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Włodkowic, Paweł. Writings (1416–1432). The Struggle for the Self-Determination of Central Europe. Ed. Paul Knoll. Transl. Charles C. Kraszewski. Foreword Ewa Thompson. Rome–Warsaw: Angelicum University Press, Fundacja Świętego Mikołaja, 2023 (664 pp. ISBN 978-83-670-6544-3)

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One's first impression upon reading this collection of the writings of Paweł Włodkowic (Paulus Vladimiri) in English is regret that this work was not published sooner. It seems belated, not by a few or even a few dozen years, but even by several hundred. A profound reflection by Western authors, and their own creative expansion upon the ideas contained within the writings of the Cracovian professor could have changed the course of history, saved "modern Christendom" from the tragedy of imperialism, colonialism, or the nightmare of a multitude of armed conflicts, prime among which is the Thirty Years' War. This does not, however, mean that one can now, in good conscience, consign the ideas of Paweł Włodkowic to the dustbin of history, as something of a curiosity, an example of a missed opportunity. Therefore, as Ewa Thompson, the author of the foreword to the entire collection, rightly points out, the writings of Paweł Włodkowic may provide essential lessons and guidelines for the contemporary reader.

The book, that is Paweł Włodkowic's *Writings (1416–1432). The Struggle for Self-Determination of Central Europe*, published by Angelicum University Press and Fundacja Świętego Mikołaja (St Nicholas Foundation) (Rome–Warsaw 2023), contains Charles S. Kraszewski's translations of eight texts by Włodkowic, covering the time of the author's intellectual activity from the Council of Constance (1414–1418) to the conflict caused by the breach of the Peace of Melno in 1432. The translations are accompanied by a foreword by Ewa Thompson and an introduction by Paul W. Knoll.

Włodkowic's works are not political treatises presenting abstract political and legal ideas, but are primarily a response to the current needs of the Polish Kingdom, rooted in the realities of the time, which makes them politically engaged texts. This circumstance presents both a hindrance and an aid to reading. The difficulty lies in the fact that a researcher of the history of political philosophy has to extract timeless and universal content from Włodkowic's works, expressed alongside arguments relating to the details of Polish-Teutonic relations of the time. On the other hand, the historical facts quoted by Włodkowic provide a very good illustration of the doctrinal views he propounded. All this makes the works of Włodkowic possess an interdisciplinary value; they are attractive to a wide range of researchers, not only general historians and historians of law and political ideas, but also philosophers, theologians and sociologists.

The publisher's selection of writings is thoughtful but incomplete. Missing from the selection is a translation of *Ad aperiendam*, a text written in early 1417 on the "Prussian heresy" and the illegality of the Teutonic Order's land grabs. However, this absence is understandable, as the issues raised by the omitted text are developed in other works by the Cracovian professor which have been made available to English-speaking readers.

Obviously, from the perspective of a Western researcher, it was necessary to provide an adequate introduction to the question of the achievements of the 15th-century Polish school of international law. This requirement is fulfilled by two texts presenting the intellectual profile of Włodkowic, the historical circumstances in which he wrote, as well as a description of the works contained in the collection. It can be said that these introductions play the role of a hermeneutic key, very useful for a detailed reading of Włodkowic's writings.

However, the authors of the introductions did not shy away from mutual repetition. Both Thompson and Knoll devote a considerable amount of space to recounting the history of Polish-Teutonic relations and the key points in Włodkowic's thought, while also discussing their origins. This should not be seen as a reason for criticism of the collection; on the contrary, it serves to better situate the author and his writings against the background of the epoch. Of additional value are also the questions posed by Thompson and Knoll concerning both the reception of Włodkowic in the history of Western thought and the lessons he can teach contemporary readers. These questions are of particular value because they expose a gap in the state of research by Western academics on the history of the Polish school of international law. Hence, the publication of an English-language translation of the writings of Włodkowic raises legitimate hopes that this gap will be filled in the years to come.

The collection made available is not the first translation of Włodkowic's writings into a modern language. Polish-language literature has collections of translations made by Father Stanisław Belch and Ludwik Ehrlich. Nevertheless, these translations (although certainly correct) may sound somewhat archaic to a modern reader, while the English used by Kraszewski remains free of unnecessary archaisms. A comparative analysis of the editions of the Latin originals with the English-language version given by the translator suggests that Kraszewski faithfully adhered to the original. Any departures from the Latin – of a semantic, punctuational, syntactic or grammatical nature – are made only where justified by the good practice of this type of translation. Hence, this publication is also of value to Polish scholars as a comparative source.

The order of the writings is chronological. The treatise *Saevientibus* – made available to the Germanic nation at the Council of Constance on July 5, 1416 – is presented first. In this treatise Włodkowiec takes up the issue of the validity of the privileges granted to the Order by the emperor and the pope, on the basis of which the German lords justified their expansion. Here, the Cracovian professor takes an opposing stance, aiming to show that these privileges and endowments are not grounded either in biblical theology or in the doctrine of canon law. Włodkowiec also enters into a polemic with the 13th-century canonist, Henry of Segusio (Hostiensis), according to whom any aggression towards pagans is legitimate and legal because as a result of their rejection of the Christian message they have placed themselves outside the norms of state and natural law, and both their lives and property are at the free disposal of the pope. In response to this stance, Włodkowiec develops extensive argumentation, supported by the authority of Innocent IV and Thomas Aquinas and attesting to an above-average erudition, justifying the conviction that with the incarnation of Christ pagans did not lose their natural rights. Thus, neither the emperor, nor even the pope himself, can concede lands legally held for years by pagans to anyone. Moreover, any aggression against peaceful infidels, even motivated by a desire to propagate the faith, does not fall within the bounds of a just war, and the Teutonic Order's expansive policy is evidence of heresy and a distortion of Christ's teachings.

This treatise should be regarded as the most essential for the entire oeuvre of Włodkowiec. All subsequent works contain repetitions, or clarifications of ideas expressed in it, concerning natural law and the right of nations to self-determination. This lack of significant evolution in the main points of Włodkowiec's argumentation allows us to believe that from the first sentence read, we are being addressed by an author who is already mature, with fully formed and well-considered views.

The next writing, dated July 6, 1416, presents a development of the ideas contained in *Saevientibus*. It is addressed to the entire community of the Council – *Opinio Hostiensis*. Here, too, the earlier theses resonate. However, in terms of audience reach, Włodkowiec's view – based, moreover, on the well-established medieval tradition of the doctrine of the “two swords” – that the pope holds universal jurisdiction over nations is worthy of particular attention. It should be remembered that among the Council Fathers at Constance, conciliarism, which elevated the authority of the Council above that of the pope, was very popular. With this in mind, the question arises as to what extent Włodkowiec's declaration of papalist views was a conscious risk, and to what extent a political game or a testimony of sincere conviction. This question retains particular value in the context of the mood prevailing among intellectuals associated with the university in Kraków, which, despite Zbigniew Oleśnicki's ambivalent attitude, was rather conciliarist.

Another work from the published collection, *Articuli* (dated between November 1416 and January 1417), was composed in quite a different tone. In it, Włodkowiec plays the role of a lawyer, a court prosecutor presenting evidence of the Teutonic Order's numerous crimes. The 155 articles describe a succession of examples of iniquities committed by the Order, each of which could form the basis of a separate accusation. The collection is indeed striking, and its detail attests not only to an excellent knowledge of the political and economic realities (Włodkowiec often converts the losses into values expressed in the coinage of the time), but is also of great value to historians of Central and Eastern

Europe. The enumeration of these wrongs is crowned by the rather bold statement that the Order is a threat to the entire *Christianitas*.

The next two works are texts involved in the conciliar discussion built up around the Polish question and are clearly animated by the wide circulation of the texts of John of Falkenberg and John Urbach of Bamberg by the Teutonic side.

Iste Tractatus is a Polish response to two works by Falkenberg, both in form and content often deviating from the culture of academic discourse and descending into minor tones that today's readers would probably describe as hate speech. For understandable reasons, Włodkovic's retort contrasts sharply with *Quoniam error*, a treatise polemizing against Urbach's position as a canonist, where the Cracovian professor returns to the precise language of legal argumentation, one after the other, to refute his adversary's claims.

Evidence of further Polish-Teutonic struggles can be found in the treatise *Oculi* (1419), written with the intention of presenting it before Sigismund of Luxembourg at the Reichstag in Wrocław. It picks up on the earlier arguments delivered in *Saevientibus*, *Ad aperiendam* and *Articuli*, but gives them a different form. Another writing, this time prepared for papal arbitration, *Ad vivendum*, also contains similar content, where Włodkovic focuses on the interpretation of the emperor's competence to dispose of lands originally belonging to pagans.

The last text, *Epistola ad Sbigneum episcopum Cracoviensem*, was probably particularly difficult to translate. This is a letter written rather late, in 1432, and advising the bishop of Kraków, Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki, a figure of great merit to the Kingdom of Poland in the first half of the 15th century. The difficulty of translating this work lies in the necessity of accurately rendering the personal tone of the letter, steeped in the disappointment of Włodkovic's earlier diplomatic efforts, and the bitterness stemming from the tragedy of the war that struck his native lands. It must be said, however, that the author of the translation has taken into account the emotional spirit that guided Włodkovic.

In light of reading the collection as a whole, the remarks expressed in the introductions return with great force. Firstly, Włodkovic's writings present an incredible freedom of expression – a feature often denied to medieval disputations by the Enlightenment and later commentators. Secondly, the question of the negligible extent of the reception in Western thought of the ideas propounded by Włodkovic is highlighted. Reflecting on the latter, Thompson notes that the Council nation to which the Polish delegation belonged was dominated by Germans; Sigismund of Luxembourg was German, and the territories hosting the Council Fathers also remained in the orbit of German influence. All these circumstances, according to Thompson, effectively drowned out the voice of Włodkovic. Hence, as the author of the foreword emphasizes, we were dealing with a kind of medieval variant of the well-known cancel culture. This opinion opens up new research perspectives for historians of ideas and social relations, as well as emphasizes the timeliness of research into the legacy of the 15th century Polish school of international law.