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Visual Homophobic Fabrications  
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The Curious Cases of Boleslaw the  
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## **Kings as 'Queens'—Textual and Visual Homophobic Fabrications of Two Polish Kings: The Curious Cases of Boleslaw the Generous and Henry I of Poland**

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**Abstract:** Polish historiography concerned with the lives of kings and queens has—as yet—not been subjected to a major reevaluation and re-interpretation from the point of view of gay and lesbian or queer studies. This is despite the fact that at least eight rulers in the course of Polish history have had their supposed heteronormativity contested. Given Polish historians' general reluctance to address the issue of the rulers' sexuality and—if indeed addressed—the homophobic entanglements that characterise the historical discourse, two cases appear to be particularly valid and illuminating: Boleslaw II the Generous (1042-1081) and Henry III of France (1551-1589)—known in Poland as Henry I. For centuries, the two rulers have been—more than any other Polish king or queen—subjected to defamatory criticism. The issue of their sexuality has been deliberately used as a major instrument in creating their “black legend.” It is their sexuality—regardless of the “real” psycho-sexual identity of the two kings—that has played a major role in creating a homophobic fabrication of their image as evil and immoral rulers, the former being presented as the Sodomite “Murderer” King, the latter as the Sodomite “Traitor” King. This article investigates a history of textual and visual homophobic representations of both rulers, scrutinising not only traditional historical documents (such as chronicles and annals), but also a variety of literary sources from the period (poetry and lampoons) and images (prints, drawings, and murals). Special attention will be paid to the rulers' conceptualisation as the antithesis of the “good king” trope, as well as to some contemporary attempts at re-claiming and re-writing traditional history within the framework of queer studies.

**Keywords:** Polish kings; Boleslaw the Generous; Henry I of Poland; homophobia; queer historiography

In that phrase “a queer desire for history,” I meant a desire for a different kind of past, for a history that is not straight.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, nos. 2–3 (2007): 185.

### In search of a queer impulse



Over the last two centuries or so, “a desire for a different kind of past, for a history that is not straight,” famously formulated by Carolyn Dinshaw in her 1999 seminal study *Getting Medieval*,<sup>2</sup> and later re-iterated in a well-known roundtable discussion titled “Theorizing Queer Temporalities” and published in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*,<sup>3</sup> has resulted in a major reevaluation and re-interpretation of the past from the point of view of gay and lesbian, as well as queer studies.<sup>4</sup> However, this complex process of reconstructing “queer history”<sup>5</sup> is by no means a universal phenomenon. It has, in fact, been largely limited to Western liberal democracies and, consequently, to Western (homo-/queer-philic) historiography. Polish historiography, which might well be seen as representative of Central and Eastern European historical writing in general, remains a prime example of the absence of “a queer historical impulse,” which Carolyn Dinshaw defines as “an impulse towards making connections across time between, on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and, on the other hand, those left out of current sexual categories now.”<sup>6</sup> In truth, one can argue that a “queer impulse” in Polish historical writing has been made impossible by the essentially homophobic historiographical politics of non-heteronormative sexualities; the kind which repeatedly and unrelentingly denies non-heteronormative historical figures any private life and instead relocates them into the closet, this “defining structure of gay oppression.”<sup>7</sup> The process of homophobic closeting, whose basic axioms were exhaustively addressed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her influential 1990 study entitled *Epistemology of the Closet*,<sup>8</sup> appears to be particularly pervasive in all forms and genres of Polish historical writing.

Contemporary historical biography focusing on individuals whose non-heteronormative psycho-sexual identity is not only self-evident, but also historically well-documented might be cited here as one of the most notable manifestations of this phenomenon. In recent years, the likes of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Poland’s most-widely read novelist of the twentieth century, Jerzy Giedroyc, an essayist, politician, and the creator of the influential *Kultura* monthly, as well as the Kraków-based bohemian artist and celebrity Piotr Skrzynecki, to name but a few, have become not only the subjects of major historical

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<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities,” 185.

<sup>4</sup> We are well aware of the conceptual differences between gay and lesbian studies and queer studies and, despite the occurrence of both conceptual frameworks within this article, we have deliberately prioritised the latter category.

<sup>5</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 2. One should note a resistance on the part of a number of queer scholars to the very notions of queer history and queer historiography (as well as their respective methodologies). Scott Bravmann, for example, in his *Queer Fictions of the Past*, insists on placing his work within the framework of “queer cultural studies of history” rather than queer history or historiography. Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), x.

<sup>6</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 71.

<sup>8</sup> Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 1–63.

biographies,<sup>9</sup> but also the victims of both the politics and poetics of the closet, in which “epistemological pressure” refuses to be “saturated with sexual impulsion.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most probing investigation (as well as exposure) of the politics of homophobia in Polish historiography is provided by the recent biography of Józef Czapski, an émigré writer and painter as well as a friend of the aforementioned Jerzy Giedroyc, written by the American (and not Polish, *sic!*) writer and painter Eric Karpeles. In his 2018 study of Czapski’s life and art entitled *Almost Nothing*, he recalls the following incident, which happened when he was touring around Poland with one of Czapski’s relatives:

Chewing his lip a bit, his eyes darting about, he [Babu, Czapski’s relative] asked sheepishly if I would mind if he were to ask me something personal about his well-known ancestor. “I’ve heard about him my whole life,” he announced with some trepidation. “He’s like a hovering spirit. But conversation about him within the family always goes only so far and then stops. I’ve heard some kind of rumbling noises from friends of the family, stories about him beyond the saintly legend, but no one in the family wants to talk about it. You seem to know so much about him.” Long pause. “Was he gay?”

It was a relief to hear the question put so directly. It may be the twenty-first century, but I was in Poland, a country where eighty percent of the population identifies as Catholic, where many long-held taboos remain firmly intact. And so I sensed a lot was at stake. I knew that my reply to this sophisticated but credulous Józef Czapski look-alike should not be flippant. Maintaining my credibility and standing within the family of Czapski descendants was no small consideration; I needed their permission in order to publish my research. I couldn’t risk ruffling feathers by making pronouncements about a renowned member of their tribe I’d never met. It was clear to me, however, that to prevaricate under these circumstances would be wrong. If Czapski had no illusions about himself, Babu, having asked a question point-blank, had the right to an honest answer. I took a deep breath. “He slept with both women and men,” I said, “but I believe his sexual preference was primarily homoerotic. So, essentially, about what you’re asking, the answer is yes.”<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, despite a number of biographical studies dedicated to Czapski’s life and work in Polish and even his biographical museum, which opened in Kraków in 2016 (The Józef Czapski Pavillion, a branch of the National Museum in Kraków), all of which remained silent about their subject’s sexuality, it was an outsider who managed to violate “the sanctity of the closet” cherished by Polish historiography.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the above, one may be more than tempted to inquire about Polish historiography concerned with the lives of kings and queens, as well as its (potentially equally homophobic) politics. Not surprisingly, given the claims and examples formulated above, royal

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<sup>9</sup> Marek Radziwon, *Imaszkiewicz: pisarz po katastrofie* (Warszawa: W.A.B, 2010); Magdalena Grochowska, *Jerzy Giedroyc* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2009); and Magdalena Waś, *Skrzynecki: demiurg i wizjoner* (Kraków: Wydawnictwa WAM, 2018). However, it needs to be stated that the last ten years or so has witnessed the arrival of a number of counter-narratives that clearly oppose official biographies and focus on the non-heteronormative sexuality of their subjects, for instance, Klemetyna Suchanow, *Gombrowicz* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017). However, these rare “homobiographies” (a term used by Krzysztof Tomasik in the title of his groundbreaking study on Polish non-heteronormative writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) remain interested exclusively in the modern period and nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical figures. Krzysztof Tomasik, *Homobiografie: pisarki i pisarze polscy XIX i XX wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Karpeles, *Almost Nothing: The 20th-Century Art and Life of Józef Czapski* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2018), chap. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 56.

lives have not been thus far sufficiently addressed by gay and lesbian or queer studies; in fact, not a single monograph dedicated to non-heteronormative sexualities of Polish rulers has ever been published by a Polish academic historian, despite the fact that throughout Polish history there were several rulers whose sexuality is believed to have represented non-heteronormative models of male sex or gender deviance. Here, suffice it to mention Wladyslaw III (1424-1444) whose military failure and death at the Battle of Varna in 1444 was thought to be a direct result of his “male lust” (*in marium libidinem proclivus*)<sup>13</sup> and “lewd and despicable habits” (*expedicione incestus suos et abhominabiles voluptates*).<sup>14</sup> Given the general reluctance of Polish historians to address the issue of the rulers’ sexuality and—if indeed addressed—the homophobic entanglements that characterise historical discourse about them, two cases appear to be particularly emblematic and illuminating: Boleslaw II the Generous (c. 1042-1081) and Henry III of France (1551-1589)—known in Poland as Henry I. For centuries, the two rulers have been—more than any other Polish king or queen—subjected to defamatory criticism, while the issue of their sexuality has been used deliberately as a major instrument in the creation of their “black legend.” It is their discursively “constructed” sexuality—since it is impossible to establish the “real” psycho-sexual identity of the two kings and as such it is of little interest to this paper<sup>15</sup>—that has played a major role in creating an essentially homophobic image of their evil and immoral rule. While Boleslaw II the Generous has been presented as the Sodomite<sup>16</sup> “Murderer” King, Henry I has been labelled the Sodomite “Traitor” King.

The aim of this paper is thus not to “desperately seek a sodomite”—to paraphrase the title of Gregory S. Hutcheson’s influential essay<sup>17</sup>—but to investigate a history of textual and

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<sup>13</sup> *Joannis Dlugossii Annales Seu Cronicae Incliti Regni Poloniae. Liber Undecimus et Liber Duodecimus 1431-1444* (Varsavia: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 327.

<sup>14</sup> *Joannis Dlugossii Annales*, 327. A notable exception to the paradigm described above guiding Polish historiography is *Homoseksualność staropolska: Przyczynek do badań* by Tomasz Nastulczyk and Piotr Oczko, in which the authors address various representations of “homosexuality” in Old-Polish writings and culture and in which the sexuality of several Polish rulers is (marginally) referenced. However, due to a number of methodological inadequacies (the unequivocal use of the term “homosexuality” with regard to the pre-modern period, insistence on gay/lesbian essentialism and a postulate to write a Polish history of homosexuality from the gay studies perspective, as well as a rejection of the tenets of queer historiography, to name but a few) this work—despite its pioneering character—remains of little interest to the present article. Tomasz Nastulczyk, Piotr Oczko, *Homoseksualność staropolska: Przyczynek do badań* (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> In line with Jonathan Goldberg’s belief that “any inquiry into such questions [what sodomy is and how it may be recognised] will never deliver the sodomite per se, but only ... sodomies, relational structures precariously available to prevailing discourses.” Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodomies: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 20.

<sup>16</sup> We are quite aware of a number of methodological questions that inevitably arise with regard to the study of pre-modern and early-modern sexualities—an issue that has been succinctly addressed by Graham N. Drake in the following manner: “Which words are appropriate? Do we shun anachronism, or do we need it in a strategic sense to uncover or recover what has been silenced? Is the very concept of anachronism an obstruction? What models provide a productive heuristic for understanding the past, or for making it usable?” Graham N. Drake, “Queer Medieval: Uncovering the Past,” *GLQ* 14, no. 4 (2008): 639. Consequently, in line with the nomenclature proposed by Drake (and many others, including Glenn Burger, Jonathan Goldberg, Gregory S. Hutcheson, and Steven F. Kruger), as well as true to its methodological framework (i.e. queer historiography), this article prioritises such terms as “queer,” “same-sex desire/intimacy,” “homoeroticism,” as well as “sodomy” (for reasons explicated in footnote 33) over “homosexuality.”

<sup>17</sup> Gregory S. Hutcheson, “Desperately Seeking Sodom: Queerness in the Chronicles of Alvaro de Luna,” in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S.

visual<sup>18</sup> homophobic representations of both rulers; in short a (selected) history of discourses which have addressed both kings' sexualities. Although until the very dawn of the modern era homophobic ways of seeing and describing the two monarchs were constructed by a highly exclusive discourse (the one shaped by chroniclers and poets, clergymen, and politicians or propagandists, and, as such, limited to the narrow literate élite), their cultural impact seems to be quite substantial. In this sense, the two cases exceed the limitations of both medieval or early modern historiography and academic investigations, and become part of Polish cultural memory. The very notion of “cultural memory” is understood in this paper after Aleida Assmann as a rich and capacious discursive space embracing both tangible and intangible (textual, visual, performative, linguistic) evidence of the past which becomes re-animated and re-actualised in the present.<sup>19</sup>

One should also note that the use of the term “homophobia” throughout the whole paper is deliberate—despite the fact that it corresponds to the modern category of “homosexuality,” and does not conceptually belong to the Middle Ages or the Early Modern Period—and remains indebted to David M. Halperin's genealogical analysis of non-heteronormative categories and, in particular, their “transhistorical continuity.”<sup>20</sup> The essay, which might be seen as contributing to (and having methodological affinities with) “queer cultural study of history,”<sup>21</sup> will scrutinise not only traditional historical documents (chronicles, annals, etc.) but also a variety of literary sources from the period (poetry and lampoons) and images (prints, drawings, and paintings). Special attention will be paid to the rulers' conceptualisation as the antithesis of the “good king” trope, as well as to some contemporary attempts at re-claiming and re-writing traditional history within the framework of an alliance between heritage and queer studies.

Finally, some explanation appears to be required with regard to the paper's broad historical sweep (from the eleventh century until the present day) and, consequently, its “disturbance of temporality,”<sup>22</sup> which many readers might find problematic. While this choice inevitably affects the paper's primary and secondary source evidence (taken from different time periods, necessarily accommodating Polish and international scholarship) and the processes of its selection, the essay's lack of “chronological bias”<sup>23</sup> and anti-normativity with regard to periodisation (in other words, its refusal to be exclusively a medievalist/early-modern studies/modern studies paper) should be recognised as deliberate and indebted to the already-mentioned queer historiography. The present analysis—genealogical, interdisciplinary, and transversal—sees “the questioning and queering of periodization [as] a way to ask about the

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Hutcheson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 223.

<sup>18</sup> Identifying both texts and images as privileged “terrain[s] of homophobia and homosexual panic” can be traced back to Joanthan Goldberg's *Sodomities* (see for instance his discussion of a homophobic ad in *Rolling Stone* magazine in the book's opening pages). Goldberg, *Sodomities*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Aleida Assmann, “Vier Formen des Gedächtnisses,” *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik*, no. 13 (2002): 183–190.

<sup>20</sup> David M. Halperin, “How to do the History of Male Homosexuality,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Babell and Susan Potter (New York: Routledge, 2013), 266.

<sup>21</sup> Bravmann, *Queer Fictions*, x.

<sup>22</sup> Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, “Introduction,” in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xi–xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory S. Hutcheson, Josiah Blackmore, “Introduction,” in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 1–19.

relationship between past and present,<sup>24</sup> and thus remains a means to critically engage with both academic historiography and—as the concluding section will demonstrate—public history.

### The Man and the Saint

Homophobic fabrications of Boleslaw II the Generous—the third crowned ruler of Poland—started in the Middle Ages. The creators were church propagandists: chroniclers and historians of the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Boleslaw II the Generous does not hold pride of place in Polish cultural memory and he is remembered primarily due to his conflict with the bishop of Kraków, Stanislaus of Szczepanów (1030-1079), which ended in the clergyman's death, a noblemen's revolt, and, ultimately, the king's escape from Poland. Paradoxically it is the bishop and not the king that occupies a more prominent place in Polish culture. Alongside Saint Adalbert and Our Lady, Queen of Poland, he was one of three major patron saints of the Kingdom of Poland, a patron saint of the Wawel Cathedral—a national sanctuary and coronation site. Stanislaus is a figure on whose intercession a number of seminal events in Polish history were believed to depend and who is much worshiped in the Catholic Church until this very day.<sup>26</sup> Being no more than a character in the bishop's hagiographical legend, Boleslaw II the Generous remains in the shadow of Stanislaus. Due to the esteem in which the bishop was held, gained expeditiously several dozen years after his death, as well as his worship (he became a saint in 1253), the monarch's reputation decreased in proportion to the bishop's notoriety as a martyred saint.<sup>27</sup>

However, before the Church propagandists managed to fabricate the image of the king—the one that showed Boleslaw II the Generous as a major villain of the Polish Middle Ages, a tyrant, a murderer, and, most importantly from the point of view of this paper, a sodomite zealously juxtaposed with the venerable cleric—his representation was far more nuanced. The first historical source which provides a record of the king's conflict with the

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<sup>24</sup> Drake, "Queer Medieval," 643.

<sup>25</sup> An anti-sodomitic discourse based on Christian theology and openly directed against sexual intercourse between two male parties began as early as in the eleventh century. Undoubtedly, the first Christian author (and, simultaneously, church propagandists) to write in this vein was Peter Damian (1007-1072), the bishop of Ostia. While reporting on Damian's ideas on how to fight sodomy, Mark D. Jordan describes the monk's ruminations on the need for complex anti-sodomitic evangelism and indoctrination among the clergymen in the following way: "How to stop it [sodomy]? Not by writing simple books of appeal to Sodomites, nor even by writing books in hopes of persuading the pope to repress the spread by severe sanctions. An invisible, ancient vice rooted in deep disorder of desire, armed with its own books and a pandering rhetoric, linked with the ancient disorder of avaricious ambition – such a vice can be countered only by a book that insists urgently on the confession of hidden sins, the rejection of corrupting books, the stripping away of remunerated offices, and a permanent penance." Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1997), 65. For more about Peter Damian's anti-sodomitic treatise entitled *Book of Gomorrah*, see: Krzysztof Skwierczyński, *Mury Sodomy. Piotra Damianiego Księga Gomory i walka z sodomią wśród kleru*, (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Historia Iagellonica," 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Jan Kurek, *Eucharystia, biskup i król. Kult św. Stanisława w Polsce* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1998); and Gerard Labuda, *Św. Stanisław biskup krakowski, patron Polski. Śladami żabójstwa – męczeństwa – kanonizacji* (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> For the worshipping of the saint, see: Agnieszka Rożnowska-Sadraei, *Pater Patriae: The Cult of Saint Stanislaus and the Patronage of Polish Kings 1200–1455* (Kraków: Unum, 2008).

bishop, as well as its aftermath, is *Cronica et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum* by Gallus Anonymus, created c. 1125. The time span between 1070s, when the conflict erupted, and the period when the chronicler was compiling his *opus magnum* was as little as forty years. In this study, which is drawn from both primary and secondary material,<sup>28</sup> one will *not* find either the king's tyranny or his non-normative sexual activity. Indeed, the chronicler pays attention to the king's sin (*peccatum*), namely his decision to sentence the bishop to death. Nonetheless, he leaves no doubt as to who, as a matter of fact, broke the law and who was to be blamed for the catastrophe that ensued: it is bishop Stanislaus who is defined as a traitor (*traditor*), while the king is the one who abused his right to punish for wrongdoings (*vindicare*). One reads:

It would take a long time to recount how king Boleslaw was expelled from Poland. Suffice it to say that he himself, being anointed by God, should not have corporally punished another anointed man for any of his sins. It brought a great deal of havoc upon the king, when he acted sinfully against the sin and, so as to punish the bishop's treason, sentenced him to being quartered. As for us, we neither justify the bishop traitor, nor praise the king who enforced his legal rights in such a horrible manner.<sup>29</sup>

Another historical source that narrates the events in question is *Historia Polonica* (c. 1190) by the bishop of Kraków, Wincenty Kadłubek. This work also says nothing about the king's sexuality. However, it is the first record to introduce the king as a tyrant who personally quartered Stanislaus—himself a good shepherd. It is in this very book—written over a hundred years after the famous royal/ecclesiastical conflict by Stanislaus' successor to the episcopal throne in Kraków—that a critical and portentous re-evaluation of the two men takes place. The bishop – now innocent, wise, and generous—becomes the victim of the hateful tyrant king. Given the future fabrications of Boleslaw's image, Kadłubek's intervention is an important one. So as to rationalise the king's wrath and his crime, he reaches out to the second-century Roman historian Justin and borrows a story from him about Scythian's unfaithful wives, who in Kadłubek's work become the wives of Polish knights.<sup>30</sup> According to Kadłubek, the king punished the unfaithful wives who during their husbands' long absence had relations with their slaves. The slaves were crucified, the unfaithful wives were forced to nurse wolf-cubs at their breasts, while the bastard children were murdered. The king was believed to have participated in all of these atrocities. It is at this point that the bishop intervened, resulting in the king's anger and consequently his sacrilegious murder of Stanislaus:

And so the king went mad. Close to the altar, between the mitres, regardless of state, place, and time, he ordered that the shepherd be kidnapped. However, no matter how many times the king's impudent companions wished to execute his will and enter the church, they fell on their knees in penitence. The outraged tyrant castigated them and took matters into his own hands: he tore away the lover from his

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<sup>28</sup> Tadeusz Grudziński, *Bolesław Śmiały-Szczodry i biskup Stanisław. Dzieje konfliktu* (Warszawa: Interpress, 1986), 184–185.

<sup>29</sup> “Qualiter autem rex Boleslavus de Polonia sit ejectus, longum existit enarrare, sed hoc dicere licet, quod non debuit christianus in christianos peccatum quodlibet corporaliter vindicare. Ille enim multum sibi nocuit cum peccato peccatum adhibuit, cum, pro traditione pontificem truncationi membrorum adhibuit. Neque enim traditorem episcopum excusamus, neque regem vindicantem sic se turpiter commendamus.” “Galli Chronicon,” in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica. Pomniki dziejowe Polski* (Lwów: August Bielowski, 1864), 1:422. All the translations from Latin into English are ours.

<sup>30</sup> Stanisław Aleksander Boleścic-Kozłowski, *Czasy świętego Stanisława biskupa krakowskiego i Bolesława Śmiałego króla polskiego. Studium historyczne* (Warszawa, 1922), 98.

bride's womb, the shepherd from his sheepcote; he killed the father in the warm embrace of his daughter and son, a child in his mother's womb. Horrible and sad is the spectacle of death! The innocent bishop was quartered by the cruellest sacrilegious man—a saint by someone secular; a venerable man by a godless man. He quartered him into the smallest pieces as if he wanted to punish every bit of him.<sup>31</sup>

Kadlubek's image of the king as a tyrant and a sacrilegious person turned out to be particularly useful in the first half of the thirteenth century, when the Krakow diocese promoted Stanislaus' canonisation. The martyred saint needed his nemesis, his anti-image, a villain; in other words he needed Boleslaw. An important point of reference, especially for Wincenty Kadlubek, was knowledge of the canonisation process of Thomas Becket which ended in 1173. Both stories are almost identical: two protagonists—the king and the bishop, a sacrilegious murder carried out in a church, next to the high altar, a conflict whose basis was the vision of the state and the division of powers between the state and the church. The last similarity concerns the iconographies of Stanislaus and Thomas Becket which were created for the purpose of worship, the former being no more than a style variant of the latter (Figures 1 and 2).<sup>32</sup> In a sense, the story of the Polish king can be compared to the history of Henry II of England. Boleslaw II the Generous had his own Thomas Becket—the Kraków bishop Stanislaus, who betrayed the king and was punished by being quartered.

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<sup>31</sup> "Itaque prope aram, inter infulas, non ordinis, non loci, non temporis, inspecta reverentia, corripit jubet antistitem. Ad quem satellites atrocissimi quoties irruere tentant, toties compuncti, toties prostrati, mansuescunt. Quo tyrannus indignantissime objurgans, ipse manus injicit sacrilegas, ipse sponsum e gremio sponsae, pastorem ab ovili abstrahit, ipse, patrem in filiae amplexibus et filium in maternis paene visceribus, obruncat. O luctuosum, o transfunebre funeris spectaculum! Sanctum profanus, pium sceleratus, praesulem sacrilegus, cruentissimus innoxium, membratim discerpit, singulos artus perminutissime dissecans, quasi a singulis membrorum partibus poena exigere debisset." Wincenty Kadlubek, "Historia Polonica," in Bolesław-Kozłowski, *Czasz świętego Stanisława*, 97.

<sup>32</sup> More about the similarities and parallels between the cult of Saint Stanislaus and that of Saint Thomas Becket, as well as the impact of the latter on St. Stanislaus' hagiographic legend can be found in the following studies: Norbert Kersken, "God and the Saints in Medieval Polish Historiography," in *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006), 179; Stanislava Kuzmová, "Preaching on Martyr-Bishops in the Later Middle Ages: Saint Stanislaus of Kraków and Saint Thomas Beckett," in *Britain and Poland-Lithuania: Contact and Comparison from the Middle Ages to 1795*, ed. Richard Unger and Jakub Basista (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 65–86; Gerard Labuda, *Św. Stanisław biskup krakowski* (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2000), 143–146; Waclaw Schenk, "Zagadnienie zależności kultu św. Stanisława biskupa od kultu św. Tomasza Kantuaryjskiego w świetle śląskich rękopisów liturgicznych," *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 4, no. 1 (1957): 73–85; and Marek Walczak, "The Cult of Saint Stanislaus at the Courts of Piasts and Jagiellons and Its Artistic Testimony," *Przegląd Pamiatek* XIII (2006): 159–171.



Figure 1 and Figure 2: Master Francke, *Martyrdom of St Thomas of Canterbury* (St Thomas Altarpiece, Hamburg, 1436) and Master of St. Mary's Family, *Martyrdom of St Stanislaus* (St Stanislaus Altarpiece, Bielsko-Biala, c. 1500) © Jerzy Gadomski, *Gotyckie malarstwo tablicowe Małopolski 1500-1540* (Warszawa and Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995). Photo by K. Nowacki.

It is in the context of canonisation that the first appearance of historical sources which add acts against nature (*contra naturam*) to the above-mentioned crimes of the tyrant king can be identified. And they are the acts which in the fifteenth century will be labelled with the term sodomy.<sup>33</sup> The first written document which describes Boleslaw as the king who acts *contra naturam* are two hagiographic legends entitled respectively *Vita minor* (1253) and *Vita maior* (c. 1258) by Wincenty of Kielcza (c. 1200–after 1261), a poet, composer, a canon in Kraków, and a

<sup>33</sup> We are well aware of the ambiguity of the term “sodomy” and its idiosyncratic and wide spectrum of references that might be found in various historical sources that deal with the medieval and early modern period. As, for instance, Gregory S. Hutcheson and Josiah Blackmore remind us, “sodomy” has been understood broadly as “both aberrance and excess, that which goes against and beyond nature and God’s divine plan.” On the other hand, the two scholars also emphasise the fact that the term’s conceptual “instability” (namely it can describe every sexual activity that has been viewed as being “against nature,” i.e. bestiality, masturbation, anal—not only same-sex—intercourse) “guarantees its effectiveness as a metonymy for difference.” Hutcheson and Blackmore, “Introduction,” 1, 13. Similarly, Goldberg’s conceptualisation of “sodometrie” emphasises the very relationality of the term: “a measure whose geometry we do not know, whose (a)symmetries we are to explore.” Goldberg, *Sodometrie*, xv. Thus understood, the term “sodomy” seems to be particularly useful from our perspective, since it can be seen as an ally to queer studies and its problematisation of non-normative identities, behaviour, and performance. For the use of sodomy as a political weapon and its revival in the late Middle Ages, see: Henric Bagerius and Christine Ekholst, “Kings and Favourites: Politics and Sexuality in Late Medieval Europe,” *Journal of Medieval History* 43, no. 3 (2017): 300–304, as well as—with regard to “discursive sodomy” and its frequent application of such devices as innuendos, hints, suggestions—Richard E. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 105–106.

member of the Dominican Order. *Vita minor* was written with the purpose of being an official hagiography of bishop Stanislaus on the occasion of his canonisation; its expanded and revised version, i.e. *Vita maior*, emerged several years later. It is in the latter that one reads that, during his military expedition to Ruthenia, Boleslaw

having been among the pagans and lived with them, learnt their customs and depravities. He abandoned propensity for virtue and, instead, indulged in all sorts of debauchery. And, like a horse or a mule bereft of wisdom, while subjecting himself to indecent inclinations, mad and impure, following the body's lasciviousness, he exchanged glory for shame, and a natural way of living for that which is contrary to nature.<sup>34</sup>

However, the narrative about the sodomite King was fully developed only by the most important and influential Polish medieval chronicle, *The Annals* (1455-1480; the first printed, censored edition in 1614) by Jan Długosz (1415-1480). The king's non-heteronormative acts and behaviour are addressed three times in Book Three of *The Annals*, where the king's sodomy is described as “the most sordid” (*sordidissima Sodomia*),<sup>35</sup> “monstrous” (*abominanda Sodomia*),<sup>36</sup> and “the filthiest” (*spuricissima Sodomia*).<sup>37</sup> Describing Boleslaw's stay in the city of Kiev in 1076, Długosz writes:

Not satisfied with normal flings, he succumbed to the filthiest sin of sodomy. Thus he imitated ignominious practices of the Ruthenians, among whom this perversion is common. Defeated by those he had conquered, he bestowed some great and long-standing shame which could be erased only by God's mercy upon his descendants and his kingdom.<sup>38</sup>

Of particular interest is that the sin of sodomy is subsequently identified by Długosz as the very reason for the king's demise. In drawing this section of his book to a close, the chronicler remarks that the gravity of the insult of this sin against the majesty of Almighty God and its consequences will be revealed in the chapters to come.<sup>39</sup> In other words, it is the king's sodomitic practices that were directly responsible for the conflict with the bishop, who publicly deplored the ruler's actions. In return, the king killed the priest—the action which led to his downfall and to the downfall of his descendants and, finally, to the collapse of the entire kingdom. This is because, as the medieval legend which emerged alongside the canonisation process had it, the king's sin also brought about the end of the monarchy itself (indeed, in 1138 Poland entered a period of interregnum; the kingdom was divided into a series of mutually

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<sup>34</sup> “Commoratus autem et commixtus inter gentes didicit opera eorum et servivit immundiciis eorum. Itermisso studio virtutum, factus est syntina omnium viciorum, traditus quoque in reprobum sensum, sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus, passionibus ingominie et contumelie affectus, carnis sue sequens luxuriam, gloriam suam in ingominiam et naturalem usum mutavit in eum usum, qui est contra naturam.” “Vita sancti Stanislai Cracoviensis episcopi (Vita maior),” in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica. Pomniki dziejowe Polski* (Lwów, 1884), 4:384.

<sup>35</sup> *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales Seu Cronicae Incliti Regni Poloniae. Liber tertius. Liber quartus* (Varsavia: PWN, 1970), 130.

<sup>36</sup> *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, 145.

<sup>37</sup> *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, 121.

<sup>38</sup> “Nec simplici libidinum genere contentus in spuricissimum Sodomie scelus, Ruthenorum detestabiles mores, apud quos scelus illud in usu erat, imitates, fedissime prolapsus est; quosque annis vicerat, viciis eorum victus, universe posteritati sue, sed et regno suo et genti sue grande et diuturnum dedecus, sola propiciacione Divina abolendum, innexuit.” *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, 121.

antagonistic duchies). The very same legend had it that the duchies were to be one day united under one king, just as the members of the quartered martyred bishop miraculously grew together.

The reasons for reading Długosz's *Annals* and their unambiguous use of the stigmatising weapon of "discursive sodomy" as making references to male same-sex desire/intimacy are twofold. Firstly, as Franco Momando and Andrzej Wyrobisz have convincingly argued with regard to the sodomy legislation in Italy in the fifteenth century, "in most people's minds and imaginations, ... *sodomy* seems to have referred to, above all, anal intercourse ... and oral sex between two male parties."<sup>40</sup> This view has been shared by the likes of Guido Ruggiero, Michael Rocke, and Romano Canosa, among others, who have further demonstrated the presence and vividness of anti-sodomitic discourse and policies in the fifteenth-century Italian city-states, which was the time of *una grande paura* (the great fear) characterised by the unprecedentedly high frequency of homophobic acts (arrests, public lynching, sermons).<sup>41</sup> It is the more than likely that Długosz, being a man of his times, must have been familiar with the dominant perception of sodomy while accusing Boleslaw of his *abbominanda Sodomia*. But there is also another argument that establishes a more viable link between the Central European chronicler's work and the Italian-based ecclesiastical homophobia. Anti-sodomitic motifs often accompanied misogynistic and anti-Semitic tone of sermons given by preachers from the Observant Franciscan movement, such as Bernardino of Feltre, John of Capistrano, and—especially—Bernardino of Siena, for whom sodomy equalled male same-sex intercourse.<sup>42</sup> It was exactly this kind of anti-minorities and specifically homophobic discourse that was brought to Central Europe by John of Capistrano in 1451, when he arrived there to deliver anti-Hussite preaching and to organise an anti-Turkish crusade.<sup>43</sup> While the exact content of all his public sermons and private talks remains unknown, given John of Capistrano's overall activity and professed beliefs, it is more than safe to assume that one of its major components was the already-mentioned Italian anti-sodomitic rhetoric. It is, one might argue, the very rhetoric which was intercepted by Jan Długosz and which can be traced in his chronicle, since the two men became intimately familiar with one another in the

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<sup>40</sup> Franco Momando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 115; and Andrzej Wyrobisz, "Wielki strach' w Wenecji i we Florencji w XV wieku i jego możliwe przyczyny," *Przegląd Historyczny* XCV, no. 4 (2004): 457–465.

<sup>41</sup> Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Romano Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura: La sodomia a Firenze e a Venezia nel Quattrocento* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Amanda D. Quantz, "Focus on the Family: Bernardino da Siena and the Common Good and the Nefarious Other," in *Franciscans and Preaching: Every Miracle from the Beginning of the World Came about through Words*, ed. Timothy J. Johnson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 299. On sodomy and its understanding as a homosexual act per se in Bernardino of Siena's preaching, see Franco Momando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 113–115.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, in the city of Wrocław John of Capistrano's preaching caused not only a series of anti-Jewish pogroms, but also the expulsion of an entire Jewish population from the city. For more on this topic, see: Hanna Zaremska, "John of Capistrano and the 1453 Trial of Wrocław Jews," in *The Grand Tour of John of Capistrano in Central and Eastern Europe (1451–1456): Transfer of Ideas and Strategies of Communication in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Paweł Kras and James D. Mixson (Warsaw and Lublin: Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 149–168.

1450s. In 1453, upon the invitation of bishop Zbigniew Oleśnicki, John of Capistrano was invited to the city of Kraków, where he spent nine months preaching and eradicating all kinds of “filth.” The very man who was dispatched to Wrocław to bring John of Capistrano to the Polish capital city was none other than Jan Długosz.<sup>44</sup>

The black legend of the sodomite King—invented as a reverse side of the hagiography of Saint Stanislaus and developed by Jan Długosz—did not disappear and was alluded to frequently during the following centuries. This was not always the case, one should note, and was not present in all the sources: the non-normative sexual practices of the king did not feature in *Kronika polska* (Polish chronicle, 1597) by Joachim Bielski or in Aleksander Obodziński’s rhymed chronicle of Polish history entitled *Pandora starożytna monarchów polskich* (A pandora of ancient Polish monarchs, 1640), which consists of extended biographical descriptions of the Polish rulers. However, allusions and references to Długosz’s homophobic narrative are easily discoverable in, for example, *Ikones książąt i królów polskich* (Icons of Polish Dukes and Kings) by Jan Gluchowski, illustrated and versed biographies of Polish rulers published in Kraków in 1605 (Figure 3). In this study, the non-normative and “immoral” sexual behaviour of Bolesław is addressed a number of times. One example is a Latin poem by Klemens Janicki taken from *Vitae regum Polonorum* (1565),<sup>45</sup> in which one reads: “Cuncta libidinibus complebat, cuncta rapinis, / Cuncta ignominijs, sanguine, cuncta metu”<sup>46</sup> (all filled with wrongful lust, full of violence / full of shame, full of blood, full of depravity). Another is a poem by Gluchowski in which Bolesław III the Generous is presented as a ruler very much in the manner of emperor Nero who, mainly because of the popularity of Suetonius, became a symbol of the evil king in the early modern period. Needless to say, he was also traditionally associated with tyranny, bestiality and sodomy. Gluchowski wrote that “Płodząc rozkosz i jawne cudzołóstwo z oną, / I sprośne inne zbytki z Mściśławową żoną. / Potym w tymże pokoju i czasu krótkiego / Naszładować Nerona jał wnet okrutnego”<sup>47</sup> (Breeding desire and fornication / and other depravities with her, the wife of Mściśław / soon and in no time / he followed in the footsteps of the cruel Nero).

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<sup>44</sup> Maria Koczerska, “Correspondence between Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki, Jan Długosz and John of Capistrano,” in *The Grand Tour of John of Capistrano in Central and Eastern Europe (1451–1456): Transfer of Ideas and Strategies of Communication in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Paweł Kras and James D. Mixson (Warsaw and Lublin: Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 275–292.

<sup>45</sup> Every biography of a ruler included in the volume comprises three basic parts. Firstly, woodcuts that present the rulers of Poland that were taken from the already mentioned *Kronika Polska* of 1597 by the book’s publisher, Jan Januszowski. Secondly, Latin verses by Janicki from 1565, which are companion pieces to the woodcuts. These were translated into Polish by Jan Achacy Kmita and published in Kraków in 1591 under the title *Żywoty królów polskich* (The Lives of the Polish kings). Thirdly, poems in Polish by Jan Gluchowski that describe the rulers. See:

Barbara Górska, “Wstęp,” in Jan Gluchowski, *Ikones książąt i królów polskich. Reprodukacja fototypiczna wydania z 1605 r.* (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1979), v–xvi.

<sup>46</sup> Gluchowski, *Ikones*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> Gluchowski, *Ikones*, 45.

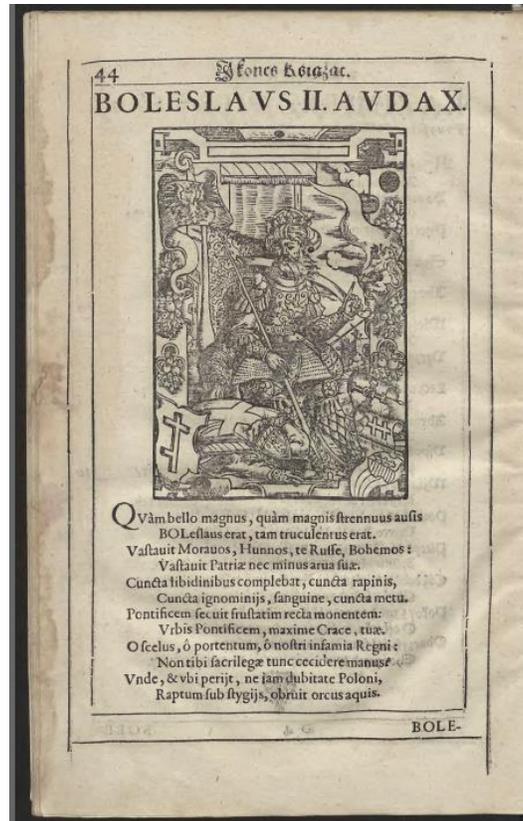


Figure 3: A page from *Ikones książąt i królów polskich* (1605). © Robert Kusek and Wojciech Szymański

Such an unambiguously negative image of Boleslaw survived in Polish historiography until the mid-nineteenth century, when it was officially challenged by the historian Joachim Lelewel in his study *Polska wieków średnich* (Poland in the Middle Ages, 1847). Consequently, professional historians, having shown a more critical attitude towards their sources in general and Długosz's *Annals* in particular, started to express a less hostile and more balanced stance towards the legacy of the king. Simultaneously, more attention began to be paid to Gall Anonim's aforementioned chronicle.<sup>48</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, together with the modernist re-valuation of culture, some new interpretations and readings of the past and, in particular, the conflict between the king and the bishop, materialised among the fin-de-siècle artists and poets. The popularity of the motif of the murderer/exiled king and of the martyred bishop was on the rise. This resulted in, on the one hand, an ecclesiastic reaction of priests and historians associated with the Catholic Church, and, on the other hand, a re-interpretation of history: while the bishop continued to be appreciated, the king started to be perceived as a tragic figure.<sup>49</sup> What remains particularly intriguing is the fact that, despite so many new studies being critical towards the existing state of knowledge, modernist artists did not address the king's non-normative sexuality. It might be argued that this element of his identity—part of the black legend fabricated by the ecclesiastical chroniclers in the Middle Ages—did not assist

<sup>48</sup> Tadeusz Grudziński, "Konflikt króla Bolesława Szczodrego z biskupem Stanisławem w polskiej świadomości zbiorowej (zarys problematyki)," *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Historia XVII*, no. 117 (1980): 11–16.

<sup>49</sup> Grudziński, "Konflikt," 20–23.

them in conceiving of a new image of the king, this time full of pathos and tragedy. Consequently, one might claim that traditional homophobia which relied on deploration and stigmatisation was substituted by a bourgeois and modern form of homophobia whose axioms are silence and secret. Hate speech was substituted by hate silence, homophobic outing by closeting.<sup>50</sup> If we return to Długosz and his *Annals*, it cannot be ignored that the chronicler—while creating the negative image of the sodomite King—deliberately directed the readers' attention to the source of his depravity. It was, one may remember, the East: the Orthodox Kievan Rus'. It is in Kiev that the king started to take joy in sodomy, which was supposed to be a common practice there. The rhetorical figure used by the chronicler which ascribes sexual non-normativity and sinfulness to a neighbouring and foreign culture has, of course, been well recognised and analysed by contemporary scholarship, influenced by cultural geography and by its problematisation of peripheries and liminal spaces.<sup>51</sup> It will also come to prominence in the following section of this paper, which deals with a foreigner on the Polish throne—Henry III of France.

### The French Rooster

The foreignness and extraneousness of sexual perversion can be most conspicuously identified in the case of the second Polish ruler to be analysed here, namely Henri de Valois (1551-1589; also described here as Henry I of Poland and Henry III of France). Henry's sodomite image became an integral part of Polish culture. What Henry and Boleslaw have in common is not only the claim that their vice was of foreign extraction—Eastern in case of the latter, and French in case of the former, both turned out to be treacherous and brought shame upon Poland, and both secretly left their kingdoms and never returned. Both were (adequately) punished for their sins, and died young, Boleslaw when he was 39 and Henry when he was only 37. Finally, both died because of clergymen—Boleslaw indirectly and Henry directly at the hands of the Dominican friar Jacques Clément.

Taking into account the fact that the life of Henry III, including his non-normative sexuality, has been repeatedly addressed by Western historiography,<sup>52</sup> it is reasonable to focus on what has so far remained outside that scope of interest, i.e. a Polish episode in the king's biography and his presence in Polish culture. Henry III of France indeed occupies a very special place in Polish history and historiography. He was the first non-hereditary ruler elected to be the new Polish king by noblemen after the death of Sigismund II Augustus. With him a

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<sup>50</sup> It is impossible to establish—on the basis of the written records—why this motif, so modernist, decadent, and popular in turn-of-the-century art, did not appear in poems, plays, and fiction concerned with Boleslaw, or the ones inspired by the conflict between the king and the bishop. This may be explained by the fact that the general readership was not acquainted with Długosz and his work. It was only in 1863-1887 that the first, imperfect, Polish translation of the *Annals* was published, while the first critical edition of Latin Medieval sources dedicated to Polish history was released in six volumes in the period 1864-1893 under the title *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*.

<sup>51</sup> *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hucheson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Irvin Cemil Schick, *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spirituality in Alteritist Discourse* (London: Verso, 1999); and Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example: Katherine B. Crawford, "Love, Sodomy, and Scandal: Controlling the Sexual Reputation of Henry III," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (2003): 513–542; and Gary Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings in the French Renaissance: Homosexuality, Gender, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008).

new political experiment began, the so-called “free election,” that lasted for the next two hundred years and which allowed the noblemen to choose the king from candidates submitted by various parties from all over Europe.<sup>53</sup> Henry was crowned in Kraków in February 1574, but already in June of the same year, he secretly left Poland via Vienna and Venice to France. There, he took the French throne in the wake of the death of his brother, Charles IX of France. His leaving the country was widely interpreted as an act of treason, since it not only challenged the new political system, but also extended the period of interregnum. What is more, the king’s escape and his reluctance to return necessarily forced the nobleman to create a dangerous precedent: the existence of two kings if Henry refused to abdicate and a new king was to be elected. Thus it is of no surprise that Henry’s defection and its political consequences offered perfect nourishment to the fabrication of the king’s black image, an image that featured prominently homophobic imputations.

The king’s quick and clandestine departure coincided with the activity of his courtiers who, once they left Poland, embarked on a propagandist smear-campaign against Poland and the Poles, possibly as a way of justifying Henry’s decision. The historian Maciej Serwański writes about this in the following way: “Expressing not only their own beliefs, but, one assumes, also those of Henry, on their way from Poland to France they spread rumours about Poland being poor, cold, and inhabited by drunkards. Highly critical judgements about Poland and about Poles’ hostility towards the French, can be traced back to March and April of 1574, when the first group of Henry’s courtiers absconded to Paris via Vienna. These attacks intensified once Henry left Poland.”<sup>54</sup> The best known lampoon against Poland created in the royal milieu is a piece entitled *Adieu à la Pologne* (1574) by Philippe Desportes which, when translated into Latin and Polish, naturally provoked a counter-reaction by the Poles. Promptly, *Odpowiedź przez Polaka wszętecznemu Francuzowi* (The Pole’s Response to a Degenerate Frenchman, 1574), an anonymous response by a Polish protestant to the French satire was composed, while the major Polish Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584), once Henry’s backer, completed a series of accusatory pieces in Latin.<sup>55</sup>

Kochanowski’s lampoons, aimed at King Henry, already contained homophobic innuendos. In particular, his Latin invective *Gallo crocitanti* (Response to a cackling rooster) from 1576 alludes to the king’s sexual preferences. The Latin title is ambiguous. On the one hand, the Latin noun *gallus* (rooster) refers to the Frenchman (the Gaul) with a high-pitched voice and overdressed in feathers and frills. This is, in and of itself, a homophobic image, since it implies effeminacy, which was itself associated with non-heteronormative males and, particularly in sixteenth-century Poland, with Henry and his male courtiers.<sup>56</sup> However, on the

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<sup>53</sup> More on the new political system and Henry’s election to the throne of Poland can be found in Maciej Serwański, *Henryk III Walezy w Polsce. Stosunki polsko-francuskie w latach 1566–1576* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976).

<sup>54</sup> Serwański, *Henryk III Walezy*, 231–232.

<sup>55</sup> The issue of Henry’s escape from Poland and the presence of the theme in the poetry of Desportes and Kochanowski can be found in Rolf Fieguth, “Francuskie i polskie gniewy, żale i śpiewy. O erotykach Philippe’a Desportes’a i ‘Lyricorum libellus’ Jana Kochanowskiego,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* CIV, no. 3 (2013): 39–67.

<sup>56</sup> Henry’s and his *mignons’* effeminacy was to be testified to by, among others, their sophisticated clothes, perfumes, and coiffures as well as their flamboyant way of behaving. See, for example: Guy Poirier, *L’Homosexualité dans l’imaginaire de la Renaissance* (Paris: Clisiques Garnier, 1996), 109–146; and Randy Conner, “Les Molles et les chausses: Mapping the Isle of Hermaphrodites in Premodern France,” in *Queerly Phrased: Language*

other hand, the titular rooster/cock that is wretchedly crowing is a castrated cock—a capon and, metaphorically speaking, a eunuch. Hence, effeminate and deprived of his manhood, the French bird serves as an allegorical representation of the king. While in *Gallo crocitanti* Kochanowski deliberately plays with the multiple meanings of a rooster (Frenchman / capon / impotent / eunuch), in the poem *De electione, Coronatione et fuga Galli* (About the election, coronation, and escape of the rooster, 1574), he employs a wide range of slanderous term against the rooster (i.e. Henry).<sup>57</sup> The runaway king is shown as a narcissist bird which appears to itself to be dazzling, elegant, and sophisticated (“Et caudam tenero fricare rostro / Aversus; sed ubi satis venustus / Ornatusque sibi elegansque visus, / Plumis totus inhorruit remissis / Floccosque horridus excutit revulsos”), while, in truth, his crowing brings the Polish courtiers to laughter (“Et tota immodicis domus cachinnis / Late personuit”).<sup>58</sup>

What makes Kochanowski’s verse particularly fascinating is the fact that the homophobic rhetorical devices which his poems employ anticipate equally homophobic rhetorical figures which spread in France during Henry’s rule (1574-1589), namely after his ignominious departure from Poland. The first to describe Henry as a sodomite were Agrippa d’Aubigné (1552-1630) and Pierre de L’Estoile (1546-1611), while rumours about his effeminacy, his lust for luxurious, and extravagant clothes/robes, as well as allegations about engaging in sexual intercourse with the *mignons* and being a transvestite or a hermaphrodite circulated widely among his French subjects during and after his rule.<sup>59</sup> A good visual example of this homophobic propaganda is a print which was released in 1605 as a frontispiece of the book *L’isle des hermaphrodites*, which portrayed Henry III as a deviant (figure 4). The king is represented here in a female wig, while the motto states: “Je ne suis male, ni Femelle / Et si je suis bien en cervelle / Lequel des deux je dois choisir / Mais qu’importe à qui on ressamble, / Il vaut mieux les avoir ensemble, / On en reçoit double plaisir” (I am neither a man, nor a woman. But it should be of no concern. It is the best when one has both and enjoys two types of pleasure). Above the king’s / queen’s head, a fragment of Martial’s *Epigram 174 Hermaphroditus marmoreus* announces: “Pars est una patris, caetera matris habet” (One part is his father’s; the rest he has of his mother).

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*Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Anna Livia and Kira Hall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 127–146.

<sup>57</sup> The piece was not printed in the poet’s lifetime. It was published for the first time at the turn of the twentieth century. See: BLSN (The Library of Old Polish and Neo-Latin Literature), <http://neolatina.bj.uj.edu.pl/neolatina/author.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Jan Kochanowski, *De electione, coronatione et fuga Galli*. Transcription by Albert Gorzkowski, <http://neolatina.bj.uj.edu.pl/neolatina/tscript/show/id/1116.html#11401>.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph Cady, “‘The Masculine Love’ of the ‘Princess of Sodom’ ‘Practising the Art of Ganymede’ at Henry III’s Court: The Homosexuality of Henry III and His *Mignons* in Pierre de L’Estoile’s *Mémoires-Journaux*,” in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 123–154.

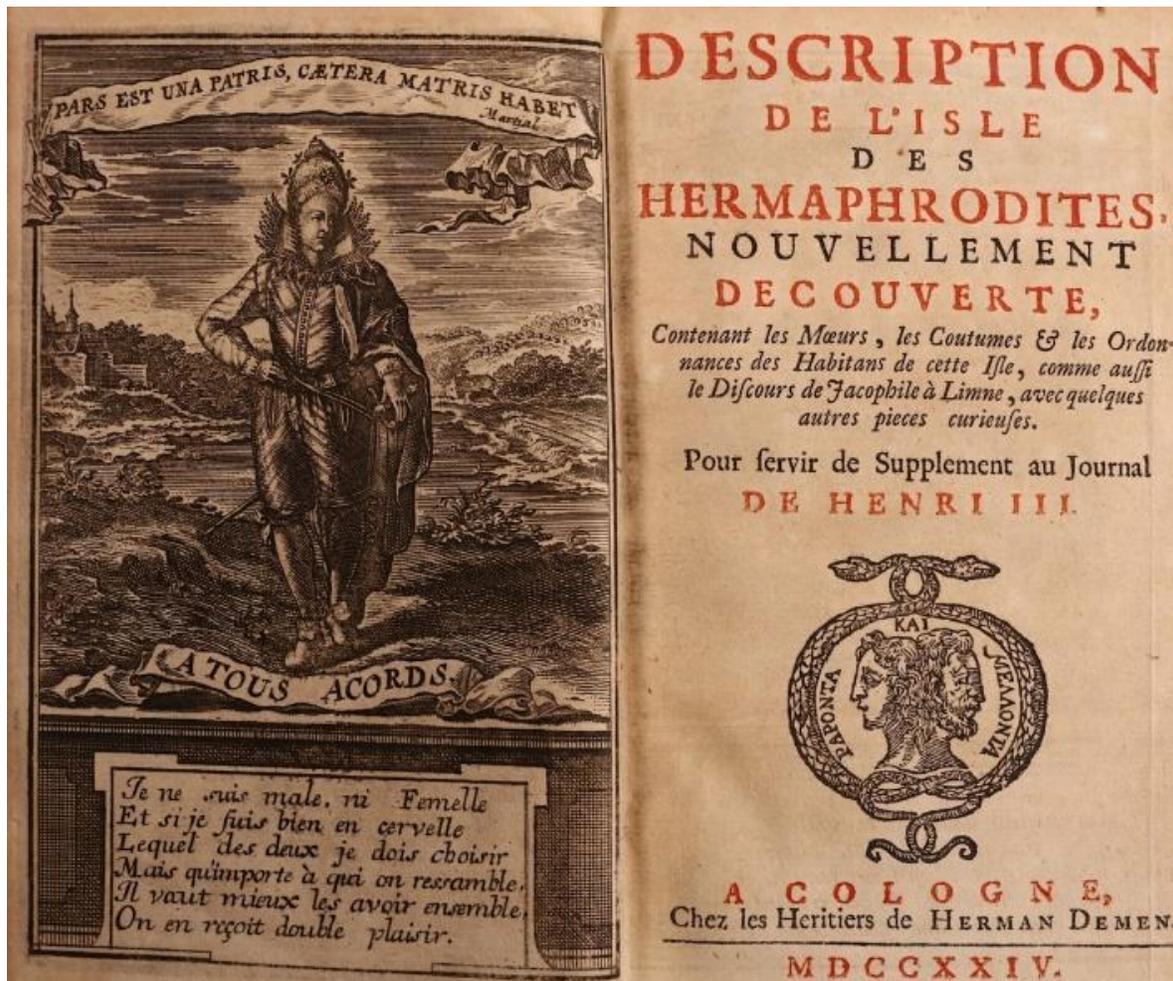


Figure 4: Frontispiece of *L'isle des hermaphrodites* (1724 edition). © Boston Public Library.

Such a homophobic representation survived in Polish cultural memory and was very much alive in the twentieth century. One example that might be listed here is an illustration by the Polish artist Maja Berezowska (1893/98-1978) from 1970—an addition to the already existing homophobic iconography of the king (Figure 5). It shows the carefully primped king in the company of his *mignons*, eating beef (*filets mignons*). The image is accompanied by a quatrain which boasts an ambiguity similar to the one present in Kochanowski's lampoon: "Król Walezy się nie trapił polityczną grą. / Pasjami lubił swe *filets mignons*." (The Valois King had little concern for political games. Instead, he passionately devoured his *filets mignons*). The image's *longue durée* is tantamount to the longevity of homophobic attitudes.

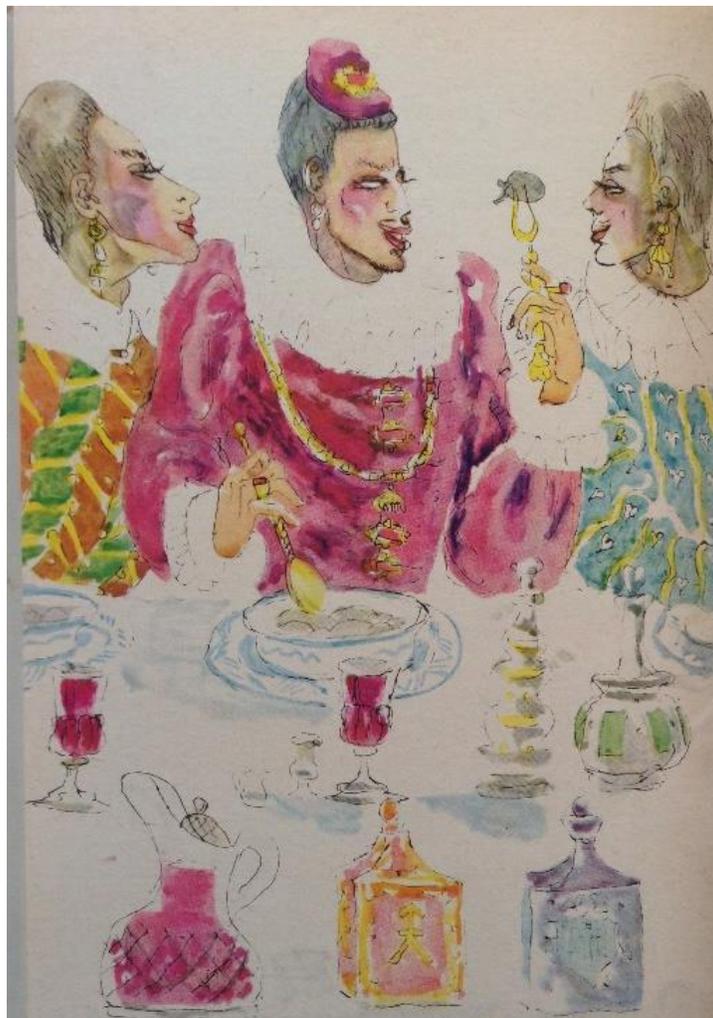


Figure 5: Maja Berezowska, illustration (Henry III of France) (1970). © Robert Kusek and Wojciech Szymański.

### Queering the (Royal) Closet

The present paper has taken a special interest in two Polish rulers who, over the centuries, have been particularly subjected to homophobic and defamatory criticism. As demonstrated above, the issue of their sexuality has been used deliberately and consistently as a major instrument in the creation of a homophobic image of their evil, immoral and, ultimately, disastrous rule. Despite a number of similarities between the two cases analysed herein, the present investigation of the history of discourses which have addressed both kings' sexualities has revealed one notable difference as far as the longevity and inter-generational transmission of these homophobic reputations are concerned. While in the case of Boleslaw the Generous it is justifiable to claim that his sodomitic "ill repute" has been largely restricted to the field of historiography, the image of the Sodomite "Traitor" King has been shown as percolating down through society and occupying a far more prominent place in Polish cultural memory, right up to today—thus revealing a complicated relationship between academic histories, memory and public stereotypes, and the narratives of public history.

Not surprisingly—in light of what has been stated in the opening section of this article—contemporary Polish historiography has done next to nothing to challenge the dubious status of Boleslaw II the Generous and Henry I and to deconstruct the faulty association of sodomy/same-sex desire/non-heteronormativity with treason and foreignness which has been propagated over the centuries by various (homophobic) slanderers. If Polish historical writing can, indeed, be accused of lacking the previously mentioned “queer impulse,” the same cannot by any means be said about various historical practices carried out within the framework of public history, especially those which have been undertaken by the Polish art world: queer artists and curators in particular.<sup>60</sup> Their major concern has not been to “establish” whether Boleslaw II the Generous and Henry I, alongside other Polish royals, were indeed queer. Instead, they have paid special attention to their unique status in Polish history and culture and the perception of them as the (non-heteronormative) other. In other words, the afterlives of these rulers as historical figures have been produced by homophobic discourse.

One notable example from the art world is the Queer Archives Institute, an artist/curator collective led by the artist Karol Radziszewski, which has researched the role, history and iconography of Polish non-heteronormative historical figures—including kings and queens—for the purpose of the exhibition “Heritage” organised in the landmark Warsaw venue, the Palace of Culture and Science, within the framework of the POMADA Queer Festival 7 in September 2017.<sup>61</sup> Driven by the sense of oppressive politics and homophobic closeting which exists in the majority of public museums and institutions, the exhibition found its ally in heritage studies in its deliberate use of “meaningful pasts” (which were often difficult or dissonant) as a resource for contemporary users of those pasts (present-day LGBTQ individuals).<sup>62</sup> With the help of archive materials (books, photographs, prints, etc.) as well as artefacts (sculptures, paintings), the Queer Archives Institute collective re-assembled the scattered iconography of the two kings for two reasons: firstly, to unsheathe and deconstruct homophobic and hegemonic historical discourses with regard to the two rulers; and, secondly, to reevaluate and rewrite their stories—consequently to transform them from the Sodomite Murderer/Traitor Kings into the victims of homophobic oppression and, as such, highly relevant figures for both queer heritage and queer history or, alternatively, for queer counter-narrative about the historical past (Figures 6 and 7).

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<sup>60</sup> Our understanding of “public history” is broad and remains in line with Robert Kelly’s classical definition, namely “the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, even in private practice.” Robert Kelly, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects,” *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 16.

<sup>61</sup> Another example is the happening organised by the Marsz Tęczowej Tradycji i Kultury (Gay Pride; literally the March of Rainbow Tradition and Culture) in 2009 in Kraków, when representatives of the ILGA Poland (Polish branch of the International Lesbian and Gay Association) decided to put flowers on the grave of Władysław III in Wawel Cathedral to celebrate the (gay) king’s birthday.

<sup>62</sup> Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1.



Figure 6 (left) and Figure 7 (right): Images from the “Heritage” exhibition (Warsaw, 2017): A socialist-realist plaster cast for the monument of Maria Konopnicka (Figure 6) and the seventeenth-century print with the image of Henry III of France (Figure 7). Photos by Bartosz Górka © Queer Archives Institute.

Both kings also featured prominently in a new series of paintings entitled “Fellows” which was created by Karol Radziszewski in 2017. This was a gallery of portraits of the twenty-two most important non-heteronormative individuals in Polish history. In his pop-art styled series, Radziszewski used existing historical iconography to portray the two kings anew (Figure 8). These “queer” portraits, just like their historical counterparts (both visual and textual) are, of course, also a fabrication of the image. This time, however, they do not contribute to the homophobic accounts about the royal treason, but constitute the very narrative that attacks national homophobic history. Having been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw for their permanent collection of contemporary art in 2018, the paintings have successfully entered the public institutional domain and might be seen as an instrument for dismantling “nationally-owned” historical discourse about the past.



Figure 8: Karol Radziszewski, *Bolesław III the Generous* (2017). © Karol Radziszewski and Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

In short, Bolesław II the Generous and Henry I should be seen today as Poland's dissonant or difficult heritage *par excellence*; incongruous and discrepant, producing disharmonies and conflicts as a result of contemporary users' engagement with their legacy,<sup>63</sup> but also capable of "extend[ing] the resources of self- and community-building into even the distant past."<sup>64</sup> And it is in the field of public history—and not academic historiography—that one should look in today's Poland for a true "queer historical impulse."

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<sup>63</sup> John E. Tunbridge and Gregory J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: Wiley, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 1.