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## Supposed Gravesites of Władysław III of Varna

### Abstract

**Introduction.** Władysław III Jagiellon – who after the 1444 battle of Varna was called Władysław III of Varna, is the subject of many legends coming from the fact that his body and his royal armour have never been found after the battle he is supposed to die in. Doubts have also arisen as to whether the head which was impaled on a spear by Turks was his, since it had fair hair and the king was a brunet. The aim of the paper is to juxtapose main versions concerning supposed gravesites of Władysław III of Varna in order to make it possible for travel agencies, their representatives and guides showing tourists around those places to give logical answers to questions asked by visitors who earlier, in another part of Europe, got to know quite a different version of the story. **Material and methods.** The present study is aimed at presentation and description of the king's supposed and symbolic gravesites – and at creation of a coherent marketing product for the needs of cultural tourism. To achieve that aim there have been used scientific, popular science and journalistic works devoted to that issue. The places pointed out in those works have been visited and there have been created their photographic documentation. **Results.** The four basic versions popularized in Turkey, Bulgaria, Poland and Portugal have been subject to a comparative analysis. Places such as Bursa, Varna, Obročište, Cracow, Madalena da Mar have been pointed out or photographically documented. **Conclusions.** At this stage it is impossible to settle where Władysław III of Varna was buried – it is, anyway, historians' task, whereas Polish guides should know all four versions in order not to cause discomfort for more inquisitive tourists.

**Keywords:** tourism, marketing, Władysław III of Varna, supposed gravesites, Turkey, Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal.

### 1. Introduction

Władysław I Jagiellon (Władysław III of Varna) was Władysław Jagiełło's eldest son. He ascended the throne in 1434, when he was only 10, and 6 years later he was also crowned the king of Hungary<sup>1</sup>. It was the time when Balkans

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Z. Święch, *Ostatni krzyżowiec Europy* [*The Last European Crusader*], Kraków 2012, p. 22.

were gradually conquered by the rising Turkish state. Byzantium was still resisting, but Bulgarian and Serbian territories had already been under Turkish rule<sup>2</sup>. The Turkish army had also started to attack Hungarian lands. In that situation, on the one hand, the young king had to defend his territories and, on the other hand, he was under pressure from Vatican, which demanded help for moribund Constantinople. The author will soon describe the conditions accompanying crusades which were started then and he will comment on legends – and, sometimes, just myths – concerning mysterious circumstances of our king's death and his supposed gravesites.

The aim of the paper is to juxtapose the main existing versions of those events – not so much from the viewpoint of the historical truth (which should be the domain of specialists in that field), but rather because of the need for introducing certain order into narrations of Polish travel agencies' tour representatives. They tell their tourists (in various places in the world) different and practically disconnected versions of the story about the killed king's lot. Stories told Polish tourists in Bulgaria are different from those told tourists travelling Portugal (and especially Madeira) and from versions which can be heard in Turkey or Poland. Many of the abovementioned legends have come into being thanks to inquisitiveness of amateurs of history and they probably frustrate professional historians, but we know very well that when there are no verifiable sources even the most fantastic legends can include a grain of truth. It is proved well by, for example, Heinrich Schliemann's (the discoverer of remains of mythical Troy) work or publications of many other sensationalists.

Multiplicity of legends concerning places of eternal rest of Władysław of Varna is thought-provoking. But it is relatively easy to explain. It simply comes from the fact that after the battle of Varna no material remains of the king were found. There was neither the body, nor the king's armour, nor anything which could prove the king's death. Maybe except of the king's head, which – according to the Turkish version of the story – was cut off in the battlefield. There is, however a problem, because the head had blonde hair and the king was a brunet<sup>3</sup>.

Lack of the Polish ruler's body was just the reason of various suppositions, searches and attempts at deductions based on extremely vague and feeble premises.

## 2. Material and Methods

The present study is aimed at collection and comparative analysis of information passed by travel agencies' representatives and tourist guides concerning

<sup>2</sup> Cf. N. Davies, *Europa, rozprawa historyka z historią* [*Europe, a Historian's Crackdown on History*], Kraków 2008, p. 468.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Kielanowski, *Odyseja Władysława Warneńczyka* [*Odyssey of Władysław of Varna*], Londo 1991, p. 19.

supposed gravesites of Władysław I Jagiellon – also called Władysław of Varna. The author has collected those stories by participatory observation as a member of travels to countries appearing in the abovementioned versions of our king's biography organized by Polish travel agencies. On the basis of analysis of particular cases, that information was supplemented with details coming from scientific and popular science works, journalistic writing, interviews and the author's own observation of the symbolic and supposed gravesites of Władysław of Varna.

The paper abstains from commenting on scientific value of thought-provoking convergences and traces appearing in the discussed versions of the story (because it is a task for professional historians) and, in its part concerning final results, it juxtaposes relatively coherent pieces of information concerning supposed lot of Władysław I Jagiellon. Such a set of various versions of the story should be known by travel agencies' representatives and guides in order not to be surprised by tourists who – while listening to one version – cause awkward situations by asking about another version, which they have been told in another country. The present study is oriented on description and presentation of a marketing product for cultural tourism<sup>4</sup>.

Since the searches for traces of Władysław III of Varna we are interested in have also taken place on the territories where the Cyrillic alphabet is used, bibliographic items coming from those areas are quoted on the basis of transliteration according to the International Standard ISO 9:1995, which is officially in force in Poland as NP ISO 9:2000. In the case of names of locations transcription used in international maps is applied in order to enable potential tourists to find them by the Global Positioning System. Principles of Latinisation of names from the area of the Cyrillic alphabet published by the Commission on Geographical Names Standardization<sup>5</sup> have also been used. The author also tries – especially in the case of surnames – to use, if it is possible, their Polonized versions.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. A bit of information from the official biography

Our protagonist was the first-born son from Władysław Jagiełło's marriage with Sońka (Sophie) Holszańska. For his father it was another marriage and he had no son from his previous marriages. At the time of the wedding the king was already 70 and his young wife was less than 20. It was the source of various kinds of court gossip told by malicious persons, which even led to a lawsuit, but Sophie came away unscathed from it<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Mazurkiewicz, *Wybrane teorie oraz metody badawcze turystyki* [*Selected Theories and Research Methods of Tourism*], Warszawa 2012, p. 139.

<sup>5</sup> [www.ksng.qugk.gov.pl/gp.php](http://www.ksng.qugk.gov.pl/gp.php) [accessed: 22.02.2013].

<sup>6</sup> [pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zofia\\_Holszańska](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zofia_Holszańska) [accessed: 24.05.2015].

Władysław I Jagiellon (Władysław III of Varna) was born in 1424 – so he was ten when his father died. He became the king of Poland when he was still a child, but the country was governed by bishop Zbigniew Oleśnicki in his name. When the young king reached the age of 15 Cracow was visited by Hungarian emissaries, who proposed to make him also their king, because the Hungarian throne was empty, the international situation was difficult and coalition with Poland against the Ottoman Empire seemed to be a reasonable solution. There was, however, a problem because the late Hungarian king Albert Habsburg left a widow, Elisabeth, who – worse still – was pregnant. In spite of the fact that she was twice as old as Władysław, there was even a proposal that the young king should marry her. It did not happen because Elisabeth gave birth to a son – Władysław (Ladislaus) the Posthumous – and she demanded the crown for him. Finally our Władysław was crowned and, after many tribulations, he became the King of Hungary. However, in the face of Elisabeth's opposition, there were clashes with her followers, almost a civil war. The whole, already complex, situation became even more complicated by border disputes between Poland and Germany, as well as by obstructions made by Frederick III Habsburg – Elisabeth's protector – who was also a pretender to the Hungarian throne. Intrigues, calumnies, accusations, doubtful agreements are characterized by J. Dąbrowski in his work<sup>7</sup>.

The young inexperienced man was surrounded by a veritable Gordian knot of circumstances which would be difficult to unknot even for more experienced rulers. We should also remember that after having left Cracow Władysław still remained the King of Poland, even if he never went back there.

The young king's zeal for fighting the Ottoman Empire was properly stoked by Julian Cesarini – a legate of the pope Eugenius IV. He was the person who caused that finally a coalition army – composed of Hungarian, Polish and Serbian soldiers commanded by Władysław I Jagiellon – began its first crusade against Turks in 1443. The king was 19 then. The coalition forces were composed of about 25 thousand knights. The main parties and figures of that first crusade are: Poles with king Władysław, Hungarians with János Hunyadi and Serbs with Georgi Brankovi (a ruler who had been deprived by Turks of his state, whose sons had been taken captive and were blinded). Knights from other European countries were virtually absent from that expedition. Its destination was Adrianopolis (today Ederne) – the then capital of the Turkish state.

The military commander of the coalition was the Transylvanian voivode János Hunyadi, who – if the expedition had been successful and Turks had been pushed away from Europe – would have possibly become the king of revived Bulgaria<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Dąbrowski, *Władysław I Jagiellończyk na Węgrzech (1440–1444)* [*Władysław I Jagiellon in Hungary (1440–1444)*], Warszawa 1922, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. T. Wasilewski, *Historia Bułgarii* [*History of Bulgaria*], Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1970, p. 132.

From the very beginning the expedition was achieving considerable successes – among others, thanks to help from local Serbian and Bulgarian population. They won the big battle of Kruševac and took Sofia without fighting. The army going to Plovdiv stopped, however, at the mountain pass Zlatiška, because of severe winter, lack of horse forage and supplies made crusaders retreat – however, in orderly fashion and practically without loss of life. The main commemoration of the first crusade is placed at the river Marica. It is a big cross with a concreted tablet containing a writing in three languages (Polish, Hungarian and Bulgarian) which says: “This is the farthest place reached by the so-called long march led by the Polish-Hungarian king Władysław Jagiellon and János Hunyadi as its military commander in 1443 – honour to heroic participants of the expedition”<sup>9</sup>.

One of legends says that after the 1443 expedition a part of Polish knights from the retreating coalition army stayed in the village of Etropole. It is supposed to be proved by a considerable number of family names ending with “ski” in that area (what is not a popular phenomenon in the Balkans). From the tourist viewpoint the village is attractive because of another reason. Once for two years there is held the world festival of mother-in-law jokes. It is even explicable why just there – if a considerable group of men of somehow different cultural habits had stayed there and had married into the local community, their difference would have probably been accepted by local wives but not necessarily by mothers-in-law.

All the same the balance of the expedition was positive for the allies, because the Turkish sultan Murad II (Amurat) asked for peace. Its conditions were very favourable for Hungarians and Serbs. The treaty provided for a 10-year peace, return of all conquered Hungarian and Serbian lands and payment of a huge compensation. In the case of undertaking of any war expedition by the Hungarian king, Turks obliged themselves to support it with a military contingent. Moreover, they obliged themselves to free G. Brankovic’s blinded sons.

The treaty was ratified in Adrianopolis (today’s Bulgarian name is Odrin and Turkish – Ederne) in June 1444 and in August of the same year Władysław Jagiellon took an oath to keep it on Bible in Segedin (today – Szeged).

Three days later, under the influence of a papal legate Julian Cesarini, the treaty was broken. Cesarini persuaded the king that his word given to an enemy of Christianity is not binding and even issued a written document confirming nullity of the oath.

Preparation for the second expedition began immediately. G. Brankovic, however, refused to take part in it and concluded a separate peace treaty with Turks. Then only 16 thousands knights went off on the crusade – mainly Hungarians and Poles. János Hunyadi became the military commander of the coalition forces

<sup>9</sup> L. Jaczynowski, B. Sławow, *Ulotna pamięć o bułgarskich polonikach* [*Fleeting Memory of Bulgarian Polonica*], [in:] Z. Krawczyk, E. Lewandowska-Tarasiuk, J.W. Sienkiewicz (eds.), *Człowiek w podróży* [*Man in Travel*], Warszawa 2009, p. 193.

again. The plan of the expedition assumed reaching Constantinople and helping the then the capital of the declining Byzantium. A slightly different route than that of the first expedition was chosen. The army moved along the Danube through Vidin and then southwards to Szumla – today Šumen. A Turkish fortress was captured there and it was virtually the last victory of the 20-year-old king<sup>10</sup>.

Today there is a concrete tablet there to commemorate that event with a writing: “25.10.1444 the Crusader united forces commanded by a Polish-Hungarian king Władysław III Jagiellon – of Varna vanquished a Turkish garrison and seized the fortress of Šumen. Šumen 2004”<sup>11</sup>. Every two years – on the initiative of Mariana Ewstatiewa-Biołczewa – there are historical reconstructions organized, commemorating the events of that time<sup>12</sup>.

However, during celebration of the victory in Šumen, the king got a bad message – the Venetian fleet had not managed, as it had been planned, to prevent Turks from crossing the Dardanelles – and a 60-thousand army was marching towards the crusader army. In order to avoid fighting against the many times stronger enemy the coalition forces made for Varna, where they were to be supported by the abovementioned Venetian fleet. Alas, the Venetian ships had not come.

In that situation, the famous battle of Varna took place on 10 November 1444. It has been described in relations of many authors, who emphasized that, thanks to János Hunyadi’s genial strategy, it was basically winnable, and only the king’s reckless unnecessary charge with a handful of his guardsmen on the sultan’s elite janissary reserve led to the crusaders’ defeat.

And here historians’ relations – relatively consistent up till that moment – start to differ. The source of many divagations – which are so different from each other – may be the fact that neither the king’s body, nor any part of his armour were found. It is difficult to understand, because the Turkish party used the oath violator’s death for a big propaganda action, but – lacking other proofs – it focused on the cut off head.

### 3.2. The Turkish Version

The Turkish version is recognized by historians as the official one, because it was the area controlled by the Turks. The Crusader army was smashed and only thanks to János Hunyadi’s strategic genius it was not completely killed off. Survivors’ relations are scanty and they often give rise to considerable doubts.

It is, however, true that people in Poland did not believe in the king’s death and envoys, whose task was to find the king and possibly redeem him from cap-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. T. Wasilewski, *Historia Bułgarii [History of Bulgaria]*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1970, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> B. Sławow (director), *Polskie ślady w Bułgarii [Polish Traces in Bulgaria]*, Warszawa 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Mariana Ewstatiewa-Biołczewa is a film director. She graduated the Łódź Film School and in her private life she is the wife of professor Bojan Biołczew (Bojan Biołčev), a Slavic philologist and a two-time rector of the Kilment Ochridski University.



tivity, were sent. Interregnum in Poland lasted three years, because the king's younger brother – Kazimierz Jagiellon – accepted the crown only after the greatest resistance, persuaded by supplications of his mother Sophie.

Turkish sources – some of them written many years after the battle of Varna – describe the circumstances of the Polish-Hungarian king's death in a basically unambiguous way. His horse stumbled and fell down with the monarch. One of the janissaries cut his head off, put it on a spear and brought it to Sultan Murad II. The Sultan ordered to take it and ride it around the battlefield, which led to panic in the coalition army. That version is also known in Poland and was analysed by Jan Dąbrowski<sup>13</sup>. There is an interesting fact that the janissary's name is different in different versions of the story: Karadza Khizr, Kodza Chyzyr, Kodza Khizr or Kodza Hyzyr. It may, however, be caused by inexact transcription rules applied by different translators.

The document quoted by Z. Święch<sup>14</sup> somehow contradicts that version. It is *fethname* of the Sultan Murad II – that is, an official message about the course of the battle sent to rulers of several Muslim states allied with Turkey. It contains a fragment where it was written that Władysław I Jagiellon was taken captive and executed for the crime of violating an oath.

Anyhow, it comes from both versions that the king lost life and was decapitated, and then his head was preserved in honey and showed to the sultan's guests. The macabre trophy did not, however, get to the then capital of the Turkish state, but to the old one – Bursa (Print 1). What happened to it later? What happened to the monarch's body? Who became the owner of the precious royal armour? Our researchers of Turkish sources about the king's death have not found any answers to those questions. We know that the king's head (if it was really his) was sent to central Turkey and there the trail goes cold. It could not be preserved for a very long time, so it was disposed of somehow. Was it namelessly buried, profaned or, in spite of all, did it leave some trace? It is another issue to explain for seekers of the grave of Władysław III of Varna.

What happened to the body? Here Bulgarian strands appear.

### 3.3. The Bulgarian Version

In Bulgaria the memory of Władysław I Jagiellon is meticulously cultivated. He is known there as Władysław of Varna. It is worth emphasizing that the king's cognomen comes from the name of a locality, and the latter probably comes from lime produced from limestone which is popular in the area. In Bulgarian "var" means lime and probably such is the origin of the name "Varna".

In 1935 the epic story of king Władysław of Varna was commemorated by erecting a mausoleum in that city (Print 2). It was integrated with an empty

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Dąbrowski, *Władysław I Jagiellończyk na Węgrzech (1440–1444)* [*Władysław I Jagiellon in Hungary (1440–1444)*], Warszawa 1922, p. 189.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Z. Święch, *Ostatni krzyżowiec Europy* [*The Last European Crusader*], Kraków 2012, p. 91.

grave (burial mound) coming from Thracian times and the ceremony was attended by the then Tsar Saksoburgotski family. In 1964, there was also a museum opened there. Nowadays that facility is one of the greatest tourist attractions of Varna and it usually is taken into account in schedules of tours for visitors from Poland. We must, however, remember that the place is only a symbolic grave, because – as we know – the king's body was not found after the battle.

Recently there has been a number of articles published in Varna press<sup>15</sup>. A film, directed by St. Szumanow (St. Šumanov)<sup>16</sup> has also been produced, where it is suggested that, in spite of all, our king's gravesite has been found. What is interesting, much earlier such a hypothesis was put forward by a Czech researcher, Hermenegild Skorpil, the chairman of the Varna Archaeological Association. Moreover, his work is available in the resources of the Virtual Historical Library in Varna<sup>17</sup>. Those works – and other publications – suggest that the retreating coalition forces took the king's corpse with them and they were looking for a place for a decent burial. They found such a place in a Greek (Byzantine) church dedicated to St. Atanasij in the village of Obročište. It is placed about 30 kilometres north of Varna, near the currently popular tourist resort of Albena. A local legend says that St. Atanasij fell in love with a Turkish woman and, because of that, both of them were stoned to death. His head was cut off and sent to the capital to the sultan. To commemorate his martyrdom the abovementioned *paraklis* was erected ages ago (maybe there was also a monastery there).

It is an edifice of a specific construction. It was built on a hexagonal foundation, which is rare from the architectural viewpoint. The size of the interior is about 20 square meters (together with the vestibule). Thick walls have embrasures and the doorway surrounded with small marble blocks of shapes characteristic for Arabic edifices. Neither inside, nor outside any visible (Muslim or Christian) religious symbols can be seen. Maybe this is the reason why the building is concordantly visited by believers of both religions in May. There is something like a half cylinder – which is about 2.5 m long, about 1.2 m wide and about 0.8 m tall – inside. It is not a sarcophagus but rather an untypical grave-stone. There is a grave below, which – according to the local oral tradition – belongs to St. Atanasij. There was a pit under the half cylinder where – about 2 m below the ground – there was a skeleton of a tall man. He was decapitated and his hands were folded on his chest in a characteristic Christian gesture<sup>18</sup>. Hermenegild Skorpil mentions opening of the grave during the Russian army's stay in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and quotes D.T. Stamboliev's eyewitness relation.

<sup>15</sup> *Grobat na krul Vladislav III Āgelo Varnenčik e v teketo AkĀz "I" Baba v selo Obročište* [accessed: 9.11.2013]; <http://www.dnesplus.bg/News.uspx?n=628502> [accessed: 28.02.2015].

<sup>16</sup> S. Šumanov (director), *Poslednitek "stonesnipohodina Balkanite 1443–1444"*, Sofiā 2008, film.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. H. Škorpil, *Sraženie topri Varna*. ArticleRekord, catalog libvar.bg show\_artikle.pl?/DigitalnaKolekciā/škorpil [accessed: 7.04.2015].

<sup>18</sup> Cf. I. Vagalinska, *Za kostite na edinkral*, <http://www.dneplus.bg> [accessed: 28.02.2015].



The discussed edifice is surprisingly well preserved and is placed on the area of a *teke*, which was built later – and which, for a change, is seriously devastated (print 3). The whole complex is called *Teketo AkÁz “I” Baba* and it is an element of the sightseeing program for tourists spending holidays in the Albena resort. Local guides, however, know nothing about suggestions of H. Skorpil and of a film director Szumanov concerning possible connections between that grave and Władysław of Varna, whereas we learn, thanks to their explanations that *teketawere* built in various places as gravesites for distinguished persons. This was also a place where many dervishes (Muslim preachers) gathered in a quite big guesthouse. They were usually illiterate and they preached verses of Koran from memory, so – in order to avoid distortions – once in a while they visited such places where – during a stay lasting several days – they refreshed their memory. What attracts attention in the discussed *teke* in Obročište is a hearth with a huge chimney and with hooks serving to hang a huge cauldron which could contain 500 liters of soup (*čorba*). It means that it was a relatively big training centre.

Present day seekers of the grave of Władysław of Varna suggest to make a DNA (*deoxyribonucleic acid*) comparative analysis of the skeleton placed in the discussed edifice and of samples taken from royal tombs in Wawel. Getting a permission for such examination may be difficult (especially in Poland). There is, however, another way of establishing the identity of the skeleton. It is mentioned in various relations about Władysław Jagiellon that one of his legs had six toes. It could be a genetic deformation or – which is more probable – the so-called vanishing twin syndrome. Hence, if one of feet of the skeleton in the described *teke* had six toes, the mystery of the gravesite of the Władysław of Varna would be solved. In materials, which are discussed here, there are also suggestions that the grave of Władysław of Varna may be placed in the locality called Winnica (Vinnica), which is now a northern quarter of Varna, or on the 4<sup>th</sup> kilometer of the road from Varna to Dobricz (Dobrič). The latter place is mentioned in Jan Grzegorzewski's work, which will be discussed later in the section dedicated to the Polish version concerning a possible gravesite of the king Władysław of Varna<sup>19</sup>. However, we should mention that Bulgarian authors do not agree with that hypothesis and pointing out to premises proving that in the place described by J. Grzegorzewski, Karadž Pasha (Karadž”Paša) – a son-in-law of the sultan Murad II<sup>20</sup> was buried.

### 3.4. The Polish Version

As the body of Władysław I Jagielon had not been found after the battle of Varna, he was commemorated in Poland with a symbolic (empty) grave in the

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Grzegorzewski, *Grób Władysława Warneńczyka [Grave of Władysław of Varna]*, Kraków 1911, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> F.I. Vagalinska, *Za kostite...* [accessed: 28.02.2015].

Wawel Cathedral. Print 4 shows the view of that cathedral from outside. Inside, on the gravestone of the empty sarcophagus, there has been a monument of our king since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a work by Antoni Madeyski, who – in his Rome atelier – prepared a lying figure of a knight in his armour, with a crown on his head. Earlier the same sculptor prepared a figure of Queen Jadwiga (the first wife of Władysław Jagiełło, our protagonist's father)<sup>21</sup> for the same cathedral. Both works are magnificent and attract great numbers of tourists.

Of course, Poles have also undertaken searches for the grave of Władysław III of Varna. One of them was Jan Grzegorzewski, who at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was looking through Bulgarian and Turkish archives and who examined places connected with the battle of Varna in person. According to his opinion, sought after grave is placed in a *teke* just in the battlefield, 4 kilometres from Varna at the old road leading to Dobricz (Dobrič). Grzegorzewski describes that place in details and blames police from Varna for not keeping the grave from harm made by treasure hunters who had devastated it<sup>22</sup>. At one time his work caused a reaction from the Bulgarian Ministry of Enlightenment and a response which was an excerpt from the report of the Varna Department of the Archaeological Association, signed by its vice-chairman Karol Skorpil. He describes a provocation by certain Todora coming from Małe Tyrnowo (Malko Tarnovo), who threw into the grave called *Pasza Baba* an Austrian coin from 1816, a Roman coin, a wooden cross incrustated with nacre and a picture painted on wood – giving that way credibility to a thesis that there were treasures there. Then – helped by several persons – she excavated the grave and took bones, which had been placed there, as relics. It caused a conflict between the local Christian and Muslim population, because the first aspired for that place because of religious reasons and the latter because of proprietorship of that area. However, later Bulgarian research proved (as it has already been written) that the person buried in the grave was not Władysław of Varna, but Karadza Pasha – a son-in-law of Murad II – who was also killed during the battle.

In his work J. Grzegorzewski mentions also two other places only 1 kilometre away. There are two Thracian burial mounds *Meselitepe* (called also *Kara paposmezary*). It is the place where – on the southern burial mound – soldiers from gen. Władysław Zamoyski's Polish division put the monument dedicated to the Władysław of Varna on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1854. Count Władysław Zamoyski was a nephew of prince Adam Czartoryski and a great opponent of M. Czajkowski (Sadyk Pasha)<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Z. Święch, *Ostatni krzyżowiec Europy* [*The Last European Crusader*], Kraków 2012, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Grzegorzewski, *Grób Władysława Warneńczyka* [*Grave of Władysław of Varna*], Kraków 1911, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> L. Jaczynowski, *Niedoceniane lekcje polskości Sadyka paszy* [*Underappreciated Sadyk Pasza's Polishness Lessons*], [in:] Z. Krawczyk, E. Lewandowska-Tarasiuk, J.W. Sienkiewicz (eds.), *Aksjologia podróży* [*Axiology of Travel*], Warszawa 2012, p. 153.

In the Historical Library in Varna, there is a work by Hermenegild Skorpil (a brother of the abovementioned Karol), who described those events<sup>24</sup>. Namely, he writes that after excavating the burial mound there was a cross found with seven green decorative stones, a diadem and a human skeleton. A monument was erected on that burial mound in the form of a tetragonal pyramid (of white marble) which was about 2.5 m high with writings in Polish (on the northern side) and Latin (on the western side) of the same content: “for the king Władysław I Jagiellon and Polish knights who died near Varna on 10.11.1444”.

The writings did not mention the fallen knights of other nationalities but Polish, which half a century later caused a Hungarian reaction. The quoted text by Skorpil included also an attached postcard printed by Polish emigrants in France in 1857, where there were sketched the two burial mounds and the monument. On the right you can see military warehouses, on the left – the city of Varna and the seashore with the Galata Hills on the horizon (Print 5). The monument was erected – and the writings carved – by count Stanisław Julian Ostroróg, captain of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ulan regiment. As H. Skorpil<sup>25</sup> wrote, in the following part of the text, a few days later the local population – sure that there are royal treasures under the monument – demolished the monument and dug up the burial mound, so that no trace of that was left.

When on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1907 the Archaeological Society in Varna turned to the city authorities with a request for giving one of the streets the name of Władysław of Varna (*Vladislav Varnenčik*) and naming a quarter of the city Władysławowo (*Vladislavovo*), it simultaneously turned to “Austrian, Russian and German Poles” with a request for financial support for building a new monument. On page 75 of the discussed text by H. Skorpil there is an answer given by Hungarians. They supported the initiative, but demanded placing on the monument proper writings in Hungarian too, because *Ulaslo I* was not only King of Poland but King of Hungary.

In the discussed work by H. Skorpil there is – on page 71 – one more detail which is usually unknown in Poland. In 1828 – during a Russian-Turkish war – Tsar Nicholas I of Russia (who was also King of Poland in the years 1828–1831) was near Varna and, under the impression of historical events, issued a letter to general M. Woroncow dated 11.10.1828:

Here is the place where a heroic Jagiełło's son, fighting under the banner of Christianity, died. His gravesite is unknown. I want to commemorate him in a dignified way in the main city of Poland. I assign for that aim 12 cannons from all those which we captured in Varna. I give them to the city of Warsaw. According to my order, they are to stand in the best place to honour the hero who is no longer among us, to honour Russian soldiers who happened to avenge his death. I oblige You to realize my will.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. H. Škorpil, *Sražienietopri Varna*. Artikle Rekord, catalog libvar.bg show\_artikle.pl?/Digitalna Kolekciã/škorpil [accessed: 7.04.2015], p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 73.

Unfortunately, we do not know whether those cannons reached Warsaw.

### 3.5. The Portuguese Version

The greatest proponent of that version is a Portuguese scientist Manuel Rosa, who works at the Duke University in the United States<sup>26</sup>. However, the first one who publicized the thesis about probable survival of Władysław of Varna – and, relying on very interesting traces, speculated on our king’s “life after life” – was Leopold Kielanowski<sup>27</sup>. He was a brother of Tadeusz Kielanowski – a professor of medical sciences and the Rector of the Medical Academy in Lublin; as well as of Jan Kielanowski – a professor of zootechnics and a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Leopold Kielanowski was a doctor of the humanities, but during the Second World War he wandered off to Western Europe together with the army of general Anders and there he took up a job in the Radio Free Europe. Unfortunately, that fact made travelling to Eastern Europe impossible for him, because of political reasons. However, he tracked down and critically analysed documents which were available in the West – in Vatican archives, in the library of the Order of Saint Catherine in Sinai, in museums of Lisbon, in historical buildings of Madeira and many other places. He got through to the full text of Nicolao Floris’ letter sent to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order Ludwig von Erlichshausen in 1472, in which Floris informed von Erlichshausen that the king had survived. The letter was kept secret in Königsberg for 500 years and was luckily rescued from ravages of the Second World War, because the archives were removed to the West in time. He became acquainted with Filippo Kallimach’s (Filippo Buonaccorsi’s) work entitled *On King Władysław*, where the course of the battle is presented as it was related by Grzegorz of Sanok, a Polish knight fighting on Władysław’s side, who survived the battle and who became the archbishop of Lvov years later. The work mentions the king’s disappearance but it does not say about his death.

L. Kielanowski got also through to a diary of a travel across Europe written in Czech by its participant Sasko of Międzygórze (and, strictly speaking, to its Latin translation from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century). It was a travel to the Western end of Europe undertaken by count Jaroslav Lev of Rožmitál – a brother-in-law of the then Czech King Georg of Poděbrady – in the years 1465–1467. In Portugal, near the town of Santa-la-Piedra, he met a penitent who was told by the local population to be a Polish king who had been defeated by pagans. Among the count’s attendants there was a Pole, who – while washing legs of the penitent, who had denied all that information – recognized king Władysław because of six toes on one of his feet<sup>28</sup>. In his work L. Kielanowski mentions many other people who took part in the

<sup>26</sup> M. Rosa, *Kolumb. Historia nieznaną [Columbus. UnknownHistory]*, Poznań 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. L. Kielanowski, *Odyseja Władysława Warneńczyka [Odyssey of Władysław of Varna]*, Londyn 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

battle of Varna and survived, and their lot was strangely connected with Portugal. On the basis of those analyses, the discussed author comes to a conclusion that Władysław of Varna settled in the Portuguese island of Madeira and there he ended his days dying at the age of 50 on a ship flooded by a rockslide when it was already entering a harbour<sup>29</sup>. Leopold Kielanowski was so fascinated by that version of the story that – according to his will – he was buried in Madeira. His version of events was described in Polish and published in London in a work entitled *Odyseja Władysława Warneńczyka* [*Odyssey of Władysław of Varna*]. The book is hardly available in our country but there are two copies in the National Library in Warsaw.

The abovementioned Manuel Rosa comes independently to similar conclusions as Kielanowski. He makes, however, one more step trying to prove that Władysław of Varna was probably Christopher Columbus' father<sup>30</sup>.

So what did happen – according to those two authors – during an unlucky Polish knights' attack on the janissaries of Murad II during the battle of Varna? The starting point for both is the fact that the king's body and armour were not found and that the cut off head had blonde hair while Władysław of Varna was a brunet. They also suggested that the wounded king got out of the battlefield covered with a habit belonging to one of monks (Franciscans) accompanying the expedition. Then – probably on a ship of the Venetian fleet which had managed to get to Varna – he was taken to a safe place. Leaving aside details of the route he was to follow, we come to a mysterious figure of a "black knight", who appears in Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai. After a few years of doing penance for his sins the knight leaves the monastery and goes to Portugal, where he is welcomed by its king Alfonso V with honours which are seldom displayed to simple knights. He marries there a highborn lady from the royal court and he officially takes on the name Henrique Alemão. In Polish translations there appear a Polonised version of that surname Henryk Niemiec. Judging from his obstinate denial of the origin which was attributed to him when he was chatted up by emissaries from Poland, it would be more proper to understand his name as Henryk Niemy (Mute) – but it would directly suggest that the story, which our black knight consistently denied till the end of his life, was true.

Both authors come to similar conclusions, in spite of the fact that they usually refer to different evidence and documents. In his book, on page 409, M. Rosa talks Kielanowski's work with respect, although he does not mention it in the bibliography. What made the greatest impression on him is the fact that our author revealed Mikołaj Floris' letter. M. Rosa in his book on Ch. Columbus quotes also a record from *Nobiliario da Ilba da Madeira* (*Noble Book of Madeira Island*) by Henrique Henriguesa de Noronhi, coming from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. M. Rosa, *Kolumb...* [*Columbus...*], p. 193.

Henrique Alemão settled on the Island about 1450 [...]. It is told that he was a Polish prince [...] he vowed to go on a pilgrimage all over the world and, made a knight on Mount Sinai, he came to the island where João Goncalves Zarco gave him acres of land in that village, confirming it with prince Henrique's letter from 29<sup>th</sup> April 1457 and king Alfonso's letter from 18<sup>th</sup> May of the same year. I saw the originals of those letters, as well as an old testimony to what I have mentioned. He died near Cape Givão, where a rock fell on his ship and his remains were buried in that church<sup>31</sup>.

The Portuguese scientist makes, however, one more step. Firstly, he confirms L. Kielanowski's findings that H. Alemão settled in Madeira in the village of Madalena de Mar and there he had children with Annes de Sá Colona (who was a granddaughter of captain Zarco's brother), whose names were probably Barbara and Zygmunt. After over 120 years Barbara's descendants proved their royal pedigree without pointing out which house they came from, whereas Zygmunt – at the age of 20 – undertook a sea travel during which he reportedly died squashed by broken mast of a sailing ship<sup>32</sup>. M. Rosa focuses his attention on that strand and puts forward a thesis that Zygmunt wanted to disappear from the public sphere to protect his father's secret and that way he began a new life as a 20-year-old Christopher Columbus, who that time is reported to come to Portugal from Genoa as a simple artisan's son. It is amazing that the supposedly simple man could not speak his native Italian, but excellently knew Portuguese and Spanish. He was familiar with sailing and was hosted by royal courts, which plunked down a lot of money for realization of his "crazy" idea of a westward cruise to India. This is, however, another strand, so let us comeback to his father.

H. Alemão lived in the village Madalena de Mar, but he had his private rooms in the palace of captain Juan Goncalves Zarco (the discoverer of that island and its governor on behalf of king Alfonso V), where he stayed when he visited the capital of the island – Funchal. By the way: Christopher Columbus' wife Filipa Moniz was a daughter of the governor of Porto Santo Island, which adjoins Madeira, and she was related to the governor of Madeira through his brother's wife<sup>33</sup>. There are more strange coincidences of that kind in this saga.

Coming back to our main protagonist, we can say that he often left for Portugal – either going for periodic penitential pilgrimages, or being invited by king Alfonso V. While he was coming back from one of such travels, the ship entering the port was hit by a rock avalanche and sank. In 1474 H. Alemão was buried in a local cemetery placed near a small church dedicated to Saint Madelaine, which had been founded by him and his wife.

It happened that another rock avalanche destroyed that church and the graves placed there several decades later. Print 6 presents a photo of a new church which was built in the same place as the old one and is also dedicated to Saint Madelaine, but there is no mention about the first founders inside it. After five

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 392 and 396.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 405.



hundred years L. Kielanowski got through to broken pieces of a gravestone, where a majority of writings were worn-away by time, but there remained ornaments (also not very clear) which he recognized as connected with heraldry of the Jagiellon dynasty. Today that gravestone has been glued together and is accessible to tourists visiting *Muzeum das Cruzas* (Zarco's former palace placed in Funchal). There is still no unanimity regarding the content of the worn-away writings placed there and it is quite strange that nobody has tried to engage criminologists – who, using modern techniques, might be able to read what really was written there.

There is one more trace in Madeira which was noticed by L. Kielanowski and which was taken also up by M. Rosa. The founders of the little church founded also a picture presenting Saint Hieronymus' meeting Saint Ann (print 7). As was the custom, persons posing for painting the saints' figures were the donors themselves. The picture has survived and is exposed behind glass in the Museum of Sacral Art in Funchal. If it turned out that the Portuguese version concerning the gravesite of Władysław of Varna is true, it would be the only real-life painted picture of Polish-Hungarian king.

A great enthusiast of the Portuguese version of the biography of Władysław of Varna is also Zbigniew Świąch, an alumnus of the Jagiellonian University. Among his books dedicated to the Jagiellon house there is also one entitled *Ostatni krzyżowiec Europy* [*The Last European Crusader*]<sup>34</sup>. He refers there to many topics L. Kielanowski dealt with, analyses them and adds his findings concerning the issue.

In June 2014, during a talk I managed to have with him, he confirmed he knew M. Rosa's work (which was printed in Poland when his book had already been published) and said that he was of an opinion that Rosa had pointed out to a very interesting strand which may turn out to be true. He was, however, sceptical regarding a possibility of realization of the idea which had been presented there of comparing DNA of Christopher Columbus and his descendants with DNA of the Jagiellons buried in Wawel. There is simply much resistance from decision-makers, who could give permission to make such research<sup>35</sup>. It is a pity, because it could potentially confirm also the version about Władysław I Jagiellon surviving the battle of Varna. But maybe someday...

#### 4. Conclusions

None of the presented versions (Turkish, Bulgarian, Polish, or Portuguese) definitely answers the question where Władysław III of Varna was buried. Each

<sup>34</sup> Z. Świąch, *Ostatni krzyżowiec Europy* [*The Last European Crusader*], Kraków 2012.

<sup>35</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014 talk with Z. Świąch in Busko-Zdrój on reluctance of the church authorities of the Wawel cathedral to permit using a DNA sample taken from one of members of the Jagiellon house buried there for a comparative analysis.

of them is based on some, more or less reliable, documents, which should be analysed by specialists. Legends about the king's death and what happened later are, however, attractive and have a life of their own in the social space and that is the reason why the four basic versions are juxtaposed in the present text in hopes for creation of a consistent basis for a tourist marketing product. Its creation would enable avoiding discomfort which is experienced by inquisitive tourists who – earlier and somewhere else – heard a different version of the story than that which is being told them at the moment.

Can a common denominator for all those versions be found? Yes, it can, but it is rather a tentative theory. If the head which was cut off on the battlefield had not belonged to the king but to one of his bodyguard knights, it would have also made plausible the Portuguese version of a penitent knight. Maybe still developing techniques of biological, criminological as well as historical research will enable solving that fascinating mystery in the future.

Some hopes are created by information that an international team of historians from Oxford got 1.5 million euro grant for studying the phenomenon of the Jagiellon house<sup>36</sup>. The subject is vast, but you can suppose that the specialists will turn their attention to the lot of Władysław of Varna too.

Will that team be joined by Polish scientists currently dealing with the problem we are interested in? A number of our historians publish their considerations on the subject<sup>37</sup>. Will they manage to explain definitely what in the discussed legends is true and what is a myth? Let us hope.

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. E. Winnicka, *Natalia przesuwa środek Europy* [*Natalia Moves the Centre of Europe*], "Gazeta Wyborcza" ["Duży Format"] 2015, no. 17/1128, pp. 20–21.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. I. Czabańska, W. Szulc (eds.), *Warna 1444. Rzeczywistość i tradycja* [*Varna 1444. Reality and Tradition*], Poznań 1997.

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**Print. 1.** Map of the place (Bursa) where the cut off head of Władysław III of Varna was reportedly taken

Source: *Atlas samochodowy Mercedes-Benz [Mercedes Benz Road Atlas]*, Polskie Przedsiębiorstwo Wydawnictw Kartograficznych im. E. Romera SA (Printed in Germany 1996), Warszawa – Wrocław.





**Print 2.** Mausoleum of Władysław of Varna in Varna (phot author)

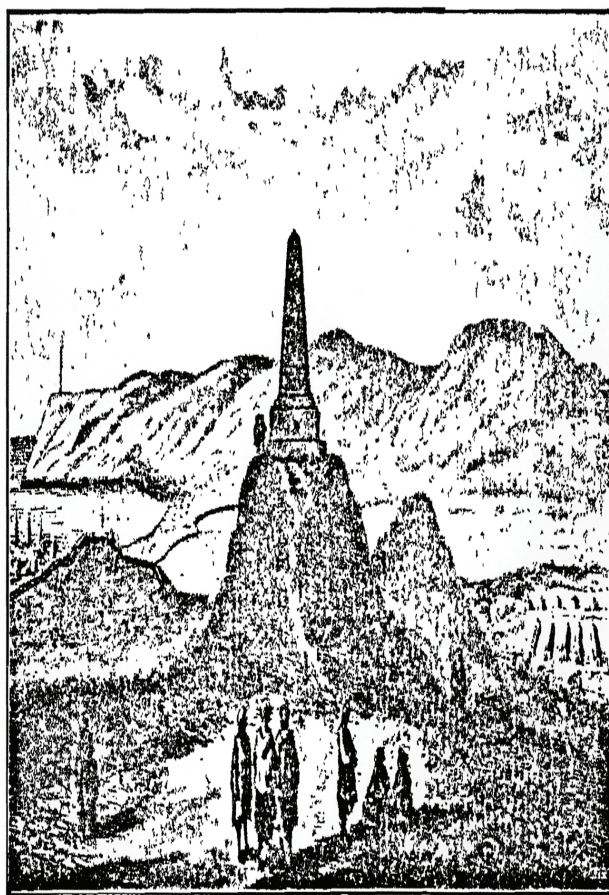


**Print 3.** St. Atanasij's temple in *teketo* Ak Âz "I" Baba in the village of Obročište (photo by the author)



**Print 4.** The Wawel Cathedral (photo by A. Żyrkowski)





**Print 5.** A monument to commemorate Władysław of Varna (a postcard printed in France by Polish immigrants in 1857)



**Print 6.** New Saint Madelaine's church in Madeira (photo by the author)



**Print 7.** A picture. Saint Hieronymus' (supposed Władysław of Varna) meeting Saint Ann (photo by the author)