work may help to spread the cult of St. Hyacinth and strongly motivates to visit his chapel in the Holy Trinity Dominican church in Kraków.