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## About the Need for Community Self-Reflection. The New Formula and the Program of the XX General Assembly of Polish Historians

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*O potrzebie środowiskowej autorefleksji.*

*Założenia i podstawa programowa XX Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich*

### ABSTRACT

This is an original attempt to answer the question of why the community of Polish historians needs general assemblies. In this context, the author presents the new formula and the program of the XX General Assembly of Polish Historians, convened to Lublin by the Polish Historical Society for September 18–20, 2019, marking the 450th anniversary of The Union of Lublin and the 30th anniversary of the Autumn of Nations that resulted in a peaceful dismantling of the post-Yalta system in Europe.

**Key words:** the 20th General Assembly of Polish Historians, the Polish Historical Society, self-awareness of the historians' community, social responsibility of historian

**Bear with us, while we think**  
The Slow Science Manifesto, 2010<sup>1</sup>

Why does the community of historians still need general assemblies? In the age of 'pointosis' and 'grantosis', which is omnipotent in Poland in the 21st century, where every professional activity has to translate to the number of points gained and financial means acquired for research, this question is heard more and more frequently and loudly. The authentic, in my opinion, concern it manifests, is that for the future of assemblies

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<sup>1</sup> <http://slow-science.org/> [access: 15 IV 2018].

themselves, as well as the usefulness of preserving their previous form. This text is an attempt at seeking the answer to this fundamental question.

Kraków 1880, Lwów 1890, Kraków 1900, Poznań 1925, Warsaw 1930, Vilnius 1935, Wrocław 1948, Kraków 1958, Warsaw 1963, Lublin 1969, Toruń 1974, Katowice 1979, Poznań 1984, Łódź 1989, Gdańsk 1994, Wrocław 1999, Kraków 2004, Olsztyn 2009, and Szczecin 2014 – meant subsequent stops on the way of development in Polish historiography. Watched from a perspective – some of them turned out to be important, whereas the significance of others would be difficult to defend today. It is time for another assembly: this time we are going to meet in Lublin, from 18 to 20 September 2019. We – the organisers of this assembly of historians in Lublin – faced the problem of whether assemblies are not an anachronism from the perspective of the modern times, a relic that belongs to the past, which is supported only by the esteemed Polish Historical Society, every five years trying to reanimate – with increasing difficulty, let us admit – the extinct ‘volcanoes’ of the community to cause an intellectual eruption... The last ‘flame’ was seen in Kraków in 2004, and it still smouldered five years later in Olsztyn. Will there seriously be anyone to admit to have seen the true fire at the assembly in Szczecin? What great emotions accompanied, for example, the audience of the paper on the genealogy of Copernicus, presented in the prime time, at the opening of the 19th General Assembly of Polish Historians?

Participation in the general assembly long ago ceased to be a ‘history festival’, even more so the journey for ‘the golden fleece’, where one communes with historical science of the highest grade and seeks answers to fundamental questions. For years, we have been attending, complaining about the overloaded programme, the general exiguity, the eternal time-trouble and the lack of invigorating discussions. We agree to this as a community. Most often we do it in silence. In order to grant everyone who wants to appear at the sessions the right to ‘vote’ (**otherwise they will not come** – this is the main argument of the PS of the organisers), we prepare some special ‘eve’ sessions for them, preceding the Assembly, and at it we allow the flood of papers, which nobody, except for the interested person, actually feels like listening to<sup>2</sup>. It has become a standard to drop into one’s own item on the agenda at the Assembly, present it and leave in haste. In this particular case one does not even need to pay the assembly fee...

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<sup>2</sup> For how can one listen to something that amounts to twenty pages in writing (and it sometimes happens so that there are many more), and the referee is trying to read (rather than present) it in twenty minutes, because this is how much time is predicted for that person in the programme. After all, this is the standard of the assemblies!

We ourselves are to blame, since by acting in this manner /enabling this, we depreciate this greatest 'history festival', as our Masters called the General Assemblies of Polish Historians. We need a GREAT CHANGE in this matter!<sup>3</sup> Alas, have we matured enough for this? Will we have enough courage? Honestly, I don't know! Perhaps the 20th General Assembly of Polish Historians in Lublin will turn out to be a failure of the Organising Committee and my own (because I take full responsibility for the concept of this Assembly as the President), or maybe it will become a shock to the extent of another 20th Assembly... – the future will show.

Today I know one thing: such breakthrough discussions, great and fundamental questions about history, which used to be posed at the assemblies of Polish historians, we yearn for intellectually, and they are worth coming back to. I was ultimately convinced about this by the course of the conference on the crucial issues in Polish and general historiography, inspired by the famous *The History Manifesto*, organised in 2016 in Kraków by professors Andrzej Chwalba and Krzysztof Zamorski<sup>4</sup>. Well-prepared papers, ordered with appropriate advance by the organisers and a lot of time for discussion, turned out to be a simple recipe for success of the entire undertaking. This is when an authentic need for reflection in the community was revealed, for community self-reflection on the state of Polish historiography and the challenges faced nowadays by the historians. The one-day meeting at the Jagiellonian University only emphasised this need, just like did the course of the *Forum of Contemporary History Scholars*, organised under the auspices of the Polish Historical Society and the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in December 2016<sup>5</sup>. The hunger for consideration in the community, a community self-reflection, creates for Lublin and the Organising Committee of the 20th GAPH a chance for new opening and suggesting such format/formula of the assembly, which would favour, or even enforce, the debate on the matters significant to the community of historians. (Within the group of the organisers we quietly add that this is also an opportunity to therefore cover for the intellectual poorness of the 10th assembly, which took place almost fifty years ago in our city and therefore cause the assembly in Lublin to be remembered differently...).

My personal experience reaches back to the assembly in Toruń (1974), where I had the opportunity to participate as a student of history at the

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<sup>3</sup> The concurrence with the main subject of the 20th GAPH in Lublin is in this sentence coincidental, but it is also has a symbolic dimension.

<sup>4</sup> The papers presented at this conference found their textualisation in the 47th volume of 'Historyka. Studia Metodologiczne' (2017).

<sup>5</sup> The information on the Forum and the record of discussions can be found at: [www.pth.org.pl](http://www.pth.org.pl)

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, whereas active participation, including presentation of papers, dates back from the assembly in Katowice in 1979 to the most recent one in Szczecin in 2014, but this is not what is most important here. I was educated in the historiographic tradition of Marian Henryk Serejski and Andrzej Feliks Grabski, who in the general assemblies saw a reflection of both the most important trends in historical science, and the current subjects, which were then experienced by the historians and experienced by the nation, whose history they were telling. They both emphasised the significance and the non-banality of disputes carried on there, the three former ones in particular. There was Tadeusz Korzon at the assembly in Lwów in 1890, demanding apoliticism of history, separation of historical studies *'from politics, from any religious proselytism whatsoever, from any economic theories, diplomatic manoeuvres... History has to be a simple, real science, it should satisfy some demands in the very same way as botany, zoology, mineralogy'*<sup>6</sup>. And, polemising with this thesis ten years later, Szymon Askenazy, primarily emphasising the national and independence dimension and value of telling about the native, also the most recent – at that time 19th century – history. The clash of these two visions: the necessary autonomisation of history from the current politics and combining them in the name of common interests, are to some degree *constans* – a constant of reference for Polish historiography in the 20th and 21st centuries.

As far as the inter-war period is concerned in this context, the significance of the assembly in Warsaw in 1930 is emphasised, with a great presentation by Marcei Handelsman. Its fragment is worth quoting here:

*The contemporary reality imposed on each generation a different attitude towards the past and offered foundations for different synthesis. /.../ Currently, after optimism, it is time for realism. This is demanded by the worldly attitude towards the tasks of history. It requires bold duty of a scholar disregarding the encumbrances with the past. This is demanded by the need of one's own nation. For the Polish nation demands a single thing from us, its teachers: truth, even if it is most bitter, most brutal, but an honest truth, explicit, without banalities, a "real" truth. For it is only the knowledge of stern reality, one that exists, and actually one that existed, that a citizen of a great, free nation, can use to educate oneself as a conscious creator of one's fate, the fate of the nation and the state*<sup>7</sup>.

One can ponder, of course, to what extent do the words of the author of *Rozwój narodowości nowoczesnej*, addressed to the community of historians

<sup>6</sup> T. Korzon, *Błędy historiografii naszej w budowaniu dziejów Polski*, Lwów 1890. Quote from: M.H. Serejski, *Przeszłość a terażniejszość. Studia i szkice historiograficzne*. Ossolineum, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1965, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> Quote from: A.F. Grabski, *Zarys historii historiografii polskiej*, Poznań 2000, pp. 169–170. The entire assembly presentation was reprinted in: M. Handelsman, *Historycy. Portrety i profile*, Warszawa 1937.

in 1930, maintain their value and validity today, in the age of omnipresent post-truth, but this problem can also be presented in a different way: to what extent have we replaced this necessary realism with conformism? Conformism as a survival strategy – this is a subject for community self-reflection! I hope that it will not be omitted at the assembly in Lublin, in the course of seeking an answer to the question: What history do the Polish people need nowadays?

As far as the post-war assemblies are concerned, the significance of the assembly in Wrocław in 1948 is usually emphasised, as well as the uniqueness of the one in 1958.<sup>8</sup> The former was the last breath of the freedom of speech and studies on the period of ‘mistakes and perversions’, not only in Polish historiography, the latter a reckoning with Stalinism and the spirit (or rather a spectre) of ‘Otwock’<sup>9</sup>, which became a symbol of intellectual enslavement for an entire generation of historians.

Further turning points were, in my opinion, missing, although the 16th GAPH in Wrocław in 1999 convened under the banner of ‘Turning points in history’. Its intention was ‘*not only to conduct a review of Polish historical science, settle with so very twisted past, full of intricacies, but also to define the tasks, answer the challenges posed for the Polish historians in the entire trend of general history by both the nearest and the more distant, future*’<sup>10</sup>. However, seeking these settlements and ground-breaking findings in the presented papers would be in vain. In the Assembly Manifest it was announced that: ‘*The 16th General Assembly of Polish Historians will make an attempt at an assessment of the historical path of Poles and Poland in the passing millennium, the output and deficiencies of Polish history science at the threshold of the new*

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<sup>8</sup> This is, for example, a statement of Prof. Feliks Kiryk in ‘Dziennik Polski’ about the assembly in Kraków in 1958: ‘In the opinion of many contemporary scholars it was one of the most interesting post-war assemblies, as it criticised the period of mistakes and perversions and presented the results of the research achievements in the period of the Thaw (lasting from 1956). The preference of economic and social history, with simultaneous neglect for the history of culture, genealogy and heraldry, as well as political history, was recognised as one-sided and harmful’. <http://www.dziennikpolski24.pl/artykul/1914248,historia-zjazdow,id,t.html> [access: 15 IV 2018].

<sup>9</sup> Clearly, I refer here to the so-called 1st Methodological Conference of Polish Historians, assembled at the turn of 1951 to Otwock under the patronage of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. The grudge of many older historians against methodology as such had its roots precisely in its association with ‘Otwock’, for it is under the banner of ‘methodology’ that indoctrination attempts were made in their vulgar version of Marxism, and ‘detachment’ of this association was in many cases very difficult. Cf. R. Stobiecki, *Pierwsza Konferencja Metodologiczna Historyków Polskich*, in: *Skryte oblicze systemu komunistycznego. U źródeł zła*, eds. R. Bäcker, P. Hubner, Warszawa 1997.

<sup>10</sup> XVI Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich we Wrocławiu. *Przełomy w historii*, Wrocław 1999, p. 6.

*Millennium, its place in the life of the Polish nation and the Polish Republic*<sup>11</sup>, but little has come of these promises at the stage of implementation. One that definitely went down better – not just in my memory – was the assembly in Kraków in 2004. This is what Andrzej Chwalba said in an interview for ‘Gazeta Krakowska’ about the purposes sought by the organisers on the eve of opening of the 17th GAPH convened in Kraków under the banner of ‘Tradition and modernity – identity’:

*Assemblies have from the very beginning, that is, from the first assembly, which took place in Kraków in 1880, been the places of important debate, concerning the fate of Poland in the past and the prospects for the future. /.../ The subjects of the sessions are selected so that they can be of interest also to non-professionals. We will ponder on the Polish tradition and national identity in the context of common Europe. On the extent and the way in which the national identity legitimised the state, based on the example of Poland and Europe. What were and what are the basic components of national identity – material, intellectual, and spiritual components. We will be debating on what will happen to us, what can happen to us when we are going to become a part of the European Union. Will our original contribution to the European and global heritage, recognised for example by historians, not dissolve in rich European identity? Will the quickly developing post-industrial civilisation not make it more difficult for us to maintain contact with our memory and ancestors, our anniversaries. The doubts of millions of our compatriots should be addressed, among others, by historians, who, referring to history, should indicate to what extent their concerns and fears are justified and how they can defend against them*<sup>12</sup>.

The diagnostic and therapeutic – with regard to the state of historical awareness of the Poles A.D. 2004 – nature of the assembly in Kraków turned out to be its advantage and enabled such conduct of plenary debates, that they went down in our memory for longer as an adequate answer to the most current question of that time, regarding the mutual relations between ‘Polishness’ and ‘Europeanness’. More importantly, the assembly rather provided ‘food for thought’ than ‘ready answers’. This is precisely what we would like to maintain in the 2019 debate in Lublin on the GREAT CHANGE.

Feliks Kiryk aptly noted that: ‘*The assembly slogans were usually formulated so that they would be favoured by the decision-makers and therefore grant access to the state funds. However, they [assemblies] have never been the mouthpiece of the party or government. They retained (with an exception of a few presentations of official historians of the Polish People’s Republic) independence of thought, they were critical both with regard to the distant, and the closest past*’<sup>13</sup>. Although many years have passed since those times, the observation of Professor

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> A. Chwalba, *Będziem Polakami*. An interview for ‘Gazeta Krakowska’ of 16 September 2004. Reprinted in: A. Chwalba, *Nie ufam własnej pamięci*, Kraków 2006, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> F. Kiryk, *op. cit.*

Kiryk quoted above inclines me to, just in case, provide an explanation on the slogan of the 20th GAPH – ‘THE GREAT CHANGE. HISTORY IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES...’.

Luckily, I have many witnesses that both the concept of our Assembly itself and its leitmotif were formulated directly after the assembly in Szczecin, as early as in 2014, so several months before the so-called GOOD CHANGE. The coincidence is therefore unintended, but I am aware of the significance of this connotation *post factum*<sup>14</sup>. Why the Great Change then? Our intention was to emphasise that we would meet in Lublin from 18 to 20 September 2019:

- 450 years after enacting of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, which meant a GREAT CHANGE – not only related to the system – in our part of Europe;
- 150 years from a GREAT CHANGE, which was granting women the right to vote (Wyoming, USA; in Poland from 1918). This is a good pretext to ask about the role of women in history, about the Great Change, which was the appearance of Polish women in the public sphere for our history (especially since none of our previous Assemblies has dealt with this matter seriously);
- on the 30th anniversary of the Polish Transformation, which initiated the ‘Autumn of Nations’ – a GREAT CHANGE in the history of Europe, consisting in peaceful dismantling of the post-Yalta system;
- and on the 50th anniversary of the 10th General Assembly of Polish Historians in Lublin (1969), we should therefore ask ourselves the following question: how has the GREAT CHANGE occurred in the course of these fifty years in Polish historiography?

In addition, the historical community faced the GREAT CHANGE, brought by the age of the Internet, both in the sphere of technology – the common digitisation, as well as society (our students belong to the so-called e-generation) and it must face entirely new challenges (*e-History* and *Public History* as challenges for the community). It is therefore no surprise that it is precisely the reflection on the Major Change in the abovementioned problem areas, as well as others, significant to particular fields and sub-disciplines of historical science, that will be the leitmotif of the discussions and debates at the assembly, both at the plenary sessions and in the particular sections. With the awareness of the fact that, as Władysław A. Serczyk put it very nicely, ‘we only get to know the past

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<sup>14</sup> All the more, as the Organising Committee of the 20th GAPH in Lublin, we reject any suspicions of cheap opportunism or seeking – as Kiryk put it – ‘easier access to state funds’, although such fake news are probably going to spread in the public space...

when we go through the looking glass. On the side where we started our journey in the past years, there's nothing left anymore, as all the elements and properties of the reality possible to study that used to exist here, "in front of the looking glass", which are currently analysed, found themselves in the single or multiple reflection, which is sometimes created by the historians themselves.<sup>15</sup>

Our own intention as the Organising Committee of the 20th GAPH in Lublin, we expressed to the fullest extent in the *Assembly Manifesto adopted in March 2015*:

*We convene the jubilee 20th General Assembly of Polish Historians in Lublin on the 450th anniversary of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, which for the nations of our part of Europe meant a long historical path, leading – as John Paul II said – “from the Union of Lublin to the European Union” and on the 30th anniversary of the great transformation of 1989, referred to as the “Autumn of Nations”, which for the end of the 20th century was no less significant than the “People’s Spring” was for the 19th century.*

*How to study these and other great changes in history? How to capture their historical importance? How to cognitively seek the truth on the processes of transformation, and structures, and simultaneously bear in mind the words of Zbigniew Herbert, that History is in the hand of a man who is standing straight, has regained honour and dignity, and will not let himself be humiliated. These questions will determine the problem axis of the symposia and the intellectual climate of the debates and discussions at the 20th General Assembly of Polish Historians.*

*We will be meeting in Lublin from 19 to 21 September 2019, exactly 50 years after the 10th GAPH, which also took place in Lublin. This encourages reflection on the changes which occurred within this time in Polish historiography itself, as well as on the challenges that we are currently facing. A reliable balance of the achievements and failures of the past half-century of academic historiography in Poland and its current position in European and global science, is still ahead of us and it is finally the time to deal with this task.*

*Heraclitus taught that “change is the only constant”, which was accepted by the servants of Clio with full understanding, but the rate at which these changes are currently occurring, in the life of a single generation of historians, means a true revolution. We are talking here about both the great changes within the scope of making sources available by means of their digitisation on a mass scale and publishing online, by means of a great change within the scope of presence of history (in highly varied forms, from online forums and blogs to specialised portals and e-journals) in the virtual reality (e-History), to a radical change within the scopes of needs and expectations of our students with regard to academic history. “To be »-e«, or not to be. That is the question” – this is a real question and choice faced by every historian nowadays. It is therefore clear to us that this range of problems cannot be missing at the 20th Assembly.*

*Some people claim that our historiography is in a crisis, and this is in the times when the Polish people live and breathe history, it permeates our everyday life, it is constantly present in the public life, and the state backs history policy as the foundation of patriotic education. Even if someone does not share this belief, the search for an answer to the question regarding the history that the Poles need nowadays is both a duty and the order of the day for the entire historical community. All the more, when the native history policy is confronted with history policies of our neighbours, and more*

<sup>15</sup> W.A. Serczyk, *Historia z drugiej strony lustra*, in: *Historyk i HISTORIA. Studia dedykowane pamięci Prof. Mirosława Francicia*, eds. A. Walaszek, K. Żamorski, Kraków 2005, p. 33.



*broadly, with the European history policy, as seeking the sources of European identity is nowadays becoming highly significant in the context of the clash of civilisations which we are witnesses to.*

As you can see, the programme refers both to the assembly tradition, related to the celebration of great anniversaries<sup>16</sup> (450th anniversary of the Union of Lublin and the 30th anniversary of the 'Autumn of Nations'), and seeking answers to questions – posed by the organisers of the assembly – that are fundamental to history and historians. For with regard to the latter issue we share the opinion of Antoni Mączak, who, pondering on '**What is important in historical science?**', wrote: '**I am convinced that questions should be formed more boldly and ambitiously**'<sup>17</sup>. One can say that the call 'more boldly' and 'more ambitiously' has accompanied the Organising Committee since the very beginning of the works on the 20th GAPH. We treated this also as a directive, when we were 'orchestrating' the assembly conceptually into five thematic plenary panels and when we spoke to the coordinators of particular sections, within which the assembly will be debating.

This is how I would like to move on smoothly to the discussion of the new format of our Assembly. We found the formula of the assembly we came across unacceptable. Instead of the multiple papers practised hitherto, the sessions of each section will have a nature of discussions on **major subjects** of significance to a particular age, agreed upon in the course of reflection in the community, which we have been conducting over several months within the framework of particular task teams and sections. We entrusted the organisation of these works to the coordinators selected jointly by the OC of the 20th GAPH and the General Board of the Polish Historical Society. Each of the panels and each section will have its coordinator in Lublin, in order to ensure proper two-way communication<sup>18</sup>. We also determined that the sessions in sections will be preceded by **introductory papers**, ordered by the Organising Committee as a result of conclusion of an open competition on their preparation, whereas the papers themselves will be 'published' on the assembly website three months prior to the Assembly, in order to facilitate good preparation for the discussion. At the Assembly itself the person presenting the paper will only have 15 minutes

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<sup>16</sup> The first assembly was called on the 400th anniversary of the death of Jan Długosz, the third one in 1900 – celebrated the restoration of the Jagiellonian University, the unrealised assembly in 1910 was supposed to happen under the slogan of the anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald, in 1930 the leitmotif was the 100th anniversary of the November Uprising, etc.

<sup>17</sup> A. Mączak, *Historia jest we mnie*, Warszawa 2004, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> The list of coordinators can be found at the assembly at: [www.xxpzhp.umcs.lublin.pl](http://www.xxpzhp.umcs.lublin.pl)

to present his or her theses in the form of a multimedia presentation, in order to grant a real opportunity to conduct a serious, not illusory, debate. This is a significant *novum* as far as the previous form of the assembly is concerned. I admit that we have come across the greatest resistance from the community with regard to this matter. The other such controversial issue turned out to be the number of sections. The previous habits and strong lobby of particular sub-disciplines and specialisations in history caused numerous tensions and at a certain point it even seemed that this might threaten the integrity of the entire concept of the 20th GAPH, but with substantial assistance of the General Board of the PHS the Organising Committee managed to harness this 'element' – ultimately we will deliberate in sessions in five thematic panels and nine sections.

We also predicted space and time for a special **poster session** in the course of the 20th GAPH, during which the interested research teams and doctoral students will be able to present the results of their works on boards and monitors prepared specifically for this purpose at the Lublin Conference Centre and the Centre for the Meeting of Cultures.

The sections and their leading subjects at the 20th General Assembly of Polish Historians are the following:

#### ANTIQUITY:

##### ANTIC AND MODERN DEMOCRACIES

Change or continuation? Constancy and revolutions in ancient times

#### MIDDLE AGES:

IDEAS, CONCEPTS AND THEORIES STIMULATING THE MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN THE LAST HALF-CENTURY (DIVIDED INTO EARLY AND LATE MIDDLE AGES)

#### MODERN HISTORY

POLISH HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE EARLY MODERN ERA AFTER 1989, AN ATTEMPT AT EVALUATION AND GUIDELINES FOR THE FUTURE

#### 19TH CENTURY HISTORY

FROM NOBLENES TO MODERNITY? POLISH COMMUNITY IN THE FACE OF CIVILIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE 19TH CENTURY

#### THE INTERWAR PERIOD AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

SHOULD WE DEVELOP A NEW SYNTHESIS OF THE HISTORY OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC AND IF SO, HOW SHOULD WE DO IT?

THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSAL DIMENSION OF THE POLISH EXPERIENCE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

## THE 20TH century after 1945

PEOPLE'S POLAND. CONSTANCY AND CHANGE

PEOPLE'S POLAND IN THE WORLD – TYPICAL OR EXCEPTIONAL? 1944-1989

## THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE TRANSFORMATION

'THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE PAST'. FUTURE AND ITS ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD ON POLISH TRANSFORMATION.

## THE DIDACTICISM OF HISTORY – MEMORY IN HISTORICAL EDUCATION

MEMORY IN HISTORICAL EDUCATION – CONCEPTS, CONTEXTS, EXPERIENCES

## AUXILIARY SCIENCES OF HISTORY – A NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

FROM A MEDIEVAL DOCUMENT AND CHRONICLE TO AN E-TEXT

TOWARDS THE VISUALISATION OF THE PAST – IMAGE, SIGN, ARTEFACT IN HISTORICAL STUDIES

As at this stage of preparations to the assembly we already **have a guarantee of publication of *Pamiętnik XX PZHP w Lublinie* [The Journal of the 20th GAPH in Lublin], we, as the Organising Committee, endeavoured for the Assembly itself also to be registered in the WEB OF SCIENCE, as a result of which all the published papers and voices in the discussion will be able to count on being awarded 25 pts.** This will develop the prestige of the 20th GAPH, but also constitute the answer to the sceptical voices questioning whether there is a point in coming to the assembly at all if one has no paper. There is – for many reasons. Including the one that after all anyone can provide a good comment in the discussion, which will later make it into the *Journal*. And the participants will be given enough time to prepare for this, as the full texts of all the papers will be published on the assembly website well in advance, as early as in June 2019.

For obvious reasons, our particular attention as the Organising Committee is paid to five thematic panels, open to all the participants of the Assembly<sup>19</sup>. They are the ones to encourage community self-reflection. I will try to bring the idea of each one of them forward.

For the opening of the assembly we proposed panel I – **The Heritage of the Union of Lublin**, moderated by Professors Hubert Łaskiewicz (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin) and Norman Davies (Oxford University) with participation of eminent foreign historians:

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<sup>19</sup> In their course there will be no simultaneous sessions in sections.

Jūratė Kiaupienė (Lithuania), Robert Frost (United Kingdom), Ivan Hrycak (Ukraine) and Hienadz Sahanovič (Belarus). Seeking the key to this conversation, we decided to follow in the footsteps of Antoni Mączak and ask '*Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: what allowed it to develop and grow, and then continue – until the end of the 18th century – in an increasingly dangerous environment? What was it distinguished by from the background of European monarchies? How did the institution of the Commonwealth serve the state? How did the state serve the society? And finally, the society, meaning who?*'<sup>20</sup>. We hope that such approach and transnational perspective on the Union of Lublin will turn out to be enlivening and inspiring not only to the specialists, which will also be reflected in the discussion.

We will end the first day of the Assembly with panel II – **History of Poland from the point of view of women**. We are presenting here – for the first time on such scale in the history of general assemblies – the issue of the presence of women in the history of Poland and in Polish historiography, aware of this dualism: women in the role of actors in historical events and historians, telling about history from the point of view of women. How to study the history of women? How to write the history of women? How to popularise the history of women? – these are the three questions we have posed for starters. They were immediately followed by others: is gender of the researcher significant in the telling of a story? Also, what image of the history of Poland emerges from the studies conducted by female historians, and does it differ significantly from the 'male' depiction? The pretext for their posing was the book *Dzieje kobiet w Polsce. Dyskusja wokół przyszłej syntezy*<sup>21</sup>. The concept of this panel was developed by three female historians: Dobrochna Kałwa, Agata Mirek and Marta Sikorska-Kowalska, which will also moderate the discussion. I admit that I look forward to present to them – following Witold Kula – the following problem: 'Can you ask the past the questions, which it has never asked itself?', bearing in mind – of course – his advice that 'Events do not have to be conscious for them to affect the human fate, or even human consciousness'<sup>22</sup>.

The third panel we titled: **Which way to learning about the past? Polish historiography between the 10th and 20th assembly of the Polish Historical Society**, and in a sense it has/could have a settling-diagnostic nature, as far as the path taken by historical science over the course of

<sup>20</sup> A. Mączak, *op. cit.*, pp. 64–65.

<sup>21</sup> *Dzieje kobiet w Polsce. Dyskusje wokół przyszłej syntezy*, ed. K.A. Makowski, Warszawa 2014.

<sup>22</sup> W. Kula, *Rozdziałki*, prepared for print by Nina Assorodobraj-Kula and Marcin Kula. Introduction and annotations added and prepared by Marcin Kula, Warszawa 1996, p. 94.

these fifty years separating both these assemblies in Lublin from each other is concerned. The authors of this concept are in this case Professors Ewa Domańska and Rafał Stobiecki in cooperation with Ewa Solska, PhD.

In the first part of the panel we will be interested in the circumstances accompanying the Assembly in 1969<sup>23</sup>, associated with the tense relations between the authorities and the community of historians, as well as the ideological and historiographical consequences of the meeting in Lublin. Against the background outlined in this way, the participants of the panel will try to answer the question regarding the degree to which the 10th General Assembly of Polish Historians can be treated as a model exemplification of the fates of history and historians in the times of People's Poland. We will also reflect on the strong and weak sides of the studies of historiography of the times of the Polish People's Republic and whether we are still dealing with taboo subjects in them.

In the second part in turn, we would like to focus on the cognitive, theoretical, methodological and ethical challenges faced by Polish historians after 1989. Reflecting on the subject of new ideas in Polish historiography, the panellists will be trying to identify some Polish specificity/innovativeness in the studies conducted within the framework of historical science, for example within the framework of transnational or post-colonial history, economic and social history, historical anthropology, or oral history (to keep only to the most popular subdisciplines), which distinguish them from the international background and could contribute to the promotion of Polish historiography and co-create the global knowledge about the past.

The coordinators of panel IV – **History in the public space. Historical museums** are Robert Kostro, Dariusz Stola and Rafał Wnuk, i.e. the historians who combine the ability to reflect on the area of public history with particular practical experience in this matter. On the other hand, the task of the speakers selected in the competition and the panellists invited by the coordinators will be an attempt to answer the following two questions: (1) *How to present history in museums?* and (2) *Who do the history museums belong to?* I am convinced that this guarantees an interesting discussion including participation of all the stakeholders in museum practice, which in the recent decade have been flourishing in Poland and it was successful in gaining recognition in the world with its achievements.

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<sup>23</sup> As we know, it was supposed to happen a year ago, but due to the political situation a decision was made then to postpone it to the following year.

Finally, there is panel V, with which we are planning to close the sessions of the 20th GAPH – **What history do the Polish people need today?** To me, personally, this is probably the most important one, as this question has always been arising in the thinking of historians in the times of some historical turning point, and the formulated answers are a record of the current ‘state of mind’ of the community. I posed it publicly to myself and the fellow historians during the martial law in April 1982.<sup>24</sup> I am very curious how the search for the answer to this question will look in 2019. We entrusted the organisation of panel V to Łukasz Kamiński, Sławomir Nowinowski and Marek Woźniak, hoping that they will manage to ensure both high-grade members of the panel and the pluralism of views.

Of course, we are all aware that history is often written with patriotic motives in mind. And there is nothing shameful (or even more ‘wrong’) about this, for history is a highly significant factor of developing the identity of a community and the shared experience of history develops the *social capital*, without which we are losing the ontological historical security and the ability to act collectively / change the world<sup>25</sup>. Historiography – if it wants to be a science – must, however, intellectually cross swords with the limitations, which these patriotic motives can bring into historical cognition. One should for example remember that from a point of view of historical science, as Timothy Snyder says: ‘The nation is here neither an object of faith nor an object of fun, but an object of study’<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, how not to fall into the trap of nationalism, if, for example, one wants to write the history of the 20th century in the paradigm of affirmative history? Can it be recognised that the most important good is that of one’s own nation and look at general history from the point of view of national politics of memory? Actually, this is a question regarding the border between patriotism and nationalism. In this case one can refer to the lessons from the history of the 20th century<sup>27</sup>, one can – if preferred – reach for *Pamięci i tożsamości*, where we find such thought of John Paul II and simply hold on to it:

*Whereas nationalism involves recognizing and pursuing the good of one’s own nation alone, without regard for the rights of others, patriotism... Patriotism is love of one’s own native land that*

<sup>24</sup> J. Pomorski, *Jakiej historiografii Polacy dzisiaj potrzebują?*, ‘Przegląd Humanistyczny’ 1983, 6, pp. 171–190. Reprinted in: idem, *Spoglądając w przeszłość... Studia i szkice metahistoryczne*, Lublin 2017, pp. 29–51.

<sup>25</sup> I speak more broadly on this matter in the article *Mitologizacja i polityzacja historii, czyli w czym neuronauka (i metodologia) może pomóc badaczowi historii najnowszej?*, ‘Historia@Teoria’ 2017, 4, pp. 15–42.

<sup>26</sup> T. Snyder, *Rekonstrukcja narodów. Polska, Ukraina, Litwa, Białoruś 1569–1999*, Sejny 2009, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. T. Snyder, *O tyranii. Dwadzieścia lekcji z dwudziestego wieku*, Kraków 2017.

*accords rights to all other nations equal to those claimed for one's own. Patriotism, in other words, leads to a properly ordered social love*<sup>28</sup>.

There is also the issue of a historian's freedom. Following in the footsteps of Witold Kula, there is an urge to ask: *Is a historian free to do anything? Can a historian pose any hypothesis?* The answer of the author of *Rozdziałki* is categorical:

'Definitely not. We just need to focus on what a historian cannot do. A sentence "14 July 1789 was the day of the outbreak of the Great French Revolution" can be countered by different theses by a historian. He or she can question the date (should it be counted from the assembly of the Estates, from the call of the Estates, etc.), [He or she can question] the adjective "Great", [He or she can finally question] the noun "Revolution" (or maybe a "Counter-revolution"?). In Hungary we had to wait for a resolution to find out if it was a Revolution or a counter-revolution that happened there. /.../ But there are limits to what a historian can do, somewhere. Some things he or she cannot do.

And the limits of this are worth studying'<sup>29</sup>.

So, what are we, historians, not allowed to do today? Kula in this context also uses one more accurate metaphor for our profession: 'history is a customs official that does not let fake goods through'<sup>30</sup>. For what would happen if we – as the community of researchers of the past – allowed / turned a blind eye / failed to react to someone trying to introduce 'fake goods' into the collective memory of our community?<sup>31</sup>

Many such questions and dilemmas, also ethical, will probably be posed to us during the 20th Assembly. This will be the time of community self-reflection, a time of true 'celebration of history', which do not like haste, but rather prefer reflection in the spirit of *slow science*. In *The Slow Science Manifesto*, published in 2010, there is a fragment that is particularly close to me:

*Science needs time to read, and time to fail. Science does not always know what it might be at right now. Science develops unsteadily, with jerky moves and unpredictable leaps forward – at the same time, however, it creeps about on a very slow time scale, for which there must be room and to which justice must be done.*

<sup>28</sup> Jan Paweł II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, Kraków 2005, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> W. Kula, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, Kula is aware that 'There will always be a historian...' Cf. his not of 24 September 1964 on this matter under a telling title 'Kurwy' [in English: 'Whores']: W. Kula, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

*Slow science was pretty much the only science conceivable for hundreds of years; today, we argue, it deserves revival and needs protection. Society should give scientists the time they need, but more importantly, scientists must take their time. We do need time to think. We do need time to digest [the results of studies – note from E.D.]. We do need time to misunderstand each other, especially when fostering lost dialogue between humanities and natural sciences. We cannot continuously tell you what our science means; what it will be good for; because we simply don't know yet. Science needs time<sup>32</sup>.*

We also, as the historical community, need time for unhurried reflection. The general assemblies of Polish historians take place once every five years. This is a good time interval, in order to think over the most important issues at ease. Including the problem of a historian's responsibility for historical education and the state of historical awareness of the Poles. One of my intellectual Masters, whose books I was brought up on, put it in the following words:

*'The thing is that each chapter of history will be written'*<sup>33</sup>. This sentence appears by the way of reminding a statement of Himmler, who supposedly said to his aides in the criminal act: 'This is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory in our history'. What important thought does this sentence contain? What did Professor Witold Kula mean by that? About the constant **temptation of the rulers to obliterate the traces of their abuse of power – to obliterate the things, which are uncomfortable to them, from the collective memory**. And countering this temptation with the certainty that not only the poet, but also the historian is watching: that each chapter of history is finally going to be written one day. This is a kind of a message from Witold Kula – to us. And also some kind of a preventative act against the behaviours of those, who feel the temptation of 'erasing' in history. A warning that their despicable practices will be described in the future...

What about the historical studies themselves? How to guarantee not only their quality, but also cognitive and social significance? How to aspire to the major subjects? – one feels like asking towards the end of these reflections.

I admit that to me this is still an 'open book', in which we keep writing subsequent pages. Here is one of the more significant recent quotations, which we would like to refer to at the 20th GAPH:

*.../ I ponder whether and how such knowledge about history, literature, art can currently be developed, which would not lay claims to prophecies about the future, but rather influence – pre-*

<sup>32</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Ewa Domańska for drawing my attention to this Manifesto. Quote from: E. Domańska, *Sprawiedliwość epistemiczna w humanistyce zaangażowanej*, 'Teksty Drugie' 2017, 1, p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> W. Kula, *op. cit.*, p. 61.



figure it (create the realistic local utopias), aware that the entire plan might work or might not work at all. Because of such ideas, however, I am hoisted by my own petard: on the one hand, I yearn for "calm humanities" (an element of which is "slow science" returning to the idea of developing objective "reflected" science), on the other I can see the legitimacy of further promotion of engaged humanities, which, of course, is not neutral. Engagement can nevertheless be balanced and ethical, and it can follow the directives of epistemic justice, which, however, requires major research self-discipline (epistemology of virtue). Therefore, inclusion of the idea of epistemic justice as the principle guiding studies conducted within the framework of engaged humanities could use – in my opinion – reflection (and maybe even wisdom)<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> E. Domańska, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

## STRESZCZENIE

Jest to autorska próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, po co środowisku polskich historyków potrzebne są zjazdy powszechne? W tym kontekście prezentowane są nowa formuła i program XX Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich, zwołanego do Lublina przez Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne na 18-20 września 2019 r., w 450-rocznicę Unii Lubelskiej i w 30-lecie 'Jesieni Narodów', czyli pokojowego rozmontowania systemu 'Europy Pojałtańskiej'.

**Słowa kluczowe:** XX Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich, Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, autorefleksja środowiska historycznego, społeczna odpowiedzialność historyka

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