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Vincentius of Cracow: medieval transmission of ideas and modern interpretation

Panel sponsored by the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, Poland

Chair: Professor Constant Mews, Melbourne

Paper 1: 'Nations' in ancient history and contemporary times and their modern Polish interpretation. Example of the chronicle by Bishop Vincentius of Cracow

Stanisław Rosik, Wrocław

One of the more intriguing literary characteristics of the chronicle by Bishop Vincentius of Cracow is his 'flattening of the time perspective' whereby the ideas and perspectives of his time were anachronistically introduced into depictions or interpretations of the past. In his work Vincentius placed individual and collective heroes on a continuum of universal history irrespective of the time gap separating them. One of the examples of this 'bending of time' is Vincentius' description of the Battle of Psie Pole in 1109 where among the 'nations' fighting against the German Emperor, the Poles feature next to ancient Parthians. By placing the Poles in the same time spectrum as the Parthians Vincentius singlehandedly antedated the existence of Poles into ancient times. In the modern Polish translation of Vincentius' chronicle Parthians are translated as Parthians, though the editor 'demythologise' the chronicler's literary treatment by interpreting them as the Cumans. Whilst the existence of the Poles in the age of Alexander the Great was left without commentary, the *Silenci* are interpreted as the West Slavic tribe Ślężanie. The modern Polish translation thus introduced a certain scholarly interpretation which does not necessarily correspond to the Latin version and perhaps departs from Vincentius' intention and purpose. This paper will discuss the issues related to Vincentius' use of presentism and its modern interpretation and by highlighting specific examples, point to deficiencies of the modern translation.

Paper 2: Ideas of holy war and their modern English interpretation. Example of the chronicle by Bishop Vincentius of Cracow

Darius von Guettner, Melbourne

The first native chronicler of Poland was a Christian cleric who was learned in Roman law and steeped in classical tradition. Bishop Vincentius of Cracow wrote a chronicle which provided his recently Christianised countrymen an ancient heritage and placed their roots within the framework of universal history. Vincentius included three descriptions of the Polish dynasty's holy wars against the Prussians in 1147, 1166, and 1192. These holy wars represented a cultural shift from the wars of expansion into the dynasty's active participation in the Christian holy war. This paper will examine the possible sources of Vincentius' ideas on holy war and their Christian and classical heritage. It will also analyse how Vincentius gave meaning to the Piasts' expansionary policies how his work influenced court tradition and history writing in the centuries to follow.

Paper 3: **Antique and medieval ideas of rule and community in Bishop Vincentius' chronicle and their modern German interpretation**

Eduard Mühle, Warsaw/Münster

Bishop Vincentius of Cracow wrote his chronicle at the end of the twelfth century on commission from his sovereign overlord aiming at legitimising the power of his sponsor. In his work Vincentius developed his own specific concepts of rule and community and transposed into the Polish reality of his times antique Roman terminology, for example, introducing terms like *res publica*, *senatus*, *patria*, among others. In addition he adapted the western medieval concept of kingly rule (*regnum*, *rex*) to depict the Piast ducal power. This phenomenon raises several questions: firstly, what were the sources of Vincentius' ideas on rule and community; secondly, what was the purpose of Vincentius' application of antique terminology to his narration of Polish medieval history; and thirdly, how can the modern historian interpret and translate the concepts of rule and community rendered by Vincentius in terms not common to his contemporary Polish society. The paper will attempt to give answers to these questions looking at, among others modern German historiographical concepts, providing the background for a Latin-German edition of Vincentius' chronicle.