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ul. Rubież 46

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Alicja Szubert-Olszewska

Drawing by

Grzegorz Jan Ber

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translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz, articles by E. Chomicka, M. Łuczewski,
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SAINT ADALBERT AS A RELIGIOUS HERO IN THE POLISH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

ANNA URBAŃSKA-SZYMOSZYN

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY
POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Abstract

This article is meant to show the cultural mechanism connected to the perception of Catholic saints through Campbell's concept of mythologisation. I have focused on Saint Adalbert who functions in the Polish culture not so much as a historical, but rather as a mythological figure. Saint Adalbert is the national Saint Patron of Poland, and thus holds the status of a religious hero. Only sporadically is he perceived as a popular saint. I have based my analysis on materials from the ethnological fieldwork on the cult of Saint Adalbert carried out on the whole territory of Poland in the years 1995–2001, as well as on publications by other authors who have looked at topics connected to Saint Adalbert. I have also used theoretical works concerning the process of mythologisation of this figure. My analysis focuses on the successive stages of mythologisation undergone by Saint Adalbert as seen from the perspective of Joseph Campbell's scheme. I have arranged this theory into a model. It shows the universality of the process during which a historical figure is transformed into a mythological hero. Moreover, it emphasized the qualities of a religious hero.

* * *

Celem tego artykułu jest ukazanie mechanizmu kulturowego związanego z postrzeganiem świętych katolickich poprzez pryzmat campbellowskiej mitologizacji postaci. Uwagę koncentruję w nim na św. Wojciechu występującym w kulturze polskiej nie jako postać historyczna, lecz mitologiczna. Św. Wojciech jest świętym narodowym, a więc posiada status bohatera religijnego i tylko sporadycznie uważany jest za świętego ludowego. Podstawą moich analiz są materiały z badań terenowych nad kultem św. Wojciecha przeprowadzonych na obszarze całej Polski w latach 1995–2001 oraz publikacje innych autorów podejmujących problematykę związaną ze św. Wojciechem, jak i teoretyczne rozważania dotyczące procesów mityzacji postaci. Miejsce szczególne w tych analizach zajmują kolejne etapy mityzacji św. Wojciecha widziane z perspektywy teorii Josepha Campbella, którą ujęłam w formie modelu. Ukazuje on uniwersalność procesu przekształcania postaci historycznej w bohatera mitologicznego oraz jej charakter jako bohatera religijnego.

Key words: mythologisation, sanctification, religious hero, saint, national hero, Saint Adalbert, Joseph Campbell

INTRODUCTION

Saint Adalbert is not only a historical and mythical figure but also a saint revered by Poles as a holy apostle, an ascetic and a teacher, as well as a patriot, a member of the ruling elite and a guardian of Polish tradition. The ethnological results of my fieldwork carried out between 1995–2001 prove that Saint Adalbert is treated by Polish society more as a religious hero than a typical saint stemming from popular culture and lower social groups.¹ Indeed, the canonically granted title of saint does not necessarily entail that universal social and religious relations should immediately arise and endure, similar to those relationships existing between society and a revered figure considered by the community as a saint. Indeed, beatification or canonisation either consolidate an already existing worship, or introduce a new, little-known figure into the official canon. This new saint may be accepted and included into the local or universal mythology in a ways which cannot not always be anticipated.

In the 10th century Poland was a newborn state. The elites ruling Poland from the end of the 10th to the 12th century knew that they needed to find new ways to integrate and consolidate the newly formed society. Christian religion, already adopted by Western and Southern European countries, was perceived as a means of integration. However, the religion was still new on Polish lands and had very shallow roots. There was a strong need for a figure which would convey the social aspects of religion and who would confirm, by the example of his or her life, the still strongly held, collective belief about the godly origin of power. Saint Adalbert (956–997, canonised in 999) was perfect for this purpose. The elites of that time found in the recently deceased and canonised saint the proper religious support for their political ideology. Since Adalbert came from the elite class and was related to many medieval European royal families, he could, on the one hand, consolidate the position of the Piast dynasty and, on the other hand, form an indirect link with the ethos of the celestial origin of rulers. The holy anointing of a Bishop who had led a life of pilgrimages and ascetic practices fit perfectly the image of a hero and a saint of that period and fulfilled all the related needs. At that time, new settlements and seats of power were formed, chapels and churches were built and cities were developed, which contributed significantly to a quick dissemination of knowledge about the missionary and his cult among the population gathered around those centres.² Saint Adalbert was the

¹ By the term 'genesis' I mean here all the cultural activities and phenomena which occur in society (for instance in a rural, small town, urban, parochial community etc.) without „top-down” steering, i.e. initiated by different kinds of institutional authorities (e.g. the church hierarchy, communal authorities, poviats, city administration, state authorities, school administration etc.)

² During the International Scientific Session “Social and political functions of the cult of Saints in society” H. Manikowska (Wiszewski 1997, p. 478) presented evidence for the existence in the seats of Bishops of the Archdiocese of Gnesen of a cult of city patrons who were often the same as the patrons of the Bishops' cathedras.

perfect character to be presented and brought into the medieval cultural landscape of the as yet unconsolidated society whose members very easily and rapidly passed from the position of Christian converts to reconverted Pagans.

In 13th century Poland, in view of the fragmentation of Poland and with no universal cult of a holy ruler, the figures of Saint Adalbert, Saint Stanislaus and Saint Hedwig of Silesia were used to awaken the cult of saints as political patrons in order to unite the country. The cult of these three saints already had a nation-wide dimension. Therefore, appointing them as a symbol of unity of the Polish society in order to consolidate the fragmented state was actually a natural move in the political and social sense: it was about designing tradition. After a dozen centuries, Saint Adalbert became part of Polish tradition in a way certainly unforeseen by the 10th century elites. In this article I present a system of contemporary human concepts reconstructed mainly on the basis of the materials I collected during interviews and observations in almost all regions of Poland. The statements that follow present the aware and sometimes unaware convictions of the Polish society.

The Patron of Poland has a specific contact with the Polish cultural and religious landscape, especially through locations such as the church under the invocation of St Adalbert, his sanctuary or chapel, a cross by the road where he presumably used to teach, but also the “magical” stone, a “miraculous” spring, the “cursed” lake, a tree “planted by the hand of the Saint” and a hill “where he used to bestow his teachings”. These sites delimit a holy space, but are also sanctified through their contact with the supernatural being, the mythologised Holy Wanderer. Thus, this relationship is bilateral, since the geographical sites strengthen the connection between the saint and the local community. Participation in religious ceremonies and pilgrimages to sites related to St Adalbert is tantamount to organizing space; for this purpose the Saint is merely a tool. On the other hand, since the natural elements who were in contact with a supernatural being form special sites endowed with extraordinary properties, Adalbert becomes a steward of *sanctity* (*sacrum*). Indeed, he organizes the world and protects it from the chaos brought about by dangerous activities of holy powers. Nonetheless, one should add that Saint Adalbert is not the main character who fulfils these tasks. This is clearly visible in the ethnological evidence gathered during fieldwork. His role is mainly limited to the initial delimitation of the holy space. These areas were defined when Adalbert was travelling around the country and converting pagans. Nowadays, this tradition has fallen into disuse. Saint Adalbert is currently perceived chiefly as the national patron. He is a saint who, thanks to the universal phenomenon of mythologisation, has become a religious hero and plays the role of a warden and representative of the Nation.

For any person to achieve a similar position as Saint Adalbert, namely the status of a religious hero connected through many ties with his community and a mythologised space, they must go through the mythologising cycle described by Joseph

Campbell (Polish editions: 1994 and 1997) as the Hero's journey. In this article I propose to analyse Saint Adalbert's biography from the perspective of Campbell's stages of the hero's journey in order to show, on the one hand, that this is a universal process, and, on the other hand, to present the qualities of this concrete character as a religious hero. I should add at this point that in my view the most interesting aspect is the social perception of the figure and the reactions between the saint and the group to which he belongs, as a religious and cultural element.

THE SAINT: A NATIONAL HERO AND A RELIGIOUS HERO

The necessary condition for a religious hero to exist in society is that he/she should follow the model of a mythical hero. In this article I use the following terms: *mythical*, *religious*, *historical*, *national* and *holy hero*. The word *hero* alone is far too general to adequately describe reality. This term needs to be further qualified by the epithets *mythical* or *historical*, which by themselves also have a rather wide definition. The hero is always to some degree mythologised by the society, he/she can be more or less connected to the historical prototype, or he/she may even have absolutely nothing in common with the authentic historical figure. A hero is a personage revered and set as an example for the younger generation in traditional and institutional education; he or she can also trigger the creation of models in line with the cultural and civilisational requirements of a given community. Who is the religious hero? In order to answer this question one needs to first present the characteristics of two figures: the saint and the national hero. For the religious hero is the product of the two aforementioned characters. He has the qualities of both the national and the holy hero. However, he/she has not been unequivocally assigned any cult or function typical of popular saints, such as for instance St Anthony or St Christopher. He does not either fully comply with the ecclesiastical definition of the term 'saint', namely a chosen individual who intercedes for believers in front of God (c.f.: Czarnowski 1956, p. 13). At the same time the religious hero is more than just a holy patron, a warden of everyday life, since he fulfils the functions that are among the duties of the national patron. However, the religious hero is too distant, too mythical, to be treated as a fully-fledged national hero on a par with Kościuszko or Piłsudski. The religious hero is the category which most fully embodies the relationship between the Polish society and St Adalbert.

The word 'ś w i ę t y' was given the ecclesiastical meaning of *sanctus* only thanks to Christianity. Its genesis goes back to ancient Slavonic times. This word was originally connected to the pagan pantheon and can be found in old names such as Svetovid – the name of a deity from Arkona on Rugia. The term ('ś w i ę t y' – 'saint') meant the same as 'hearty' ('jary'), i.e. strong (Brückner 1970, p. 537). The Latin word *sanctus*, which has a Greek (*hagios*) and a Hebrew equivalent (*quâdosh*), can refer to God,

people. When used to describe a man, it meant someone sanctified, consecrated, made "*Saint in front of God*", chosen to fulfil a holy cause or task (Attwater, John 1997, p. 7). One of the oldest Christian definitions of the notion '*saint*' can be found in the New Testament. Apostle Paul understood the saints as a community of believers, not necessarily all perfect, but striving to achieve the ideal of Christ's perfection. This term includes the martyrs, the first monks, but also the bishops and patriarchs.

As time went on, the population of Christian communes grew, the nation of '*saint*' was narrowed down and became a title used to express reverence and respect towards a person particularly devoted to Christ.

As a result saints started to be publicly revered. In the Christian terminology a '*saint*' is a person who has a connection with religion, sanctified by religion, revered and surrounded by worship. This definition can be completed by the canonical meaning: a saint is a canonised figure considered as worthy of worship and publicly venerated by the community of believers. Such understanding of a "*saint*" and "*beatified*" goes back to the 12th century (Kosowska 1985, p. 63n). A saint embodies the continuation of Christ as a universal hero, and therefore he/she holds only a part of His features and functions. For the saint is the founder of a new religion, a creator or the first advocate of a teaching which forms great cultures, but he/she is at the same time *only* the continuation of Christ and *as much as* His continuation, due to which he/she becomes a hero.

Martyrs served as the first saints. Originally they were worshipped at the sites where they had died and been buried. Every year, on the anniversary of the saint's death, believers would gather at his grave where a Holy Mass was held to commemorate the personage. With time, this practice spread to the whole Church. After the Edict of Milan passed by the emperor Constantine the Great in 313 which allowed to practice the Christian religion, the worship of saints started to include the Desert Fathers and eminent spiritual leaders no longer called martyrs, but "confessors". Apart from the Eucharist in honour of the saints, churches began to be dedicated to holy patrons, they were invoked in prayers, more and more relics started to appear, as well as other forms of reverence. Children were baptised with their names, there were pilgrimages organised to visit holy relics, historical and legendary places connected with the saints and to sites where miracles were presumed to have happened or where the saint had appeared after his/her death (*Sacred Places...* 1998, p. 10).

The teaching of the Catholic Church penetrates deeply into European culture,³ especially Polish culture. However, as Magdalena Zowczak (2000) and Joanna

³ One should also mention the contemporary understanding of a saint as an example of religious interpretation of the phenomenon, since it refers directly to the figure of Saint Adalbert as a Catholic saint. The Second Vatican Council in his *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium"* (KK) devoted six paragraphs to saintly figures, teaching about their role in the Church (Vatican Council II 1967: paragraphs 49, 50, 51, 104, 108, 111). The Bible mentions this issue a few times

Tokarska-Bakir (2000) noted, the popular perception of the world and the saints may differ from the official version. In folk tradition, the saint has a number of basic features that set him/her apart from other figures. First and foremost, every saint has an attribute that is assigned to him/her and which is connected to their history or profile. Thanks to these attributes saints are easily recognised on figural representations. They have one or more functions in social and religious life of which they are the patrons, the actors, the wardens or the judges (c.f.: Uspieński 1985, pp. 76–89). A saint is credited with apparitions, miracles and miraculous cures, and he is permanently present and alive in the society. The saint defines for himself a geographical and sacral area (which is supposed to be confirmed by legends and tales) or such a domain is assigned to him on the territory inhabited by his worshippers, or outside this area. Many legends and tales about the saint are among the most common texts used for educational and moralizing purposes in traditional upbringing.

Edward Ciupak (1965, pp. 47–89, 97–108) presented a sociological approach to the cult of saints in mass religiosity. He noted that there was a relationship in Poland between the revival of religious life and interest in saints. He pointed to the different social functions fulfilled by saint patrons. However, he mainly focused on presenting a typology of the cult of saints on the basis of an analysis of hagiographic literature and sources published in Catholic magazines. He divided the saints into three groups, depending on their place of origin. The first group includes those saints whose cult is still alive, which can be confirmed by the numerous churches under their patronage, the fact that people are given their names, by the names of church fairs and a large number of biographies and legends (e.g. St Adalbert, St Stanislaus, St Andrew Bobola, St Hedwig of Silesia). They could be called National Saints. The second group consists of saints popular in the folk cult, but less prominently featured in the Church (St Roch, St Florian, St Agata, St Barbara). They started to be worshipped in Poland in the first centuries of Christianity and are still revered today. The third

as well (1971: Act. 17, 26–28; Ps 105, 3; Mt 5,48; 1 Cor 1, 2; 6; Gal 5, 22). That is why this issue is tackled in details in the *Catechism* (1994: paragraphs 28, 30, 492, 564, 2011, 2683). Paragraph 2011 provides for the religious interpretation of the mythical archetype describing the presence of supernatural beings in the life of the believers' community, while paragraph 2684 points to the fact that the teaching of the Church also mentions the cultural as well as temporal diversity of the saints' spirituality and religiosity. Contemporary moral theology of the Catholic Church follows the position that saints, as people of an exceptional moral perfection, are worshipped by the Church (Olejnik 1991, p. 85). That is why Catholics believe that saints in their life and after their death can perform miracles and cure diseases. The teaching of the Church stresses that religious reverence due to the saints is a universal phenomenon constant in history. This is supposed to be confirmed by the fact that the worship of martyrs and believers existed already in ancient Christian times. The Bible praises many saintly figures and gives examples of cases when God listened to the intercession of certain people. Drawing the believers' attention to these fragments of the Bible within the Catholic religious teaching is supposed to help in implementing a concrete social and cultural ethos.

and most numerous group is formed by those saints whose cult is only a liturgical one and who have hardly any ties with a local community.

According to Stefan Czarnowski, saints form a special category of heroes. "They are people of renown who by their deeds or death have earned a privileged position among the chosen ones. The congregation has a spiritual connection with them and perceives them as their advocates in front of God. They are, nonetheless, heroes of a special kind. For in their case sanctity is subordinated to a moral and religious ideal set by theology" (1956, p. 30n).

The national hero, on the other hand, is a historical figure who supported an idea considered later on as a just cause from a social and historical point of view. Such an individual does not have to be ethically irreproachable. Very often controversies concerning their private life are commonly known. The national hero is directly connected to power if he holds one of the functions of authority, or indirectly if he defies authority and enforces social grievances or demands. This hero contributes to different kinds of breakthroughs in the history of a nation, in politics, in internal affairs, or by fostering, consolidating and revealing a new social idea or need which is already universal, but which has not yet been expressed; he is in a way the "ombudsman" of social requirements and needs. Society's opinion of his actions must be positive, both in the eyes of his contemporaries and in later times.

Czarnowski "defines the hero by his social function in the social awareness. This theory brings into one common category both the undefeated hero from Troy and the quiet Christian ascetic, the legendary potter Keramos, Tristan and Amundsen, Prometheus and Pasteur; it could even include warriors of modern revolutions such as the *archegetes* of Greek cities" (Ossowski 1956, p. 6). It is an initial definition with a wider range of meaning than the term 'saint'. Czarnowski derives the final definition from the popular understanding of the term 'hero': "A hero is a man who, through the merits of his life or death, has ritually acquired effective power specific for the group or the cause which he or she represents and whose basic social values he embodies" (1956, p. 30n). He draws attention to the difference between heroes and deities or saints. He treats them as some kind of anthropomorphised gods. For the author, St Patrick is not only a saint, but also a hero in the true sense of the word.

Czarnowski believes that any analysis of the term hero should be based on its relationship to the term 'sanctity' and on the functions which the hero fulfils. Joseph Campbell, however, believes that one must first ascertain the stage of mythologisation at which a given character is. Nonetheless both scholars separate the hero from the saint. The basic difference between the two are, on the one hand, the performed deeds of a national character (integrating society), and on the other hand, ethically perceived sanctity and intercession in obtaining privileges between God and society (exchange function). Campbell accurately describes the evolution of the hero. The

