

Matthew Koval: Childhood in Medieval Poland (1050–1300). Constructions and Realities in a European Context. (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, Bd. 73.) Brill, Leiden 2021. 222 S. ISBN 978-90-04-46099-7. (€ 115,56.)

Previous research on childhood in Poland's past has focused on the late medieval and early modern periods. Matthew Koval, on the other hand, has decided to investigate how childhood was perceived in the earliest history of the Piast state, i.e. from the tenth to the end of the thirteenth century. In doing so, the author's aim is not to reconstruct an overall social vision but to analyze representations of children and childhood in a specific source context.

The study has the character of a detailed textual analysis, where each chapter is devoted to a different historical source. The material selected by the author is very well known to anyone who has dealt with medieval Polish history and has been subjected to various scholarly analyses. K. wishes to offer a new perspective on these texts and identify views on childhood, even in passages where one would hardly expect them.

The first chapter examines the Chronicle of Gallus Anonymus (before 1116), which presents the history of the first Polish ruling dynasty, the Piasts. K. argues that children play a very important role in this narrative in that childhood events and actions were supposed to foretell future events and actions. The second chapter is focused on Vincent Kadlubek's *Chronica Polonorum* (circa 1205), which largely repeats the stories recorded by Gallus but presents them in a different light. Here, the moral upbringing of the future rulers had a decisive influence not only on the fate of the dynasty but on that of the whole country. The third chapter is devoted to a book kept by the abbots of a Cistercian monastery in Silesia (the Henryków Book, after 1268). Polish customary law gave heirs the ability to cancel any ancestral land grants so any new lord could deprive the monastery of its basis of existence. For this reason, children (young princes) were portrayed as a threat. In the next chapter, K. turns to hagiographical sources. In the middle of the thirteenth century, in the Polish lands expanded the cult of new local saints, i.e. Jadwiga, Salomea and Kinga, and the past saints—Adalbert (Wojciech) and Stanislaus—gained a new popularity and reedition of hagiographies. These sources allow us to also consider gender issues. K. concludes that although the Holy Spirit is as much involved in the lives of boys as it is in the lives of girls in the narratives studied, boys are given the power of intellect, while girls are left with only purity of heart. Interestingly, the male saint Stanislaus healed children no less frequently than the female saints.

In all the sources examined so far, childishness is portrayed primarily pejoratively, defined as stupid, incompetent, reckless behavior; such behavior could be threatening to society and the prosperity of the country. A good child is one who behaves like a mature adult—this motif, called *puer senex*, is present throughout the literature of the time. However, the author warns against drawing too hasty conclusions about the generally negative image of childhood in the Middle Ages. Positively valued childish behavior can be seen, for example, in descriptions of the miraculous healing of children, where joyful play is ultimately evidence of a holy miracle and arouses the delight of those around them. There is also no shortage of descriptions in the sources studied of love for children, or care for them and despair when they became ill or died. The lack of proper parental care is always presented as a social dysfunction and a cause of numerous misfortunes in the future.

The author also seeks an answer to the question of when a boy became a man—the analysis shows that the transition to the next stages of life (*puer—iuvenis—homo*) depended not on age but on the position in the lineage, the degree of autonomy in ruling and the maturity in behavior. K. also poses the important question as to what extent, according to the authors of Polish medieval sources, the decisive factor for future greatness was nature, i.e. innate qualities, and to what extent training and education. The answer is: both—even the most exceptional children required diligent study and solid formation in order to shape the desired character.

The structure of the work is appropriate, the research questions relevant, the argumentation convincing, the theses clear. Despite differences in the dating and nature of the sources, and the motivations of the authors, the same motives (such as *puer senex*) and similar issues are interwoven. In contrast, the last chapter has little in common with the rest of the book—it was written on the basis of a completely different genre of sources, using a completely different methodology: K. decided to collect data from several dozen cemeteries dated from the tenth to fourteenth centuries (the majority from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries) from various regions of Poland. He addresses several research problems: the frequency of child burials, the occurrence of grave goods, multiple burials and the spatial layout of child graves. Towards the end of the chapter, he conducts a statistical analysis of several large cemeteries to show differences in the distribution of grave goods between men, women and children.

Contrary to his declarations, the author does not establish a dialogue with the previous chapters. This is a pity because linking archaeological sources concerning either childhood stages, childcare or children's relationships with parents with literary sources could be very promising. The style is tiresome; the reader is overwhelmed by a series of details, like how many beads were in which grave in which cemetery. At the same time, the meticulous description does not lead to satisfying conclusions. K. rightly supposes that there must be some socio-cultural reasons behind the great disparity in the percentage of child graves in medieval Polish cemeteries (from a few to 40 percent), but he does not try to identify them. The archaeological excavations also gave him opportunities to analyze differences in the treatment of daughters and sons, but he did not take advantage of them. Admittedly, the author has pointed out gender differences in the nature of grave goods, but he is inconsistent in doing so: at one time, he writes that girls had different objects than boys, and at another time, he uses only one category of "children," a separate category from men and women in this context. The inclusion of different regions in the study would be an advantage, if not for the fact that the author notes the regional differences but does not explain them (for example, why exactly in Pomerania were children given animal amulets?). Critical appraisal of the last chapter does not invalidate the sense of undertaking research into childhood on the basis of archaeological findings in Poland. On the contrary, it suggests that they should be deepened and presented in a separate publication.

At the very end of the book, K. concludes that the concepts, terminology and images of childhood in the Piasts' Poland 1000–1300 fit into the general European framework and correspond to what we can find in Western European sources. Thus, he realizes that all written sources in Poland during this period were authored by people from the West or educated there. Nevertheless, he manages to point out elements that are unique—for example, accurate descriptions of the rite of passage for boys (*postrzyżyny*), the improved position of women in the thirteenth century, and grave goods that were specific to children. This demonstrates the importance and need for research on childhood in relation to different regions of Europe with their specific contexts. Despite a few shortcomings, the book is an interesting, valuable and recommendable publication, especially for researchers who have not had much contact with the Polish Middle Ages so far.

Warszawa

Jaśmina Korczak-Siedlecka

Germans and Poles in the Middle Ages. The Perception of the „Other“ and the Presence of Mutual Ethnic Stereotypes in Medieval Narrative Sources. Hrsg. von Andrzej Pleszczyński und Grischa Vercaemer. (Explorations in Medieval Culture, Bd. 16.) Brill. Leiden – Boston 2021. 433 S., Kt. ISBN 978-90-04-41778-6. (€ 229,99.)

Der Band dokumentiert den Großteil der Beiträge einer gleichnamigen Tagung, die 2018 in Warschau am Tadeusz-Manteuffel-Institut für Geschichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften stattfand. Ausgestattet mit zwei Karten, einer Auswahlbibliografie und einem Orts- und Namenregister enthält der Sammelband zwanzig englischsprachige Aufsätze in