

Bożena Popiołek, *Kobiety świat w czasach Augusta II. Studia nad mentalnością kobiet z kręgów szlacheckich (Women's World under Augustus II. Studies in the Mentality of Women from Nobility Circles)*, Kraków 2003, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 132 pp., bibliography, index of persons.

This book is all the more interesting, because it refers to the sphere of mentality, which is a relatively new subject of historical studies. The author has carried out wide research at home and abroad (Paris), apart from manuscripts studying many old printed publications, and for the sake of comparison making use of rich secondary literature, Polish and foreign (French, German, and English). Her sources are mainly correspondence, testaments, memoirs and *silvae rerum*. The wide comparative context has enabled her to formulate an interesting list of investigative questions, which find their reflection in the construction of her work. It consists of three chapters. In Chapter I, entitled *Religious Values and Eschatology*, she presents the religiousness of women of that era, their attitude to God, their ideas of God and extraterrestrial world, their participation in religious life and attitude to ultimate matters, i.e. to death (both the phenomenon of departure and the attendant funeral rituals). In Chapter II the author presents values — individual and common. Among the former she mentions those that were mostly prized by women under Augustus II, i.e. health, love, marriage, and maternity, she also characterizes the family and genealogical ties cherished by women, as well as their attitude to material values. She proceeds to discuss the category of "common values", i.e. the attitude of women to their homeland, their patriotism, their attitude to the state and its institutions, as well as to the law. In Chapter III, *The Women's Image of the World*, the issue has been divided into two parts: the "close" and the "distant" world. The author presents here the women's attitude to closer (domestic) and more distant (foreign) political events, the forms of their participation in political life, their knowledge of the world gained not only from reading and correspondence, but also by travelling and frequent changes of their place of residence (pilgrimages, visits to the family, voyages for medical treatment). The author is also interested in the role performed in this feminine *theatrum mundi* by various curiosities, rumour and gossip, information of sensational character, about criminal and miraculous events, the pastimes (balls, hunting, visiting), as well as cases of conjugal unfaithfulness. The sensations of hundreds of years ago come to life under her pen, providing the reader not only with the knowledge of that era, but also some amusement.

The book presents the mentality of women from the nobility and rich gentry stratum. The reason for the selection was the fact that precisely this group is represented by the richest sources and it was the first group that cherished the same views and the same mentality, fostered by tradition, customs, financial position, social prestige, education, mutual family and social ties as well as the unity of interests and actions in an open forum. The fact of belonging to this group imparted to its members a definite type of Old Polish baroque mentality, although it was not free of some French or (to a smaller extent) German influence. Bożena Popiołek reaches the conclusion that the mentality of the group of women under her analysis did not diverge significantly from the mentality of the corresponding group of men. Women — she says — copied the behaviour and views of their fathers, husbands, and brothers, sometimes surpassing them by the clarity of their judgement, energy and activeness in many spheres of life. These findings are very important, and enable us to better understand the characteristic features of the culture of Polish gentry, and especially its upper strata. At the same time they throw additional light on the position of a woman in Old Polish society. This issue arouses more and more interest of researchers; Bożena Popiołek has taken it up in her previous works and probably will return to it in future.

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