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Research and education in Slavonic studies in Poland – past and present

Słowa kluczowe: badania, edukacja, Polska, słowianoznawstwo

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Abstract: The article shows the three aspects of research on the history of Slavonic studies in Poland: the developmental trends in Polish historiography, the scale of interest in the Slavs living in Poland and the position of the other Slavic nations in the Polish historiography.

Three basic elements need to be identified when looking at the past and present state of Slavonic studies in Poland¹. First, it is necessary to discuss the general developmental trends in Polish historiography as one of the leading Slavonic historiographies. Next, one should analyze the degree of Polish scholars' interest in other Slavs who, since the Middle Ages, resided in the multiethnic Polish Commonwealth. In 1772, just prior to the Polish partitions, Catholics, who may be more or less identified with Poles, made up only 43% of the Commonwealth's population. An equal number of the country's inhabitants – the majority of whom were Ruthenians – belonged to the eastern churches (Greek Catholic and Orthodox)². Although the

¹ I have touched some of the issues raised in this article in K.A. Makowski, *Polskie badania nad dziejami Słowiańszczyzny – wprowadzenie do problemu*, [in:] *Słowianie – idea i rzeczywistość. Zbiór studiów*, ed. idem, M. Saczyńska, Poznań 2013, pp. 7–18.

² See N. Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland*, vol. 1: *The Origins to 1795*, New York 1982, p. 162.

percentage of the non-Polish population consistently declined as the result of border changes and migrations, Slavonic minorities, above all Byelorussians and Ukrainians, continue to make up a sizable group even in contemporary Poland³. The third element that warrants discussion is the development of Polish Slavistics and the place of other Slavonic countries and nations in Polish historiography. The last important question which should be answered in this article is: how have the main research trends in the field of Slavonic studies affected historical education before and after 1989?

When scrutinizing the beginnings of the modern Polish research on the history of the Slavs, it is necessary to stress that the partitions prevented 19th-century Polish historiography from developing as harmoniously as in other European countries. Only two Polish universities existed in this period, both in Galicia – one in Lvov, the other in Cracow. In the Prussian and Russian partitions, historical research could only be done as a secondary activity. As a consequence, Polish historiography clearly lagged behind its western counterparts, and it had a decidedly regional character. Researchers focused almost exclusively on Polish history, and they limited themselves largely to the medieval period. General history did not attract much interest. At the same time, it became commonplace to present domestic history through the prism of the nation, and not, as was the case in Western Europe, for example in Germany, through the prism of the state. During the partition period, historical studies were supposed to sustain and shape the national consciousness of the emerging modern Polish nation⁴. One should also add that in the 19th century Poles generally did not discern or want to discern the formation of new nations in the eastern borderlands of the former Polish Commonwealth. In the Polish consciousness, these areas were Polish, and the Ukrainians and Byelorussians who lived there were seen simply as “tribes” of the Polish nation⁵. As a consequence, Polish professional historiography did not devote itself to nationality questions during this period.

³ In Poland – according to the last national general census of 2011 – live near 50.000 Byelorussians, over 50.000 Ukrainians and over 10.000 Lemkos, as well as 13.000 Russians, about 3.000 Slovaks and almost 3.500 Czechs. (See website: <http://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/struktura-narodowo-etniczna-jezykowa-i-wyznaniowa-ludnosci-polski-nsp-2011,22,1.html>, p. 31; DOA September 20, 2017).

⁴ See, for example, A.F. Grabski, *Zarys historii historiografii polskiej*, Poznań 2000, pp. 109ff.; K.A. Makowski, *Jews in Polish Academic and School Textbooks Before and After 1989 – Some General Reflections*, [in:] *Rewriting Slavic History*, ed. B. Valota, Milano 2009, pp. 101–111.

⁵ A. Chwalba: *Historia Polski 1795–1918*, Kraków 2000, pp. 164–165.

This does not mean, however, that absolutely no research on the Slavs was conducted in the Polish lands. The origins of modern Slavonic studies extend back to the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. As a result of the pre-romantic affinity for the common people and its culture and the loss of independent statehood, the Poles began to grow aware that they shared common cultural roots and connections with other Slavonic nations. Amateur travelers who visited the Slavonic lands were the precursors of such research⁶. Later, folklorists collected archeological and ethnographic material on the minorities inhabiting the territory of the former Polish Commonwealth, including Ukrainians and Byelorussians. They received institutional support in 1873, when the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cracow created an Anthropological Commission, and then again in 1895, when the Ethnological Society was formed in Lvov.

The first chair of Slavonic studies in the Polish lands was created in 1865 at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. By the beginning of the 20th century, this Cracow center had an established academic position. From the onset, however, it gathered and trained above all linguists and literary specialists. This profile of Slavonic studies influenced the field's further development. Since this juncture, Slavonic studies or Slavistics in Poland has been identified with Slavonic philology – the study of Slavonic languages and literatures. This notwithstanding, at the end of the 19th century Polish historians did begin to participate in Slavonic research, whereby they devoted themselves mainly to the Slavs' earliest history – a tendency that would remain characteristic later as well⁷.

Polish historical research made clear progress after Poland regained its independence in 1918. The number of universities grew to six, and research institutes were also created. In general, Polish historical research in the interwar period kept pace with world historiography. While it is true that traditional political history continued to dominate, new research areas also developed gradually. Above all, the Polish school of socio-economic history pioneered by Franciszek Bujak and Jan Rutkowski warrants mention. A decided polonocentrism did continue to characterize Polish

⁶ See, for example, A. Furier, *Badania wschodnie w Polsce i na świecie*, Przegląd Wschodni, 12, nr 2 (2012), pp. 343–372.

⁷ For more on the beginnings of the Polish Slavistics: T. Lehr-Splawiński, *Zarys dziejów słowianoznawstwa polskiego*, Kraków 1948, pp. 6ff.; Z. Sokolewicz, *Etnografia słowiańska w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, [in:] *Słowianoznawstwo w okresie międzywojennym 1918–1939*, part 1, ed. M. Basaj, S. Urbańczyk, Wrocław–Warszawa 1989, pp. 207–223.

historical writing in the interwar period⁸. Research on national and ethnic minorities tended to be conducted on the margins of official research, above all at the Warsaw Institute for Research on Nationality Questions, created in 1921, as well as the Scientific and Research Institute of Eastern Europe in Vilna and Ukrainian Scientific Institute in Warsaw, both founded in 1930. Because they existed for such a short period, these institutions' output was relatively modest.

During the interwar years, Slavonic studies in Poland received a new impulse. In 1925, a School of Slavonic Studies was created at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow as part of the Faculty of Philosophy. Meanwhile, at the University of Poznań a Western-Slavic Institute arose with the task of studying the language, history, and culture of the old western Slavonic tribes. At the Lvov University, thanks to the co-operation of the chairs of Slavistics, Anthropology, and Prehistory, the first interdisciplinary research on the ethnogenesis of the Slavs was undertaken. The result was Jan Czekanowski's work, "Wstęp do historii Słowian" (An Introduction to the History of the Slavs)⁹. Ethnologists also made a certain contribution to Slavonic studies at this juncture. Particular attention should be paid to a unique journal devoted exclusively to Slavonic matters, "Lud Słowiański" (The Slavonic People), which was published in Cracow from 1929 to 1935. The research horizons of Slavonic studies thus widened considerably, but linguistics continued to maintain its clear dominance. Study of the Slavs' history, on the other hand, remained weak. Despite the creation of Chairs of East European History at the universities in Poznań and Warsaw, research in this field was, for the most part, conducted ad hoc. Just a little more than ten works from this period are deserving of attention. It is important to note, however, that they were not confined to the medieval period, but also encompassed the modern and contemporary periods¹⁰.

After World War II, Polish historiography underwent a methodological metamorphosis. The official adoption of the Marxist paradigm caused above all a growth in historians' interest in social and economic questions at the expense of political history. Following the collapse of Stalinism in 1956, a new impulse came when Polish historical science established contacts with the French "Annales" school. These

⁸ A.F. Grabski, *Zarys historii*, pp. 165ff.; K.A. Makowski, *Jews in Polish*, p. 101.

⁹ J. Czekanowski, *Wstęp do historii Słowian. Perspektywy antropologiczne, etnograficzne, prehistoryczne i językoznawcze*, Łwów 1927.

¹⁰ See, for example, H. Batowski, *Państwa bałkańskie 1800–1923. Zarys historii dyplomatycznej i rozwoju terytorialnego*, Warszawa 1938; L. Widerszal, *Bułgarski ruch narodowy 1856–1872*, Warszawa 1937.

contacts inspired some Polish historians to seek out new research fields and new theoretical approaches. Thanks to this development, Polish historiography, especially socio-economic historiography, was integrated into world scientific trends and assumed a significant place within them¹¹.

The changes taking place after 1945 also effected a reassessment of the history of Poland, but only in regards to class (the common people became the dominant element). Almost throughout the entire period of the Polish People's Republic polonocentrism continued to characterize Polish historiography. After the fall of Stalinism, historical research reverted to the same nation paradigm that had been obligatory before World War II. Up to the end of the Polish People's Republic, this paradigm of nation functioned in symbiosis with the paradigm of class, creating the ideological "national-socialist" mixture unique to Poland at this time. The authorities propagated the cult of a nationally "pure" state. This led to erasure of the memory of the national minorities inhabiting Poland. As a result, the nationality question disappeared almost entirely from historiography¹². Since the interwar period, especially in Poznań, significant attention was paid only to Slavonic-German and Polish-German relations¹³. Not until the 1970's did a few serious works appear on the Ukrainians¹⁴. At The Catholic University in Lublin the research on the Greek Catholic church in Poland was undertaken at this point as well.

After World War II, Polish Slavonic studies re-emerged above all in Cracow, where the School of Slavonic Studies was reactivated. It consisted then of 15 chairs, including ones devoted to the Slavs' older history, the modern history of the western Slavs and the Baltic countries, as well as the history of the Balkans. In Poznań, the Institute of the Ancient History of the Slavs was created in cooperation with the university. Slavonic-related research became more multi-faceted, but linguistics and the study of the Slavs' ethnogenesis continued to dominate¹⁵. Slavonic issues incited little interest in the field of history. To be sure, Poznań University did now have

¹¹ A.F. Grabski, *Zarys historii*, pp. 198ff.

¹² Ibidem, p. 229; K.A. Makowski, *Jews in Polish*, pp. 103–104.

¹³ Since 1972 the Department of History of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań has been publishing the journal "Studia Historica Slavo-Germanica".

¹⁴ See, for example, J. Kozik, *Między reakcją a rewolucją. Studia z dziejów ukraińskiego ruchu narodowego w Galicji 1848–1849*, Kraków 1975; M. Iwanicki, *Oświata i szkolnictwo ukraińskie w Polsce 1918–39*, Siedlce 1975; M. Papierzyńska-Turek, *Sprawa ukraińska w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1922–1926*, Kraków 1979.

¹⁵ T. Lehr-Splawiński, *Zarys dziejów*, pp. 32ff.

a Chair of the History of the Western Slavs, and the Chair of East European History was also reactivated. But the former existed only until the beginning of the 1960's, while in 1950 the latter was transformed into the Chair of the History of the Nations of the USSR. Chairs with the same profile also arose at this point at the Jagiellonian University and at Warsaw University, as well as in the Polish Academy of Sciences. The historians occupying these chairs devoted themselves primarily to the history of Ruthenia and Russia, and in Poznań additionally to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Lithuania. At Wrocław University, a few historians developed an interest in the history of Bohemia, the result of which was "*Historia Czechosłowacji*" (The History of Czechoslovakia) published in 1969¹⁶. Since the 1950's, the Western Institute in Poznań also studied the history of this country¹⁷. In addition, one should note that Polish émigré scholarly circles also studied Slavonic issues, especially the relations between Poles and the eastern Slavs. Of particular note here is the Literary Institute in France headed by Jerzy Giedroyc which published two widely-read journals – "*Zeszyty Historyczne*" and "*Kultura*".

The trends in historical research described above found expression in the educational process. Before World War II, the concept of "national education" was pre-eminent. It emphasized the Polish nation's dominant role in the country's history, a critical assessment of national minorities, and the inculcation of Catholic principles in students. The subject and sole causative force in domestic history were the Poles and only the Poles. This educational program did in fact aim at removing from the Polish historical consciousness any awareness of the other nationalities inhabiting the Polish lands. History textbooks from this period fully reflected this conception. The situation was similar after World War II. The academic and school textbooks that were mandatory up to the end of the 1970's also had a decidedly polonocentric character. All of them portrayed in principal only the history of the Poles. The other nationalities inhabiting the Polish lands went completely unnoticed. The idea of a multinational state was condemned, while the advantages of a uninationa state were touted¹⁸. Other Slavs generally had an insignificant place in school textbooks. That being said, the authors, who propagated the myth of the German as the "centuries-old enemy," frequently appealed to the "brother" Slavonic nations, whereby

¹⁶ R. Heck, M. Orzechowski, *Historia Czechosłowacji*, Wrocław 1969.

¹⁷ Special unit was established in the Institute headed by Stanisław Zajchowski and then by Jerzy Kozeński.

¹⁸ K.A. Makowski, *Jews in Polish*, pp. 102ff. See also Z. Mazur, *Obraz Niemiec w polskich podręcznikach szkolnych do nauczania historii 1945–1989*, Poznań 1995, pp. 93ff.

they accented Poland's central role as Slavdom's defender against the Germanic drive to the east. Muscovite-Russian issues tended to dominate in the textbooks, mainly, however, in the context of Polish history.

Certain changes in Slavonic studies in Poland did begin to occur at the beginning of the 1980's, with the creation of the *Solidarity* movement. They became even more pronounced after the transformation in 1989. Seeking to eliminate so-called "blank spots" in Polish historiography, Polish historians began to take an interest, inter alia, in the previously marginalized national and ethnic minorities. Generally speaking, however, the political transformation in Poland did not have a beneficial impact on the development of the Polish historical sciences, which – and this is not only my opinion – now find themselves in a state of crisis. Many negative phenomena substantiate this view: an increasing deprofessionalization and provincialization of Polish historical writing, its traditionalism, and, in particular, the disappearance of methodological discourse. From the mid-1950's, as I have already emphasized, Polish historiography did gradually modernize, adding new research fields (social history, later Jewish history and the history of women). Today, however, these same fields find themselves outside the main current of historiography. After 1989, political history regained its pre-eminent position in Poland. Moreover, this is political history in the form of the traditional event-driven narrative. To make matters worse, Polish historians are becoming more and more involved in politics themselves.

The interest in nationality questions that emerged in the 1980's and 1990's has proven to be lasting, however. Research on German-Polish relations has continued, and historians have begun to study Polish-Jewish relations. Many works have appeared that address the history of the Slavs living in the Polish lands – many of them, it is worth noting, written by representatives of these minorities¹⁹. They deal above all with Ukrainians and the sensitive topic of Polish-Ukrainian relations during the first half of the 20th century. Byelorussians, Czechs, and Slovaks have attracted interest as well. Another category of numerous publications is devoted to religious groups – the Uniates, the Orthodox, and the Bohemian Brethren. Unfortunately, quantity does not always make for quality, and the level of these publications varies widely.

Although Polish Slavistics has been developing quite briskly since 1989, it has not undergone any significant structural changes. The field continues to be defined in a traditional way – philologically. One of the leading Polish Slavists, Ryszard

¹⁹ See, for example, I. Hałagida, *Ukraińcy na zachodnich i północnych ziemiach Polski 1947–1957*, Warszawa 2002; O. Łatyszonek, *Od Rusinów Białych do Białorusinów. U źródeł białoruskiej idei narodowej*, Białystok 2006.

Łużny, summarized in 1995 the output of the Polish postwar Slavonic studies. And he asserted unequivocally that the field consists of Slavonic philologies, secondarily enriched by elements of the history and culture of the Slavonic nations²⁰. I can state myself that, in practical terms, we are still talking about the earliest history of the Slavs. It is only in the past ten years that certain changes in this field have become evident, as seen, for example, in the research underway at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences devoted to national stereotypes and national identity²¹.

Historians who work on the Slavs continue to do so primarily as individuals, although they have gained some institutional support. However, only two social science centers have an interdisciplinary character: the Center for East European Studies of the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw, which has been in existence since 1990, and the Eastern Institute in the Faculty of History at Poznań University, which was created in 1991. Neither one of them, however, deals exclusively with the Slavonic countries, but rather with the entire region of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as the Caucasus and central Asia. After 1989, the chairs of the history of the USSR in the university history departments were rechristened chairs of the history of Eastern Europe. New chairs were also created – for example, the Chair of Balkan History at Poznań University and the Chair of Ukrainian Studies at the Jagiellonian University. Outside the formal university structure of particular note is the Institute of East-Central Europe, created in 1991 in Lublin. Its founder and director is Jerzy Kłoczowski. There are numerous scholarly journals, among others "Balcanica Posnaniensia" and "Lituano-Slavica Posnanien-sia" published at Poznań University or "Przegląd Wschodni" published at Warsaw University, all of which have to a large extent historical character.

These changes have found expression in the significant growth during the last 27 years in the number of publications related to the history of the Slavs. Among over 100 significant books in this field published in this time, ones dealing with Russia and the USSR continue to predominate, just as before. Yugoslavia and the states created in its wake have also incited significant interest among historians, as have

²⁰ R. Łużny, *Słowianoznawstwo wobec przeobrażeń ideowych i metodologicznych w humanistyce polskiej okresu powojennego*, Prace Komisji Wschodnioeuropejskiej PAU vol. 2 (1995), p. 21.

²¹ See, for example, O. Hnatiuk, *Pożegnanie z imperium. Ukraińskie dyskusje o tożsamości*, Lublin 2003; E. Gołachowska, *Jak mówić do Pana Boga? Wielojęzyczność katolików na Białorusi na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, Warszawa 2012; L. Moroz-Grzelak, *Bracia Słowianie. Wizje wspólnoty a rzeczywistość*, Warszawa 2011.

Ukraine and Belorussia. Besides textbooks, works on modern and contemporary history predominate, and they focus primarily on political history, the history of political thought, and the history of religion. They often involve Poles' relations with other Slavs. These works tend to be traditional in both form and content. Modern trends are rare in this field, a fact that, to some extent, results from the weakness of universal historiography in Poland during the last years.

International cooperation is highly developed today in the area of Slavonic studies. After more than ten years, however, it is not hard to see that this cooperation is limited above all to education. Very rarely do we see joint research projects – yet another negative aspect of Polish historiography today. One of the positive exceptions in this regard is the aforementioned institute in Lublin. Historians have engaged in dialogue thanks to the creation of bilateral textbook commissions: for example the Polish-Russian and Polish-Ukrainian commissions modeled on the Polish-German Textbook Commission created in the 1970's. Up to now, however, the effect of their activities has been rather minimal²². One example of fruitful changes in Polish historiography as well as of beneficial international cooperation can be seen in the interesting symposium held at the 17th General Congress of Polish Historians in Cracow in 2004, "About Us Without Us," which portrayed the place and view of Polish history in the historiography of other countries such as Russia, Belorussia, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic²³.

In addition, one should note that the important forums to discuss ideas on the broadly understood history of the Slavdom from medieval to contemporary times became Central-European and East European Commissions of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as Commission of Slavonic Studies within the Committee of Historical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (currently acting as the Team for Slavonic and East European Studies). An important achievement of the Commission of Slavonic Studies was the special panel organized at the 18th General Congress of Polish Historians in Olsztyn in 2009. The discussions in previous meetings and during the panel focused on three issues: scope of the concept of Slavdom (also in relation to the concept of "Eastern Europe/East-Central Europe"),

²² See W.A. Serczyk, *Polsko-ukraińska komisja podręcznikowa, przeszłość – stan obecny – nadzieje*, [in:] *Polska i Ukraina w podręcznikach szkolnych i akademickich*, ed. W. Bonusiak, Rzeszów 2001, pp. 9–18; L. Czechowska, *Klucz do sukcesu dwustronnych komisji podręcznikowych*, *Kultura i Edukacja*, nr 3 (2014), pp. 152–183.

²³ The papers were later published: „O nas bez nas”. *Historia Polski w historiografiach obcojęzycznych*, ed. W. Molik, H. Żaliński, Poznań 2007.

the identity of the Slavs and historiography on the Slavic problems. The fruit of these debates was a volume of studies published in 2013²⁴.

The situation in education has, unfortunately, not changed much relative to the pre-1989 period. Students at a few universities have the possibility to specialize in the history of Eastern Europe (e.g., in Warsaw and Cracow). Both the university and school textbooks, however, continue to manifest extreme polonocentrism. In the sections concerning general history the only Slavonic topics addressed more broadly are ones dealing with Russia. School textbooks have become unusually laconic over the past years, so that they now resemble more and more lexicons. A significant portion of their inadequacies stems from their general lack of modern traits. Textbooks have traditionally concentrated on political and military history, while marginalizing cultural and especially social phenomena²⁵.

In summary, it is necessary to note that after 1989 progress did take place in Slavonic studies in Poland. Unfortunately, this progress is mainly a matter of quantity. The quality of research, which is conducted primarily by individuals, leaves much to be desired. Traditionalism continues to dominate. Monodisciplinary approaches overshadow multidisciplinary ones. There are few projects with international reach. Given the many problems afflicting Polish historiography, which I sketched out above, it is thus hard to anticipate a radical change for the better in this area during the foreseeable future.

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²⁴ *Słowianie – idea i rzeczywistość. Zbiór studiów*, ed. K.A. Makowski, M. Saczyńska, Poznań 2013. Similar questions touched in his short sketch A.L. Zachariasz, *Słowiańszczyzna. Mit czy rzeczywistość?* ΣΟΦΙΑ, 6 (2006), pp. 25–44.

²⁵ K.A. Makowski: *Jews in Polish*, p. 109.

Research and education in Slavonic studies in Poland – past and present

Education and research into the history of Slavonic studies in Poland in the past and in the present have taken place on three levels: the general developmental trends in Polish historiography as the leading Slavic historiography, the scale of interest in the other Slavs living in the Polish Commonwealth and the positions of the other Slavic states and nations in Polish historiography and historical education. Research into the history of Slavonic studies in Poland enjoys a noble tradition. Its origin goes back to the late 18th and the early 19th centuries. The research gained institutional support in the second half of the 19th century. In the 20th century, Polish Slavonic studies were rejuvenated in the interwar period, after 1945 (to the largest degree) and after 1989. This was reflected primarily in the notably increasing number of publications. Sadly, the quality of the research remains inferior.

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