

Originality and imitation in Polish political and religious culture (10th-13th century)

Presented project will concern the creation and development of the political and religious culture in medieval Poland. Behind these terms we can find many problems, which lead us to development of identity of the region and political structures, which were shaped within it. In discussed period those realities are remaining in strict relation and they are interpenetrating, because political culture is built primarily on the basis of religious culture; the development of both is strictly related. Moreover, they are shaping themselves through mutual interactions.

Research concerning these problems have already a long tradition. The aim of our project will be not only to enrich it with subjects, which haven't been raised yet, but primarily to present discussed problems in completely different conceptualization. Polish – and also Central European reality – was often viewed only through and with reference to European reality of this period, as a reflection or imitation of Western cultural models. Current research lacks of reflection, how diverse character might have this imitation, in how different ways these models might have been adopted, finally, how they were changed in contact with cultural specificity of this geographical region.

The participants of the grant would like to give special attention to these problems. We decided to choose the comparatistic method; thanks to that method the analysis and its effect – conclusions, have much bigger scientific value. This method is based on comparison of the same or similar phenomena, occurring in different geographical areas and analyzing its similarities, differences, dependence and mutual interaction. In our project as a comparative material for situation on Polish lands will serve both the neighbouring, Christianized in the same or similar period areas, named sometimes “Younger Europe” and the lands of Western Europe.

For this reason project will be aimed at presenting Polish lands from two perspectives. Firstly, from the perspective of relations between countries constituting peripheries of medieval Europe, namely areas of East-Central Europe. Secondly, the relations with the centre, which – for the medieval world – was the Western Europe. Since these categories have not yet found wider application in Polish medieval research, a starting point will be a reflection over meaning of the categories “centre” and “peripheries” in medieval reality, and first of all – in the context of Polish lands. The application of these categories will lead us, in turn, to the reflection on the character of Polish political and religious culture, regarded within the categories of imitation and originality. To what extent therefore periphery was taking over models coming from the centre, and to what extent it was keeping – maybe working out – its own specificity and character? Such an analysis let us to show completely new for Polish studies conceptualization of problems of shaping political and religious culture and the first stage of its development. It lets us place it in a wider context of the world of early medieval Europe, in which it was born and at the same time it shows its specific and its own contribution to the building of the identity of Central Europe.

These research forms part of a broader discussion on the problematic of cultural interactions occurring in whole Europe, and at the same time on the specificity of its various areas, in our case the area of East-Central Europe. This problem, as well as many others of undertaken here, remains still actual in ongoing dispute over Europe; study of the past may give a relevant perspective to contemporary discussion.

A team of researchers working on the project was made up of eminent specialists, whose work is coordinated by a historian for years working on the problems concerning the place of Polish culture in European early medieval culture and successfully practicing in his studies comparatistic method. Under his supervision the members of the grant – both those, who for their studies devoted already years of work, and those, who are just at the beginning of their scientific career and are undertaking in their research so far highly insufficiently studied problems – will endeavor to present issues, contained in the theme of the project, in individual research, and at the same time in collective conceptualization. At the end it will let us to show the wider character of the phenomenon of imitation and originality of Polish culture.