

Ladislaus II Jagiełło (1386–1434)

Subjects: Art

Contributor: Mateusz Grzęda

Ladislaus II Jagiełło (1386–1434). Ladislaus II Jagiełło is the founder of the Jagiellonian dynasty that had ruled over Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (until 1572), Bohemia (1471–1526) and Hungary (1440–1444, 1490–1526). A Grand Duke of Lithuania from 1377, and from 1386 a king of Poland and lord of Lithuania, which he ruled jointly with his cousin Witold (Vytautas), the son of Kęstutis. Five medieval portraits of Jagiełło survive, four of which date from the period of his reign in the Polish–Lithuanian state and one was executed posthumously. The earliest image, on Jagiełło's Great Seal, was made in connection with his coronation as king of Poland (1386). Two portraits in the Holy Trinity Chapel at the Castle of Lublin (1418) are part of a wall paintings scheme commissioned by the monarch and executed by a team of painters brought from Ruthenia. Furthermore, the sumptuous tomb (before 1430) in Cracow was commissioned by the king. Its top slab bears an effigy of Jagiełło with his suggestively rendered countenance, which undoubtedly reflects the actual facial features of the elderly monarch. An image of the king represented as one of the Three Magi in a panel of an altarpiece in the tomb chapel of Casimir IV Jagiellonian, Jagiełło's son and his successor on the Polish throne, dates from 1470. The chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross, erected at Cracow Cathedral, was in all likelihood commissioned by Casimir himself and his consort Elizabeth of Austria.

Keywords: royal images ; royal iconography ; kings of Poland ; rulers of Lithuania ; Jagiellonian dynasty ; Ladislaus II Jagiełło

Jagiełło (Lith. Jogaila), a founder of a new dynasty and its first member on the Polish throne, was one of the Gediminids, stemming from a pagan dynasty that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries ruled over a vast dominion encompassing the core lands of Lithuania and Ruthenia which, similar to Poland, was threatened by the Teutonic Knights ^[1]. By asking, in 1385, for the hand of the Polish queen regnant, Hedwig of Anjou (the daughter of Louis of Hungary, king of Poland and Hungary, and granddaughter of Ladislaus the Short, the last-but-one king of Poland from the Piast dynasty), Jagiełło, in an oath taken before the coronation, pledged to adopt the Latin-rite Christianity along with the entire Lithuania, to join Lithuania to Poland and to restore to the Polish Crown the lands lost by Poland to the Teutonic Knights during the reign of the extinct Piast dynasty and the Angevins (for the text of the oath see ^[2] (p. 2); for the circumstances of Jagiełło's accession to Polish throne and the commitments made by him at the time see ^{[3][4][5]}). Thus, the recovery of the territories lost by the Polish Kingdom in whatever time or whatever way became the guiding principle behind the king's political and military actions (culminating in the great war with the Teutonic Knights in 1409–1411 and the victorious battle of Grunwald in 1410), and as such found expression in the content of artworks commissioned by Jagiełło.

Historical narratives often presented Jagiełło as an uncouth heathen, uneducated, superstitious and obtuse. This has resulted, to some degree, from the image of the king created by the great Polish chronicler Jan Długosz, who was biased against the Jagiellonians, considering them as 'aliens' who replaced the 'natural lords of Poland', that is, the Piasts, and did not even hesitate to write slanderous statements and gossip about them in his *Annals* (for the text of the *Annals* see ^[6] (pp. 123–128), and for opinions on Jagiełło formed by writers and chroniclers, his contemporaries, see ^[7]). The current scholarship shows Jagiełło in a totally different light. He had come from a family whose various representatives professed not only pagan cults but also Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. Byzantine culture was well established at the courts of the Gediminids and, long before the official acceptance of Christianity, the country had 'consumed ecclesiastical writings and literature' written both in the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabets ^[8]. After the baptism, when Jagiełło took the name Ladislaus (Władysław), he not only proved to feel at home within the Latin culture of the Polish Kingdom, but also made his mark as a founder of numerous churches and religious houses, was a sophisticated politician and diplomat, and a patron of the University of Cracow which he, along with Queen Hedwig, re-established in 1400. Jagiełło was additionally a very pious monarch, as attested not only by the documented religious practices in which he participated but also by his abundant artistic patronage (among the most important biographies of Jagiełło see: ^{[9][10]}; see also a new synthetic treatment of the Jagiellonian dynasty, with a separate chapter dealing with Jagiełło: ^[11] (pp. 36–46)).

The idea of Jagiełło's contractual-elective rulership as a successor to the Piast dynasty on the Polish throne and a lord of Lithuania was displayed in the Great Seal (which he had used since shortly after the coronation throughout his entire

reign) and on the royal tomb, executed at the time when the monarch tried to secure the succession for his sons (which was supposed to be based on the principle of election by the representatives of the estates, hence the rich figural and heraldic programme of the tomb-chest, partly inspired by the design of the Great Seal). Religious motivations, in turn, among which an important role was played not only by the Christianisation of Lithuania, undertaken by the king, but also his military successes, determined the message of his portraits in Lublin (where Jagiełło was shown in a double role: in prayer, commended by saints to the Christ Child seated on the lap of the enthroned Virgin Mary, and as a triumphant rider mounted on horseback, who receives a cross from an angel). It is highly probable that a decision to represent his likeness as the last of the Three Magi in adoration of the Christ Child in an altarpiece panel in the Chapel of the Holy Cross was dictated by his status of a neophyte king. It attests to the fact that the memory of the dynasty's founder was kept alive during the reign of Jagiełło's son and is an expression of the dynastic identity of the Jagiellonians that was taking shape at that time.

References

1. Tęgowski, J. *Pierwsze pokolenia Giedyminowiczów* (The First Generations of the Gediminids); Wydawnictwo Historyczne: Poznań, Poland; Wrocław, Poland, 1999.
2. *Akta unji Polski z Litwą 1385–1791* (Records of the Union of Poland and Lithuania); Kutrzeba, S.; Semkowicz, W. (Eds.) Polska Akademia Umiejętności: Cracow, Poland, 1932; no. 1.
3. Krzyżaniakowa, J.; Ochmański, J. *Władysław Jagiełło* (Ladislaus Jagiełło), 2nd ed.; Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich: Wrocław, Poland; Cracow, Poland, 2006.
4. Błaszczyk, G. *Dzieje Stosunków Polsko-Litewskich* (History of the Polish-Lithuanian Relations). Volume 2: *Od Krewa do Lu-Blina* (From Krevo to Lublin); Wydawnictwo Poznańskie: Poznań, Poland, 2007.
5. Wyrozumski, J. *Królowa Jadwiga. Między Epoką Piastowską a Jagiellońską* (Queen Hedwig. between the Epochs of the Piasts and the Jagiellonians), 2nd ed.; Universitas: Cracow, Poland, 2006.
6. Joannis Dlugossii *Annales seu Cronicae Incliti Regni Poloniae*, lib. XI et lib. XII: 1431–1444, Consilium ed.; Wyrozumski, G., Ed.; Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN: Varsaviae, Poland, 2001.
7. Krzyżaniakowa, J.; Ochmański, J. *Władysław Jagiełło w Opiniach Swoich Współczesnych* (Ladislaus Jagiełło in the Opinions of his Contemporaries); Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu: Poznań, Poland, 1987.
8. *Kultura Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Analizy i Obrazy* (The Culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Analyses and Images); Ališauskas, V.; Jovaiša, L.; Paknys, M.; Petrauskas, R.; Raila, E. (Eds.) Universitas: Cracow, Poland, 2006.
9. Szajnocha, K. *Jadwiga i Jagiełło. 1374–1413* (Hedwig and Jagiełło. 1374–1413); Drukarnia, A.T., Ed.; Jezierskiego: Warsaw, Poland, 1855–1856; Volume 1–6.
10. Kuczyński, S.M. *Król Jagiełło* (King Jagiełło); Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej: Warsaw, Poland, 1985.
11. Borkowska, U. *Dynastia Jagiellonów w Polsce* (The Jagiellonian Dynasty in Poland); Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN: Warsaw, Poland, 2012.

Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/history/show/52217>