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Interpreting Magister Vincentius. Words, Images and Meaning in the *Chronica Polonorum*

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Chair: Prof. Constant Mews (Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology / School of Historical Studies, Monash University Melbourne)

Paper 1: The *Chronica Polonorum* by Magister Vincentius - Issues of translation and interpretation

Darius von Guettner, PhD (Historical Studies, University of Melbourne)

Magister Vincentius, also known as Wincenty Kadłubek, was Bishop of Kraków (1208–1218) and the first native Polish chronicler. His work, the *Chronica Polonorum* was the second work to chronicle the early history of Poland and its rulers, both mythical and historical. The first three books of the *Chronica* are written in the form of a dialogue between Archbishop Jan of Gniezno (1148–1165) and Bishop Mateusz of Kraków (1143/1144–1166), while the fourth is a narrative. Among the sources used by Vincentius are oral tradition, the *Gesta* of Anonymus Gallus, and Vincentius' own experiences. The language and composition of the *Chronica* reflect Vincentius' erudition and literary style probably acquired during his studies in Western Europe and show various influences; chiefly Cistercian. There is no English translation of the *Chronica*. Work on a translation, has been underway for some time and been challenged by various problems of interpretation. This paper will present some of the issues related to the translation of the *Chronica* into English and provide the context of Master Vincentius' vision of Polish history.

Paper 2: Morals and Politics in the Chronicle of Magister Vincentius

dr hab. Edward Skibiński (Instytut Historii, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza Poznań)

The *Chronica Polonorum* poses serious difficulties in grasping its subject matter. These are mainly due to the form employed by the chronicler, i.e. stylistic peculiarities of Magister Vincentius' Latin and the dialogic form of more than half of his work. But the contemporary understanding of the Chronicle's substance is also not made easier by

what modern reader knows about the author. On the one hand, Vincent is seen as a beatified bishop and strictly clerically-minded writer. On the other hand, it is often emphasized that he wrote his chronicle utilizing the categories of the Roman law and classical moral theory. The proposed paper will show that the main topic of the *Chronica* is a problem of practical morality. For Vincent, the politics is shaped by the rulers, but can these rules – as the Chronicler asks – be solely Christian or should the code of conduct maybe be limited to the secular moral ethics as proposed by the ancient philosophers? These deliberations can be best traced in Vincentius' account of the recent familial struggle for power between Mieszko the Old and Casimir the Just, whose strife is depicted in terms of disagreement between holders of two different political ideologies. Nevertheless the problems of practical morality in politics are considered in the *Chronica* from early on in the successive series of reigns. The first one is the story the legendary ancient Krak, that can be read as Vincentius' rejection of political theories put forward in the Latin rendition of Plato's Calcidius. Another important point in this series is the instruction on proper ruling given to Bolesław the Brave, the first Christian ruler in the *Chronica*, by a bishop, St. Adalbert. These rules are fulfilled – according to Vincentius – only in the reign of Casimir the Just, but between the first Christian king and Casimir there were others who encountered serious political problems requiring careful solution. Modalities of interest arise in case of rulers being admonished by bishops. Bolesław the Bold and Mieszko the Old both act against the respective warnings and consequently they lose. Another modality is presented in the story of Boleslaw the Wry-Mouthed who solves the conflict with his brother Zbigniew in the court of law. Magister Vincentius does not accept the sentence and the different standards that he instead proposes are the topic of the proposed paper.

Paper 3: Power and Society on the Verge of the 12th-13th. Multiple Approaches in Interpreting the Chronicle of Magister Vincentius

dr hab. Przemysław Wiszewski (Instytut Historyczny, Uniwersytet Wrocławski)

The *Chronica Polonorum* by Magister Vincentius is a compilation of several different stories. The images of the past he presents show an evident influence of classical mythology and historiography as well as narrative plots commonly occurring in the European culture of the high Middle Ages. Some of these stories were brought unchanged into the work. They served as carriers of the values considered by the author as important in the social life of his times and thus intentionally transferred to the readers. Others comprising notions different from those praised by Vincentius were significantly altered by him. In consequence, modern historians regard both kinds of narratives as elements of ideologically coherent messages, coded in the entire chronicler's narration. Nevertheless, diverse backgrounds of the stories comprised in Vincentius' chronicle raise questions about whether they could: 1. shape the meaning of the chronicle as a whole, irrespective of the political and cultural conditions existing at the time of its creation; 2. maintain their function as carriers of notions and values originally comprised in them, while remaining contradictory to the ideas reflected in Magister Vincentius' work. For the historian the main question is under what conditions Vincentius' work can be validly employed to construct specific visions of the past. Hence, the key question refers to relations between the text of the chronicle and the past. On the basis of the idea of power presented in the chronicle, the paper will characterize the change in methodological approaches to the analyses of this work. To what extent the diverse research perspectives relate to the internal diversity of the work? To what extent they comply with its meaning? Can the multiplicity of the

chronicle's plots and its dependence on the specific environment of 12th century Poland be ignored when reading it as a literary piece of art? And what then is the reality that can be discovered through an analysis of the work?

Comment: Prof. Dr. Eduard Mühle (German Historical Institute, Warsaw / Department of History, Westfälische Wilhelm-Universität Münster)