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**THE DEATH OF WŁADYSŁAW III WARNEŃCZYK AS LITERARY FACT
REVIEW OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES**

Petko Ivanov

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*Grób jego jest Europa, słup – śnieżne Bałchany,
Napis – wieczna pamiątka między Krześcijany.*

Jan Kochanowski

By an ironic twist of fate Władysław III Jagiełło, the king of Poland (1434-1444) and of Hungary (1440-1444) remained in the historical and the cultural memory of Europe chiefly, and perhaps exclusively, with his death at the battle of Varna on November 10, 1444. Even the name Warneńczyk, with which he is remembered in history, is associated with the place of his martyrdom. Today all the events in Warneńczyk's life with the exception of the fatal battle in Varna, are treated as nothing more than historical details of only peripheral interest to a few specialists. The death of the hero has completely eclipsed his life having been turned into the leitmotif of the legend about him.

Virtually all literary and folk works commemorating Władysław Warneńczyk are focused in his death and his entire literary biography has been constructed by carefully selecting only those "facts" that fit the ideal image of a hero-martyr. In reality, however, even the very "heroic" death of the Polish king is more of a literary than of a historical fact, since the hypothesis that he did not die in the battle continues to gain today not only new exponents, but also new historical evidence and supporting arguments. Thus we may conclude that Warneńczyk is a hero who was created by literary means and who by literary strategies mainly was constructed as one of the central personages of Polish (and Slavic) cultural mythology.

This paper¹ is intended as a review of the folk and the literary works about Władysław Warneńczyk, against the background of their existing scholarly context. It does not have the ambition of being exhaustive, for it represents only the first stage of an on-going research. Its documentary introduction sketches the staging of the events whose literary implementation will be discussed in the main exposition. In my later studies I intend to work out interpretative strategies for analyzing the literary material here discussed, particularly for the purpose of reconstructing the mechanisms for the cultural construction of a hero.

Warneńczyk as a Historical Persona

Władysław¹ Warneńczyk was the first son of King Władysław Jagiełło († 1434), seventy-year-old at that time, and the seventeen-year-old Lithuanian princess Zofia Holszańska († 1461).² The birth of the long awaited heir to the throne (the old king did not have any male children from his three previous marriages) on October 31, 1424 was marked by nationwide celebrations as well as by a specially composed *motetus* with the incipit *Nitor inclite claredinis* (“Let the light of the most wondrous clarity”). The author of this first literary work dedicated to Władysław III was probably Mikołaj from Błonia (Pszczółka), but it was in fact an adaptation of a panegyric hymn for the Nativity of Christ in which the name of Jesus was simply replaced by that of the newly born prince.³

¹ The semantics and the versions of the name ‘Władysław’ are studied by Kobylińska 1996.

² Such circumstances -- an old father (the age of seventy in the Judeo-Christian world is considered the so-called “David’s limit” marking an exceptional longevity) and a royal-virgin mother – are traditionally associated with the birth of a hero and hence constitute a topos of the model heroic biography (cf. Raglan 1990: 138).

³ An edition of the Latin text with parallel Polish translation see in Gansiniec 1957: 164-168 (there also see about *motetus* as a syncretic musical and poetic form). The text was falsely attributed to Stanisław Ciołek († 1437), until H. Kowalewicz presented convincing evidence in support of the hypothesis about the authorship of Ciołek’s secretary, Mikołaj from Błonia (see Michałowska 1990: 854). The implicit equation of Władysław with Christ as his prototype (this rhetorical technique, extremely popular in Christian hagiography, is known as “syncretism”; see Folke 1923; cf. Seemann 1991: 29 ff.) was later amplified by the persistent Christological interpretation of Władysław’s death in most of the literary sources as a self-sacrifice for the Salvation of Christian Europe.

Ten years later, after the death of his father (May 31), Władysław was crowned on July 25, 1434 the King of Poland in spite of the opposition of the part of the supporters of his younger brother and future successor Kazimierz. Until Władysław's official coming of age in Dec. 1438, the *de facto* ruler of Poland was his legal guardian, the Bishop of Krakow Zbigniew Oleśnicki (1389-1455) on whose initiative the Polish-Hungarian union was formed in 1440. The latter subsequently enabled Władysław to ascent on March 8, 1440 the vacant Hungarian throne after the death (Oct. 27, 1439) of Albrecht II Habsburg, although the enthronement did not pass without complications. Queen Elisabeth, the widow of the late King Albrecht, was determined to save the throne for her infant son, Ladislav Posthumus (Władysław Pogrobowiec).⁴ With the support of devoted Hungarian noblemen she instigated a civil upheaval meant to undermine Władysław's position which was especially dangerous in view of the Turkish advances in Europe. The situation deserved the attention of the Pope himself who sent his legate, Julian Cesarini, to convince Elisabeth and Władysław to come to a compromise. Finally, only days before Elisabeth's death, they signed on Dec. 14, 1442 in Győr an agreement, which bound the young king to participate in a Crusade against the Turks.⁵

The following 1443 was particularly successful for the Polish-Hungarian army lead by Władysław III and the Hungarian military commander János Hunyadi (1387-1456).⁶ They won a number of battles against the Turks at Sofia, Nish and Zlatitsa, and although none of them was of primary significance, they still gave the Polish-Hungarian side a considerable advantage during the on-going peaceful negotiations with the Muslims. On July 1 1444 a ten-year-long peace treaty was *presumably* signed at the city

⁴ Vladislav Postumum († 1457) actually did become the king of Hungary and Bohemia after Władysław's death, assuming the name László V. In Western Europe he was known as Lancelot and under this name he was mentioned in François Villon's *Ballade of Lords of Bygone Days* (1461), viz. the much discussed and somewhat cryptic verse "Lancelot, le roy de Behaigne" (see in this respect the article of Porter & Sebeok 1951, which rejects the popular thesis that Villon alluded here to Władysław Warneńczyk).

⁵ In the description of the "Hungarian episode" of Władysław Warneńczyk's life I follow Dąbrowski's study (1922); the last year's of his life (1440-1444) are studied extensively by Kwiatkowski in his somewhat dated but in many respects still reliable monography (1883).

⁶ For János Hunyadi as a historical and legendary figure, see Engel 1982 and Held 1985.

of Szeged.⁷ It was reportedly sealed by the two corresponding sovereigns by solemn oaths: Murad II (1421-1452) swore by the Koran, Władysław – by the Bible.

Incited by Pope Eugene IV by the mediumship of his legate Cesarini, however, the Polish king broke his oath soon after the signing of the peace treaty and organized his last (and most memorable albeit fatal) campaign against the Turks.⁸ The armies of the Christian and of the Muslim worlds met at the city of Varna in a battle that the historians dub “The Battle of the Peoples” for its impressive grandiosity.⁹ Early in the battle the Polish-Hungarian army had a slight superiority. There sharp reversal of fortune (and here all chronicles, Christian and Muslim alike, are in full concord) was marked by the moment when Sultan Murad II raised his arm against the skies appealing to the *Christian* god to punish Władysław, “the perjurer.” (The traditional interpretation of the defeat of the Christian army as “a divine punishment,” its rich Biblical typology notwithstanding, was apparently rooted in this particular historiographic detail.) The last reliable piece of evidence about Władysław Warneńczyk states that he led 500 of his closest knights in a rather improvident attack against the very central square of the Turkish army, consisting entirely of elite janissaries.

From there on the fate of the Polish king is veiled in mystery and legends. According to the most plausible of the versions, he was killed and then beheaded near the sultan’s tent. His last words according to the Turkish chroniclers were allegedly: “You, Master Murad...”¹⁰ After the defeat of the Christian army¹¹ Władysław’s head was carried around the Turkish cities, stuck on a spear, as the ultimate symbol of the Turkish

⁷ The Szeged peace treaty is still a focus of controversies in historiographic studies. Dąbrowski (1966) supports the more popular opinion that the treaty was actually signed, while Halecki (1943, 1958) claims that only negotiations took place.

⁸ The motif about the perjury of the Polish king is analyzed by Tazbir 1985.

⁹ See Cvetkova 1979. Descriptions of the campaign and the battle at Varna see also in Krimski 1924: 42-56 and Chasin 1989.

¹⁰ Bistra Cvetkova (1969: 189) accepts this as a trustworthy information listing a number of additional evidence for its support. According to another version Władysław fell unnoticed and only later was his body discovered and beheaded, and his head was subsequently carried around to be identified by the Christian prisoners of war.

¹¹ 12 000 Polish and Hungarian knights died in the battle. Among the casualties was also Julian Cesarini, the spiritual instigator of Władysław’s anti-Turkish politics, brothers Tarnowski (see Dworzaczek 1971) and Stanisław Zawisza, the eldest son of Zawisza Czarny (1375-1428), considered the paragon of a Polish knight (for him see Klubówna 1974 and Ziejka 1984).

supremacy. According to another version, which has been gaining considerable popularity in the recent years, Władysław Warneńczyk survived the battle and having wandered around the world for years, he finally settled down in the Portuguese island of Madeira where he was later killed in the 1460s by a lightning (Kielanowski 1991).¹² The uncertainties surrounding the death of the Polish king gave rise of the appearance of numerous imposters (“Pseudo-Warneńczyks”),¹³ the most infamous of which was Mikołaj Rychlik, mock-crowned upon his denunciation with a paper crown and later scourged to death.

Warneńczyk as a Folk Personage

Most probably Władysław Warneńczyk became a personage of Slavic folk songs soon after the battle at Varna, since Maciej Strykowski (1547–c.1582) in his *Chronicle* (1582) presents early evidence about the existence of a South Slavic epic tradition related to the events of his death: “Byłem sam tam w tych polach, gdzie nasi przodkowie Turki bili, śpiewają dziś o nich Serbowie. Widziałem Warnę z płaczem...”¹⁴ The earliest documented song is of Czech origin. It is attested in a fifteenth-century manuscript under the title *Cancio de rege Wladislao, Ungarie rege*. The song, which consists of 68 lines, was published with a short commentary by Julius Feifalik (1863: 664-666). It follows closely the peripeties of the battle at Varna in abundant circumstantial details, e.g. the prayer before taking the field,¹⁵ the continuous exclamations of the knights “bijme sě pro Ježiše,” Władysław’s initial victory and his heroic fight in which he was heavily

¹² See also Karpiński 1980; Milewska 1989: 57-58. Probably the most fantastic version claims that in 1466 a Czech traveler met a monk somewhere in Spain and recognized in him the late Polish king. The monk had six toes on each foot! (see Karpiński 1987: 293). Urbánek (1937: 2-4, 193-195) however accepts this piece of information as authentic for which he is later criticized by Śliziński 1973: 310. This episode was used by Alois Jirásek (1851-1930) in his book *Z Čech až na konec světa* (1890).

¹³ See Lewicki 1895; Jakubczak 1988; Karpiński 1987: 293-294.

¹⁴ See Radziszewska 1978: 221; cf. Wojciech Sarnicki’s evidence for an existing sixteenth-century Polish epic tradition about the battle at Varna (Grabski 1967: 26-27), and the Polish proverb “Pod Warną pogińeli nasi marno” (Gloger 1972: 419).

¹⁵ Urbánek (1937: 16-19, 179ff) in his analysis of this song suggests that the family anthem of the Jagiellonians, the famous *Bogurodzica*, was actually sung as a prayer before the battle.

wounded. It concludes with a prayer for all the fallen knights but does not touch the question about the battle's outcome.¹⁶

The second extant folk composition is from the first half of the seventeenth century. It appeared as an interpolation into one of the copies of the famous poem *Osman* by Ivan Gundolić (1589-1638)¹⁷ and was first published by Armin Pavić (1879: 93-98). It consists of 184 lines and has the characteristic structure of the epic genre *bugarštica*.¹⁸ Although Wiskowatyj (1933: 33-65) has discussed a number of its "historical realia" it nevertheless renders above all a generalized image of a military battle against the heathens, combining anachronistic details from various historical events of this type (cf., e.g., the very first line "Kad se kralju Vladislave na *Kosovo* odpravljaše"). The real hero of the song is actually not Władysław but Ugri Anko (Hunyadi) who after the battle bravely "orders" the sultan to return the body of "the noble king Władysław."

Valtazar Bogišić (1878: 75-80) discovered and published two other South Slavic *bugarštici* related to the death of Warneńczyk.¹⁹ They are composed in sixteen-syllabic meter with a caesura after the eight syllable and a sextosyllabic refrain after every second line. One of them elaborates the classical folk motif "prophesy for the fall of a kingdom." In it a maid from the town of Budim has a dream: the skies break down, the stars fall off and the moon turns dark. Ugrin Janko (Hunyadi) alone can interpret this dream. It is an ill omen that the Turks will take Budim, kill all its defenders and that "the glorious king Władysław" (evidently symbolized by the moon) will perish. The second

¹⁶ The "historical authenticity" of this song, which a propos has a number of characteristics typical of authorial literature that set it aside the folk tradition, is analyzed by Wiskowatyj 1931; cf. Grygiel 1995.

¹⁷ Władysław Warneńczyk is mentioned also in the text of *Osman* itself; see the passage (the quotation is from the Zagreb edition of 1887: 35):

Pazi Varno nadaleče
Gdi, vojujuć jur junački,
Smrt Vladislav slavni steče
Kralj ugrski i poljački.

¹⁸ About *bugarštica* see Albert B. Lord' Introduction to the anthology of Miletich 1990; cf. there the Afterward by Samuel G. Armistead.

¹⁹ A Polish translation of these songs (with a number of errors and infelicities) see in Chodźko 1880; good historiographic analyses see in Wiskowatyj 1933, Czajka 1966: 190-193,

song describes how after the tragic peripeties Ugrin Janko, while searching for the body of the slaughtered king, find his right arm which he identifies “by the ring of pure gold” and brings it back to his old mother and faithful sweetheart. The song ends with a formulaic acclamation: “Eternal glory be to King Władysław!” abundant in the original in assonance (cf. *вечна слава // крал’а Владислава*), which additionally plays on the etymology of the king’s name, more specifically on its doxological meaning.

Henryka Czajka (1966) added to the Varna folk cycle another song, which she found in the Erlangen manuscript #73. In this song however the name of Warneńczyk is not even mentioned.²⁰ A hypothesis exists that the folk ballad *Three Eagles Hover High Above the Town of Budim* from the collection of the Miladinovs brothers (1861) is also dedicated to the tragedy at Varna (see Angelov 1931; Jordanov 1969). In this song the eagles bring to the Hungarian capital the head and the right arm of a hero who has fallen in a battle against the Turks. The body of a prince, chopped to pieces in a battle, which is brought back to his fatherland for proper burial is the focus of still another song, this time of Polish origin, “Skąd ty, Jasiu? – Zza Dunaju,” which is known in numerous versions. Ivan Franko (1984a, 1984b) who accounts for several Ukrainian variants of the same song (“Відки Йвасю? – З-за Дунаю”) suggests that it also contains references to the battle at Varna. By and large, however, the Slavic folk epos reflecting the resistance of the Slavic peoples against the Ottoman invasion features as a more popular personage János Hunyadi rather than Władysław Warneńczyk. In Bulgarian folklore for example plots related to Hunyadi appear in more than forty different songs, collected and analyzed by Józeph Bödey (1947).

We may conclude that all the Slavic folk songs that echo the battle at Varna are lamentations of a generalized Slavic Christian hero and should be studied against the background of the rich European lamentative tradition related to the late medieval struggle against the Muslim invaders (cf., e.g., the Italian *canzone lamenti* or the German

Kawecka 1968 and Rećep 1989: 120-123. One of the songs, *King Wladyslaw’s Hand*, is available in English translation in Miletich 1990: 86-91.

²⁰ The author identifies “млада краља” (i.e. “the young king”) from the song as Warneńczyk using to support her argument only the name of his servant Matijaš, who according to her was the son of Hunyadi, M. Korvin who later took the Hungarian throne (1418-90). The implausibility of this hypothesis is criticized in *Studia Źródłoznawcze* 8 (1968): 226. For a review of the current studies of the Erlangen manuscript see Medenica 1982.

Türckenlieder). Therefore even the songs which feature explicitly Władysław Warneńczyk, just like those in which he appears under another name or as anonymous, are in fact lamentative glorifications not of a particular individualized historical persona, but rather of a collective hero-sovereign-martyr whose death for the Christian faith has a soteriological and messianic significance.²¹

Warneńczyk as a Literary Personage

Although epideictic works about Władysław Warneńczyk began to emerge at the eve of the battle at Varna (e.g. the epistle of the Italian poet-humanist Francesco Filelfo to the Hungarian court²²) the real career of Władysław III, the literary personage, boomed

²¹ I do not discuss here the folk narratives about Władysław Warneńczyk, which are surprisingly few in number considering the rich Slavic narrative tradition documenting the resistance against the Turkish invasion (see Klimová 1970-1972). Jerzy Śliziński (1959, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973), who carried out extensive field work in Bulgaria found himself forced to admit that his hopes to discover Bulgarian legends about Warneńczyk proved to be futile. The few legends recorded by him and others (see also Grzegorzewski 1910: 222-225; Romanska-Vranska 1958: 217-218) are all based on the motif of the beheaded king carrying his head. The fact that the same motif appears in narratives about other defeated sovereigns, e.g. the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Shishman (Andreev 1993) and the Serbian prince Lazar (Emmert 1990), suggests that Władysław as a legendary hero was probably contaminated with them. More broadly, all these legends are associated with the ancient mythologeme about the sacred nature of the royal body (the dismemberment of the king = dismemberment of the kingdom). Another mythological source is, of course, the story of John the Baptist (see Moroz 1987); it is not coincidental that a legend quoted in Grabowski (1911: 50-57) claims that the alleged grave of Warneńczyk near Varna was in fact the grave of the Baptist himself. About the motif “walking with one’s head in hand,” listed in Thomson under # F511.04, see Pliukhanova (1991) who gives examples of *kephalophors* not only from Russian but also from Western European medieval writings. Some narratives about Władysław Warneńczyk from Polish folklore are dealt with in Biernacki (1965) and Śliziński (see e.g. 1973: 308); cf. also the Hungarian children play with a role called Władysław Warneńczyk, described by Kiss 1953, Mészáros 1963, Linsenman-Kwaśniewska 1969: 17-19, Igaz 1979, and Zalesińska 1979.

²² The epistle, which was written probably on November 5, 1444, is published by Lempicki 1951: 3-12. It is considered by many a model of epistolographic art. It refers to Władysław III as “a bridal star,” “a new Alexander [of Macedonia],” and even “the Light of Christ.” It is probably the first written document which forwards the idea of Poland as *antemurale* (‘przedmurze’) of Christian Europe (about this idea see Weintraub 1979, Tazbir 1984 & 1987, Hopp 1992, and Krzyżaniakowa 1992).

after the death of his historical prototype. The very first documentary and chronicle accounts for the battle, the majority of which can be and often are read as literature, represent the Polish king as a hagiographical persona. Jean de Wavrin (1465), following the chivalrous ethos, and more specifically the model heroism prescribed by the crusader's code, characterizes both Warneńczyk and the papal legate Cesarini as martyrs for the Christian faith (see Iorga 1927 and Dąbrowski 1923). Georges Chastellain († 1475) places them in the pantheon of the most glorious chevaliers (see Bliggenstorfer 1988: 67-69). For Andrea de Palatio Warneńczyk is “like a mortal god” and the lost battle is a great albeit bloodstained triumph of Christianity (see Prochaska 1882: 21-37).²³ Eneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II, 1458-1464) apparently overcoming his negativity toward Poland, publicly discussed in a rather favorable manner the proposition to canonize Warneńczyk as a martyr saint (see Zarębski 1939: 13-28 and Grabski 1968: 414-415). Even the Turks, who are well-known for their cult toward bravery, describe Władysław as a hero, a worthy enemy and a valiant warrior (see Tatarli 1969). According to Ambrož from Morava, who supports the view of the defeat as a divine punishment, Władysław has atoned for his sin with his heroism and for that he was saved by God so that he may return in the future and lead again his knights into a victorious battle against the Muslims (see Ganszyniec 1925b). The later chronicles of Jan Długosz,²⁴ Konstantin Mihailović (c. 1500),²⁵ Marcin Bielski (1551),²⁶ Andrzej Lubieniecki,²⁷ Maciej Strykowski (1582),²⁸ Jan Głuchowski (1605),²⁹ and especially the monumental *Historia de rege Vladislao* (1487) by Filip Kallimach (see Lichońska 1961) subscribe into the same martyrological tradition of evaluating Władysław Warneńczyk's heroic death.³⁰

²³ Cf. Grabski 1968: 409-410 and Kolarov 1972: 140.

²⁴ See Mecherzyński 1869: 498-678; cf. Bercoff 1980.

²⁵ See Stolz & Soucek 1975: 74-81 and Rogov 1978: 60-66.

²⁶ See Chrzanowski 1906.

²⁷ See Linda 1982: 22-28.

²⁸ Strykowski's chronicle is in verse; see Radziszewska 1978.

²⁹ See Głuchowski 1979: 69-70.

³⁰ Echoes of the Battle at Varna appeared also in the medieval Czech (see Grygiel 1995) and South Slavic (see Rećep 1989) historiography.

The first intentionally literary works about Władysław Warneńczyk appear within the framework of the medieval “occasional political poetry.”³¹ The extant Polish texts, all written in Latin, include three short acclamations up to four lines with a refrain “Sic vivit Wladislaus” (‘Władysław is alive’) and two extensive poems published by Zeissberg (1871: 108-112).³² One of the poems with the incipit *Plangite me celi, me plangant omnia mundi* is considered by contemporary scholarly consensus the original work of Mikuláš Petschacher and was probably written between 1445 and 1452.³³ It consists of 71 elegiac couplets. Władysław himself is the interlocutor in part of the poem, addressing the Polish people from his grave in a *oratio a tumulo* manner, and in the remains of the poem an omniscient narrator takes over to describe the battle in an eye-witness report. The conclusion of the poem is composed as an eulogy whose main motif is “the life-giving head” of the martyred king.³⁴ The second poem, *Ego Wladislaus Polonorum quondam aderam laus*, was written around 1445. Its author is presumably of Polish origin as suggested by an invocation of the Virgin in Polish (“proś za nami, panno Maryjo, syna”) appearing in verse 82 (the hypothetical attribution of this poem to Jędrzej Gałka has been discussed, but not confirmed). The 93 hexameters of the poem, defined by Ganszyniec (1924/25: 202) as *versus peregrinus*, include an address of Władysław toward his subjects, in which he confirms that he atones for his sins in the Purgatory, but that he is “alive” and that he will come back whenever his fatherland is in danger. According to Grabski (1967: 36ff; 1968: passim), who points out two antithetical tendencies of conceptualizing the defeat at Varna -- the procurial tendency, apologetic of the Crusade, depicting the king and the papal legate as martyrs, and an anticurial one, depicting them as perjurers – *Ego Wladislaus* exemplifies the latter one.

Among the immediate literary responses to the events of 1444 two poems stand out as most significant. They actually constitute chronicle-like descriptions of the battle

³¹ About the term *okolicznościowa poezja polityczna* and its implications see Nowak-Dłużewski 1973.

³² A Polish translation see in Jelicz 1987: 207-213; detailed analyses see in Ganszyniec 1924/25, Nowak-Dłużewski 1963: 75-79, and Grabski 1967.

³³ M. Petschacher is a Slovak or a Czech by origin (see Grabski 1967: 28-31; cf. Urbánek 1937: 124-125). According to Nowak-Dłużewski (1963: 75) this work is a compilation of three independent poems written by three different authors.

in verse (or versified chronicles) and display a noticeable intention of presenting the events in the “realistic” vein. The first one is written by Paraspondylos Zotikos (Ζωτικός), who describes himself as a Greek philosopher from Varna and an eye-witness of the recorded events. The poem consists of 466 lines and features its leading personage János Hunyadi, who is accused on a several occasions by the poet for having self-interested motives against Władysław because of his own “ambition for power.” This work, which was published several times,³⁵ has little artistic merit and is justifiably viewed today above all as a valuable linguistic and historical source (see, e.g., Takács 1994; Prinzing 1995). The second poem entitled *Von dem Kung Pladislau, wie der mit den Türken strait* (see Karajan 1849: 35-46) is the work of the famous German *meistersinger* and chronicler Michael Beheim (1416 - after 1472).³⁶ It renders the eye-witness account of a man called Hans Märgest, who allegedly participated in the battle and then spent 16 years in Turkish captivity. This poem is by no means the chef d’oeuvre of Beheim, yet it still possesses interesting passages, most of all a number of curious legendary details (e.g. that Władysław was buried in a Greek church near the battlefield, or that Cesarini was captured and skinned alive in Adrianopolis). Beheim is rather sparing of direct evaluations, but tries to follow the facts alone in order to create “objectively” the martyrological image of the king and the legate.

Apart from the chronicles mentioned above, the story of the battle at Varna appears only sporadically in sixteenth-century literature³⁷ and is used primarily as an instructive parable for monarchs. Against this background the several poetic fragments from Jan Kochanowski’s (1530-1584) unfinished tragedy (1589) about Warneńczyk have the quality of real masterpieces.³⁸ Especially notable among them is the poetic epitaph of

³⁴ About the common Christian motif of the “living head” which has an independent life from the body after decapitation see Pliukhanova 1991.

³⁵ The standard Greek edition is Moravcsik 1935; cf. Dimitrov’s Bulgarian translation (1910). About other Greek accounts of the battle at Varna see Theocharides 1987.

³⁶ About Beheim see, e.g., Scholz 1987: 112-180; cf. in English the studies of McDonald 1981 and Takács 1994.

³⁷ Cf., e. g., a small poem in Latin by the Hungarian baron Peter de Revay (1568-1622), published in Gołębiowski (1846: 123) and Palauzov (1860: 82), as well as some poetic works by H. Morsztyn (see Biernacki 1965).

³⁸ See “Włodzisław Warneńczyk” in Julian Krzyżanowski’s edition of Kochanowski’s works (Warszawa: PIW, 1976: 46-49).

the Polish king, whose grave is the entire Europe that he guarded and protected by his death ("Grób jego jest Europa, słup – śnieżne Bałchany // Napis – wieczna pamiątka między Krześcijany"), an image evidently influenced by the currently powerful idea of Poland as *Antemurale Christianitatis*.³⁹

Kochanowski's attempt to recreate Warneńczyk as a dramatist persona materialized in the subsequent tradition of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature, where Władysław III appears as the leading personage in a number of dramatic works. The most successful among them, *El rey sin reino* ('A King without a Kingdom,' 1625; see Strzałkowa 1950, 1955, 1960a) by the celebrated Spanish playwright Lope de Vega, describes in great details, and generally true to the historical sources, the court intrigues around the coronation of Władysław as the king of Hungary. The major line in the convoluted plot follows the conflict between Warneńczyk and the "legitimate" heir to the throne, Władysław Posthumus (Pogrobowiec). In the course of the events however it

³⁹ The concept of Poland as *Antemurale Christianitatis* (or *przedmurze chrześcijaństwa*) was invented in the late Middle Ages to reinterpret the position of Poland *vis-à-vis* the rest of Christian Europe, replacing the idea of "the periphery" by that of "the vanguard." First applied to the Polish Commonwealth in 1462, only two decades after the Grand (albeit disastrous) Battle of the People against at Varna in 1444, the term *antemurale* (lit. "bulwark" or "rampart") came to designate the mission of Poland to serve as a shield of Christendom against the Muslim Turks, and, more broadly, against the perils of the "heathen" Orient. Canonizing the inclusion of Poland among other bulwark states of Europe (like Byzantium, Venice, Hungary or Austria) the term also served as a building block in the development of a new *crusades* idea. The wall-metaphor that denoted at first approximation static defense was thus pushed to the semantic territory of dynamic offense. This shift opened the door for perceiving the Polish rampart not merely as a strategically placed impediment along the way of the Oriental (anti-Christian) aggression, but also as the mobile frontier of Christendom and European civilization (see Tazbir 1987 and Krzyżaniakowa 1992; cf. Weintraub 1979, Tazbir 1984, and Hopp 1992).

The pinnacle in the solidification of the Polish *antemurale* myth was marked by the victorious Battle at Vienna as late as 1683. But it was not until the nineteenth century, when the Turkish peril had already stopped being a real political issue in European history, that the myth was incorporated into Polish messianism and started vibrating with the Romantic vision of Poland as a Christ-nation. The imaginary "wall" that once had a pragmatic purposefulness was transformed into a symbolic wall with a purely soteriological significance. It became one of the symbols of Polish metaphysical supremacy over the other nations – a symbol of the "chosen" nation that has the strength to sacrifice itself "for *your* freedom as well as ours." Or, as the narrator in Witkiewicz's *Insatiability* (1930) recapitulates, "Polska jak zawsze była *odkupicielką, przedmurzem, ostoją* – na tym przecie od wieków polegała jej historyczna misja. Sama dla siebie była niczym – poświęcając się dla innych (zbyt głęboko wpojona była wszystkim ta ideologia) dopiero zaczynała istnieć naprawdę sama dla siebie."

becomes clear that the real “king without a kingdom” is none of the Władysławs but János Hunyadi who is wronged by them both. The motif about the perjury of Władysław, who dies as early as the second act, is doubled by the perjury of Postumum who is killed later in the play as a form of his divine punishment. In accord with the canons of the Spanish drama of the time, justice does eventually triumph when Hunyadi’s son is crowned the king of Hungary in the last act. Lope de Vega’s drama is parodied, perhaps intentionally, by another Spanish playwright, Francisco de Villegas. In his *Dios hace justicia a todos* (‘God Does Everyone Justice,’ 1630-35; see Strzałkova 1960b) the same events, treated by Lope de Vega with respect to the historical truth, are handled in a somewhat operatic manner. De Villegas focuses on a series of love liaisons for which the war and peace between the Turkish and the Polish-Hungarian kingdoms serves as nothing more than a dramatic background.

In 1667 Władysław Warneńczyk appears again in a Polish work, the Jesuit drama *Zwycięstwo tryumfalne* (see Okoń 1970: 344; cf. Tazbir 1985: 522 ff). The greater part of this didactic religious play takes part in the Other World where Warneńczyk is being tried for perjury by the heavenly court in which the angels and the saints are the jurors. Władysław appears as a perjurer also in a few other plays-parables, which are not meant to stir the patriotic sentiments of the Polish audience, but pursue instead a general moralizing aim associated with the salvation of the viewers’ souls.

The Polish king is recovered as a hero-martyr by two eighteenth-century tragedies in verse, both entitled *Władysław pod Warną*, and written by Waclaw Rzewuski (1706-1779) and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1758-1841) respectively. Rzewuski’s tragedy (1787),⁴⁰ written in the spirit of Classicism, juxtaposes unambiguously black and white characters, epitomizing the idea of a model “knight,” “king,” “dame of the heart,” etc. The key place of this tragedy is taken by the declarative monologues of the hetman Jan Tarnowski, who plays the role of a wise political advisor -- the role that Rzewuski himself would very much like to play in life. It is not at random that namely the rejection of Tarnowski’s advice ultimately leads to the catastrophe at Varna, which the play

⁴⁰ The text see in Majerowa 1962: 91-140; generally about the oeuvre of W. Rzewuski see the review article by Kryda 1992, with extensive bibliography.

interprets mainly as the result of treacherous diplomatic machinations.⁴¹ Władysław III is crowned by the author with the wreath of a martyr; he is the defender of the Christians (obrońca chrześcijan) who saves them from the bondage prepared for them by the Turks. *Władysław pod Warną* (1788) by Niemcewicz, who also wrote a poem dedicated to Warneńczyk,⁴² is not much different in structure and plot from Rzewuski's tragedy. Here too Jan Tarnowski is the *porte-parole* of the author, and his wise advice is equally rejected, much to the ill fate of everyone involved. Niemcewicz adds to this familiar scheme the motif of Hunyadi's betrayal of Warneńczyk (although his plot against the king fails due to the faithfulness of Władysław's queen). He also adds to the plot anachronistic anti-Russian sentiments, often voiced out directly in verbal attacks, which are obviously related to the current political situation in Poland (cf. Chrzanowski 1921).⁴³

In more recent times the social nostalgia for the lost Old Poland's ideals and values has given rise to a tendency of depicting Władysław III predominantly as a legendary romantic figure. The works of Jan Kanty Podolecki (1800-1855),⁴⁴ Józef Bohdan Zaleski (1802-1886),⁴⁵ Adam Bełcikowski (1839-1909),⁴⁶ Teofil Lenartowicz (1822-1893),⁴⁷ Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812-1887),⁴⁸ Zofia Kossak-Szczucka (1890-

⁴¹ It is well known that the figures of the traitor and the diplomat play a key role in the Slavic mythologies about lost battles; see details in Dąbrowska-Partyka 1992.

⁴² In *Śpiewy historyczne* (1809); cf. Witkowski' study (1979).

⁴³ See, e.g., the verses: "Moskwicin, co w swych puszczech dzikością się sroży, // Nieznany światu, mało dziś nas jeszcze trwoży, // Lecz niech nas nie uwodzą zbytnie zapewnienia..."

⁴⁴ The play *Władysław Warneńczyk w 3 obrazach na obchód czwartej stuletniej rocznicy śmierci jego pod Warną* (1845).

⁴⁵ See in his *Potrzeba zbaraska*:

[...] przy Warnie
Zginął król nasz, król Władysław, za wcześnie i marnie;
Taki młody, a król Lachów, Madziarów, wszech Słowian!
Zginął, zdrajców swych kniazików nieczystym tchem owian:
Grób mu – cała Europa! Słup – śnieżne Bałkany!

⁴⁶ About his five-act plays *Hunyady* (1870) and *Król Władysław Warneńczyk* (1877) see Szyjkowski 1923: 308-309.

⁴⁷ Lenartowicz (1822-1893), one of the prominent poets of Polish Romanticism, is the author of the poem *O chwalebnych początkach Władysława Jagiellowicza*, conceived of as an attempt to put together the poetic fragments of Jan Kochanowski, mentioned above.

⁴⁸ The novel *Strzemińczyk: Czasy Władysława Warneńczyka*; about it see Grabowski 1924.

1968),⁴⁹ Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna (1892-1983),⁵⁰ as well as those of a series of other authors of lesser significance, are associated with this particular line of interpretation. The two major literary hypostases of Warneńczyk – as an oath-breaker, and as a martyr-saint – have been synthesized by modern literature into a uniform patriotic messianic vision, according to which Władysław III, just like Poland herself, has been turned into a scapegoat for the sins of others.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Her novella *Warna* (1939) became the source of patriotic enthusiasm during the years of the WW II.

⁵⁰ The poetic cycle *Warneńczyk* from the collection *Ballady bohaterskie* (1934); see Hertz 1977.

⁵¹ To the Polish works about Władysław Warneńczyk written during the last two centuries we should add also a number of South Slavic texts. Andria Kačić Miošić dedicates to the Polish king one of his songs in *Razgovor ugodni naroda Slovinskogo* (see Wiskowatyj 1933: 73), Njegoš mentions him in *Nova pjesma Crnogoraca* (see Durković-Jakšić 1977: 217), and in Bulgaria a special prophecy was written in 1854, according to which the death of Warneńczyk would soon be avenged (see Inokentii 1940).

Appendix

R. C. *The Jesuits ghost, with the prayer of the Turkish monarch to Christ* through which he obtained a mighty victory against the papists, at the field of Varna, occasioned by their wicked perjury, in breaking that league they had so solemnly sworn to keep. Written by R. C. London: Printed by John Wallis, for the author, 1689. 8 p. First part in verse.

THE JESUIT'S GHOST

From restless shades, my trembling Ghost ascends,
To visit Earth and some peculiar Friends,
Now all things are at rest and quiet found,
I only rise and walk the silent round,
In this Dark moment I'll the matter end;
For which the Bull does with the *Test* contend;
And *Romes* Religion open from the root,
Whose branches flourish with Forbidden Fruit,
And such as puts ev'n Heaven to the Blush,
Who does their Actions with just anger crush.
Can they with great Omnipotence prevail
Who Daily Vows with Bloody Victims Seal?
Or he be President, to such as have
So many hundred back-ways to the Grave?
To kill an Heretick, they 'count no more,
Than to Debauch, and then Absolve a Whore.
Tho' what's expected but a Tyburn rod,
From greedy Preists that Eat and Drink their God,
In Massacres their cruel rage out-flies
Softning tears of beauteous Virgin Eyes,
Could they proceed in their unhuman way,
They'd turn the Word into a *Golgotha*,
By Murder first the Pope, assum'd his Throne,⁵²
Since to what rage is Superstition grown,
On his Dark Reign, Oppressions Duely wait,
Like Pestilential Air to blast a State,
When Sword, and power fails, than Fire must
Lay splendid Cities level with the Dust:
Of Perjury allow, and pardon too,
So much detested by the *Turk* and *Jew*:
But *Varna* sure might silence this blind work,
When Christ gave that great Battle to the Turk.
The spacious field with Popish blood was dy'd,
And Conquering *Amurath* did in Triumph ride,
Whilst Heav'n stood Neuter, the *Hungarian* Sword
Victorious grew, but the high injur'd Lord,
Viewing the League the perjur'd *Christians* broke,
Crew pale with anger at the impious Work.
Condemn'd the crime and they receiv'd their doom,
From the rough Sons of the Loud Cannons Womb:

But these are meritorious Acts in them,
Yet what themselves in others do Condemn:
Their Giddy zeal consists on bits of Wood,
On Crosses, Nails, and reliques of the good.⁵³
In fine and costly Robes, in gaudy paint,
To deck and beautify the Idol Saint,
In Gilded Temples, *Incense*, rich perfume,
As if this World was the *Elizium*.
So Dazling Lights delude the filly fly,
Who hov'ring courts the flame until it die:
But I, in vain, these fallacies deplore;
Beyond the Grave repentance hath no pow'r,
Were I to live again, I'd then extol,
That part of heav'nly breath the pretious Soul,
And all my pious thoughts with heav'n engage,
And shun the flashy Priest-craft of the age,
Which, just Like bubbles, bore up by the Air,
Look beautifull and break, then disappear.

This daring Nation when we'd thoughts to bring
To *Romes* obedience as an off'ring,
We and the angry Dame in Council sat,
As if we wou'd unweave the Lume of Fate,
The *Cyclops* when for mighty *Jove* they wrought,
Was not so toil'd and full of various thought,
Then all our minutes busie were, and we,
To Hellish Stratagems gave Liberty,
Perfidious *Petres* with a Fawning smile,
Said, Heaven decrees for us this wealthy Isle,
Than for the promis'd Land he boldly prest,
Cried out 'tis time, 'tis time we were possess,
Post on he rid through fiery Zeal pretends,
Gold was his Guide, at Hell his Journey ends,
So smooth to his kind Prince he made the way:
He Little thought rank Treason in it Lay,
But Traytors, like false Coin, do fair appear
To all mens eyes but the Discoverer.

Seduc'd the King his Nobles to Decline,
Who are the Light by which all *Monarchs* shine,
None but false stones, no not one Glorious *Gem*,
Was left to sparkle in his Diadem.

⁵² Phocus, when he had by the help of *Boniface* Bishop of *Rome*, Murdered *Maricius* the Emperor and all his Children, and Seated himself on the Throne, in requital for his assistance in so Barbarous a murder, made *Boniface* Pope, then call'd Universal Bishop.

⁵³ The Cross of *Christ* was carried by one Man at first, and in all the *Abbys Monasteries*, and *Cells & c.* there are so many pieces of it, as if they were Solid would build a Ship of 1000 *Tun*. 3 Nails were only used in the Crucifying our Blessed *Savior*, yet they produce as many Nails as are needful in the Building of such a Ship.

The *Test* and *Penal-Laws* we must have down,
 And not one man of Sence must ware a Gown;
 Thus to our tickling *Magick* we gave way,
 Till we rais'd Spirits that we could not Lay,
 Just as the *Devil* did the project Starr,
 In our *Cabal* we had his Counterpart:
 Famous for Bawling, and suspected wife,
 Tho' one grain of Sence is worth a pound of Noise,
 This precious Plant so worthy to be prais'd
 Upon *White-Chapel* Dunghill first was rais'd:
 Yet was the third great Engineer of State
 Pick'd out to ruine the *Immaculate*,
 And *Divine Church*, that like a timely Spring
 Raises from Darkness every Living thing;
 By Lawless pow'r he strove to Undermine,
 Bur Heaven did Frustrate the Damn'd design,
 Resenting that to their Defame alone,
 For what's the *Casket* when the Jewel's gone?
 Even in the Nick of time Heav'n gave the word:
 As *Isaac's* Angel stopt his Fathers Sword,

So the *Prophetick Frost* did subject bring
 To its Chill Scepter every humid thing.
 All bodies fast in that *Cold Chain* were bound,
 No Spring to murmur, unless under ground;
 But in a trice Dissolv'd this Tyrants Pow'r
 Whose Ruins flourish in his Conquerour.
 And you who for Eternal Blessings call,
 Look up, repent, make no Demur at all,
 But to the Sacred Church obedient be,
 Heavens bright Cealing is their *Canopie*.
 In threatning storms their pious Lustre shew'd
 Like Stars that Glitter through a Gloomy Cloud;
 But *Rome's* blind Zeal depends on Beads and Toys,
 Impious Nacks more fit for Apeish Boys,
 Than means to Compass Everlasting Joys,
 Hark! *Pluto* calls, the *Stygian* Furies quake.
 The Guilty Howl, in that *Sulphureous* Lake,
 I must descend to his Imperial Thron,
 Yet when I'm there, he's Jealous of his Crown.

THE BREAKING OF THE LEAGUE

A League being made for ten Years between Amurath, Sixth King of the Turks, and Vladislaus, King of Hungaria: one Swearing upon the Holy Evangelists, the other upon the Alcoran. Amurath departed with his Army against Scanderbeg: not long after the Hungarian Clergy finding an advantage in the Turks absence. Julian the Cardinal and the rest of his Hopeful Brethren, perswadeth King Vladislaus to break the League, telling him nothing could be more fond or inconsiderate, than in their Cousultation to have regard to their private profit only, and not to the Publick, without respect of Religion, Honesty, or Consciene &c. Thus getting the consent of the King, the Cardinal absolved him, who after March'd with a very great Army into the Turks Dominion. Huniades being General, which Amurath hearing of, prepared to meet 'em, and the Armies Engaged at the Field of Varna, where there was a Bloody and desperate Battle Fought, in which the Christians had the best for the most part of the Day; so that Amurath thought of nothing but Flight, and seeing the Christian Ensigns Displayed with the Crucifix, pluckt the Writing out of his Bosome, wherein the Late League was Comprised, and holding it up in his hand with his eyes cast up to Heaven, Said:

Behold! thou Crucified Christ, this is the League the Christians, in thy Name, made with me; which they have, without Cause, violated: Now, if thou be a God, as they say thou art, and as we Dream, revenge the wrong done unto thy Name, and me, and shew thy Power upon thy Perjured People, who in their Deeds deny thee, their God.

No sooner had Amurath ended this Prayer, but the Battle turn'd, and the Christians were totally routed. Vladislaus kill'd, Huniades fled, Julian the Cardinal, the Bishop of Veradiun, and the Bishop of Agria, with most of the Clergy, all slain, who were the only Authors of that unjust War: And for all the King of Hungaria broke the League, and Invaded Amurath, yet he, by reason of his Oath, resigned his Kingdom up to his Son, of which you may see more at Large in the Reign of Amurath Pag. 277.

FINIS

DIFFERENT EDITION:

The Jesuits ghost with the prayer of the Turkish monarch to Christ; through which he obtain'd a mighty victory against the Papists at the field of Varna. Occasioned by their wicked perjury in breaking the League they had so solemnly sworn to keep. With suitable remarks extracted from the Turkish-history. London: printed by J.M. for the author, 1689. [Book 1 p.l., 6 p. 21 cm.]

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