

”They openly and habitually keep women, which was forbidden in the Nicene Synod, and they hold so lightly the respect of God and man, and even belittle the very fear of hell, that they think that it not only *may* but even *must* mean that anyone who refuses to keep a woman must be engaging in that foulest sin which the apostle mentions in his Epistle to the Romans” complained Rather of Verona, describing the situation of the clerics in his diocese in a letter to Ambrose, Otto I’s Italian chancellor, in the middle of the 10th century. What most bothered the bishop was the priests’ failure to comply with the principle of clerical celibacy.

This is just one of many examples illustrating the great importance attached to sexual behavior in the Middle Ages. Continuing efforts aiming at imposing limits on human sexuality resulted partially from the concern of the state of society, as sexual behaviors, if uncontrolled, could disrupt orderly social processes.

Sexuality in the Middle Ages has been an interesting research problem for the Western European and American scholars already for a few decades, nonetheless Polish source material enjoyed only a marginal interest. It is the purpose of the current study to examine how the sexual ethics was developed in Poland from the 11th to the 13th century. A whole range of sexual standards were imposed due to the process of Christianization, as well as through the reception of Western European behavior patterns. We will therefore ascertain what kinds of behaviors were allowed or condemned; how did the society attempt to control the conduct of its members; how were the Christian notions about sexual morals received and perceived in medieval Poland; how was the sexual misconduct punished by the Church, as well as by the secular judiciary; what were the social consequences of the introduction of the clerical celibacy and how did the courtly love ideals mingle with the Christian views on love and sexuality.

The project will therefore not only enrich our knowledge about the sexual life of the inhabitants of medieval Poland, but also contribute to expanding our general understanding of the Middle Ages societies.