

Kobieta i małżeństwo. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności. Wiek XIX i XX (Woman and Marriage. The Socio-Cultural Aspects of Sexuality. 19th and 20th Centuries), collected studies ed. by Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc, Warszawa 2004, 518 pp.

For many years world historiography has been systematically modernising its methods as well as its research means and techniques by, among other things, widening interdisciplinary research and including the category of sex in its studies¹. Polish historians share the view that this kind of research is needed, but so far not much has been done in this field both as regards the old Polish epoch² and the post-partition period³. The initiative taken by Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc in publishing this collection of studies and essays on a subject which is almost absent in Polish historiography, namely on broadly conceived aspects of cultural contacts and relations between men and women, is therefore most welcome. The editors of the volume and the authors of the studies contained in it concentrate attention on mutual contacts between men and women, including intimate relations, the sphere of erotic life which, let us add, is not viewed exclusively through the prism of biological sexuality. On the contrary, the authors interpret "sexuality" as a process of changes in mentality and customs (pp. X-XI). This is why an observant reader will find in the volume studies which strongly emphasise manifestations of sexuality, especially in the second half of the 19th century (resulting from demographic modernisation, mass migrations, the disintegration of many families, the emergence of new social milieux) as well as essays presenting changes in marital patterns and extramarital relations between men and women. Untypical, e.g. homoerotic unions are outside the sphere of the authors' interest.

The volume, which opens with the editors' introduction, contains 27 studies both by recognised scholarly authorities and researchers who only recently started detailed studies on the socio-cultural aspects of sexuality during the modernisation of society in the Polish territories, that is, in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is worth stressing that the editors have secured the cooperation not

¹ Cf. opinions on this subject by, among others, M. E. Wiesner, *Woman and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 1993; H. Thébaud, *Écrire l'histoire des femmes*, 2 éd. Paris 1998.

² The most noteworthy of the few books which treat sex as a category of social analysis are, as regards the old Polish epoch: A. Karpiński, *Kobieta w mieście polskim w drugiej połowie XVI i w XVII wieku (Woman in Polish Towns in the Late 16th and in the 17th Century)*, Warszawa 1995; M. Bogucka, *Białogłowa w dawnej Polsce. Kobieta w społeczeństwie polskim w XVI-XVIII wieku na tle porównawczym (Woman in Old Poland. Woman in Polish Society in the 16th-18th Centuries against a Comparative Background)*, Warszawa 1998; C. Kukło, *Kobieta samotna w społeczeństwie miejskim u schyłku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej. Studium demograficzno-społeczne (Single Woman in Urban Society at the End of the Noblemen's Commonwealth. A Demographic and Social Study)*, Białystok 1998.

³ See K. Makowski, *Rodzina poznańska w I połowie XIX wieku (Poznań Family in the First Half of the 19th Century)*, Poznań 1992; L. A. Zyblikiewicz, *Kobieta w Krakowie w 1880 r. Studium demograficzne (Woman in Cracow in 1880. A Demographic Study)*, Kraków 1999.

only of historians but also of representatives of other specialities (ethnology, sociology, literature, history of medicine) from various research centres and schools in Poland (Białystok, Gdańsk, Katowice, Kielce, Cracow, Łódź, Wrocław, Warsaw) and abroad (Czech Republic, Germany, USA). Thanks to this broad cooperation the studies included in the volume present a truly interdisciplinary view of mutual relations between representatives of the two sexes in societies which were quickly changing in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Despite the editors' promise, the comparative side of the subject is modestly represented in the volume. In fact, it is presented only by a short treatise by Pavla Vošahliková (from the Historical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences) on divorces in Bohemia and Moravia at the turn of the 19th century (pp. 235–241) and E. Kokoszyc's essay on marriage in Victorian England (pp. 143–158).

Although most articles are based on narrative sources which, as is well known, reflect social consciousness, the volume also contains essays based on individual testimonies, that is, memoirs, diaries, correspondence and literary works. Moreover, some authors refer to such mass sources characteristic of an industrialising society as the press, political writings, advertisements, announcements and films, thus opening new fields of research.

It is impossible to analyse in detail the subjects and questions discussed in the volume for their thematic and chronological scope is extremely broad and rich which, let us emphasise, enhances the value of this collection of studies.

The essays contained in the volume are divided into four parts: *Sexual education with marriage in the background*, *The pressure exerted on marriage by traditional norms and new customs*, *Patterns of marriage and sexuality in social discussion*, and *The strength and weakness of sexual stereotypes*. The first part, which contains six studies, opens with an essay by A. Landau-Czajka who depicts the preparation of young people for marriage and family life on the basis of popular Catholic and secular guides from the 19th and 20th centuries. She points out that irrespective of the changes which were taking place in civilisation in the 19th and 20th centuries, the training of character differed, depending on the child's sex, the aim being to prepare children for the different roles they were expected to play in marriage. J. Sikorska-Kulesza recalls the discussion on the sex education of children and young people in Polish territories, which started at the beginning of the 20th century. M. Leśniewski portrays the state of medical knowledge on human sexuality at the turn of the 19th century. M. Cwetsch-Wyszomirska presents opinions on marriage expressed by early 20th century physicians and hygienists who launched a discussion on changes in morals, promoting a reform of marriage. In their view, which they formulated in two periodicals "Kosmetyka" (Cosmetic) and "Czystość" (Purity), a perfect marriage was a marriage in which the two happy spouses enjoyed not only equal rights and duties but in which the women, unhampered by previous restrictions, talk about their sexual needs and love. B. Urbanek points out that the 19th century medical guides published more and more information concerning the body and the sexual life of men and women, stressing that motherhood was the role assigned to woman by nature. She emphasises that this image, created according to men's desires and wishes, denied woman the right to feel sexual satisfaction. M. Gawiń discusses the question of male and female sexuality and procreation which attracted the interest of Polish eugenicists in 1905–1939. She points out that the eugenicists opposed sexuality, a sphere in which they favoured liberal ideas, to procreation, which, according to them, should not depend on individual decisions but should be subordinated to the national and state community.

More than a half of the book (17 of the 27 articles) deals with the models and patterns of relations between the spouses in various milieux and cultural circles. The studies by A. Szwarz and M. Sikorska-Kowalska concern marriages between members of the elites, the landowning aristocracy and the Łódź bourgeoisie. Szwarz points out that, on the one hand, the marriages of the Polish

aristocracy became markedly more durable (owing to the growing difficulties of obtaining a divorce or an ecclesiastic annulment of the marriage, and also to family pressure) while on the other hand, abundant epistolary documents testify to the existence of many extramarital unions. According to Sikorska-Kowalska, family life, sometimes interspersed with philanthropic work, was the chief domain of women from the rich bourgeoisie at the turn of the 19th century. They agreed to function within the traditional arrangement of roles, performing the duties of the wife and mother. Writing also about Łódź, J. Zyndul says that the percentage of nationally mixed marriages grew steadily in the 19th and early 20th centuries. As the author rightly points out, they became a base for assimilation processes. Z. Borzymińska analyses the cultural and legal role of marriages in the Jewish community in the Polish territories in the 19th century. She states in conclusion that even though the Jewish women were in a much better situation than Christian women, most of them lived in abject poverty and did not benefit from the rights they were formally entitled to claim. B. Klich-Kluczevska shows how customs relating to the establishment of the family changed in Cracow after World War II, paying great attention to the activity of public institutions in this field.

In one of the more extensive articles in the volume, A. Janiak-Jasińska examines the expectations and preferences of ordinary persons who looking for a life partner, were bold enough to insert a matrimonial advertisement in the weekly "Flirt Salonowy" (Elegant Flirtation) published in Warsaw before World War I. Women's brisk activity in this field (42.6 per cent of the advertisements came from women) was not inspired by a social movement but was a result of urbanisation processes and socio-economic changes which forced women to alter their habits and way of thinking.

What is important is that thanks to the studies by T. Stegner, R. Żebrowski, C. Kraft and the above-mentioned P. Vosahlikova, attention has been drawn to such problems as the disintegration of marriage, separation and divorce in, for instance, Protestant families in the Polish Kingdom in the 19th and early 20th centuries and in the families of Warsaw Jews during the inter-war period.

Much space has been devoted to an analysis of social discussions on marriage and sexuality, conducted from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th. A. Żarnowska depicts the intelligentsia youth at the end of the 19th century and its struggle against the patriarchal model of marriage and against the patriarchal rules which subordinated teenagers, especially girls, to the will of the parents. Writing about new partnership concepts of marriage, A. Janicka discusses the emancipative idea put forward by Gabriela Zapolska. The detailed analyses of the slightly later inter-war period, R. Renz's analysis concerning the Kielce region and T. Kulak's analysis referring to the whole of Poland, seem to confirm the extraordinary durability and resistance of the traditional model of marriage based on the stereotyped division of roles between man and woman. Both studies imply that marriage was treated as a specific contract which guaranteed maintenance and social status to women. Very similar are the conclusions of K. Sierakowska who in her analysis of the content of two weeklies addressed to educated women, "Bluszcz" and "Kobieta Współczesna", points out that sensuality and eroticism were rarely discussed by the press. According to I. Kurz, these subjects were also absent up to the end of the 1950s in post-war Polish films.

The volume ends with four articles concerning the presence of stereotypes in mass opinions on sexuality and in social practice. H. Gerlich discusses the durability of the image of an ideal "virtuous woman", an unmarried and a mature woman, which functioned in the traditional plebeian-urban culture of Upper Silesia for more than half a century, from the end of the 19th to the 1950s. M. Olkuśnik's reflections on women's journeys at the turn of the 19th century, when rest-cures became popular, confirm the view that behaviour in the intimate

sphere, such as contacts between men and women, was still traditional. It was only the First World War, which brutalised culture and customs, that undermined the traditional values and, as J. Duf rat says, led to the breakdown of the previous social roles of men and women. In her analysis, M. Fidelis shows that the reality after the Second World War (in 1948–1956), had a strong impact on the sexual perceptions and sexual practices of young women-workers who migrated from rural areas to schools and factories in towns.

The volume in question is undoubtedly a valuable item and an interesting methodological proposal for it adds a wealth of new elements to the discussion which has now started in Poland on changes in morals, sexual relations in marriage, on woman's position and role in marriage and her expectations in the emotional, material and sexual sphere. The book is an important step towards a better understanding of the personality of people in old times, of the mechanisms governing social processes during the modernisation of society in the Polish territories. Let us hope that we shall soon see the next volume which, as the editors promise in the preface, will continue the discussion on these interesting subjects.

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