

## THE 2021 KWARTALNIK HISTORYCZNY SURVEY

### Introduction

At the beginning of Book Four of his Polish Chronicle (*Chronica Polonorum*), the first Polish historian, Master Vincentius, known as Kadłubek, compared his role to that of an accountant [*rationalitatis officium*]. In the same place, he also portrayed the chronicler as “a servant who cleans up the smouldering torch”.<sup>1</sup> These beautiful metaphors from eight centuries ago remind us of our constant duty to take stock of what we have achieved in our research — not individually, but collectively — and what we have failed to achieve. We are reminded of our duty to clean up the torch with which we try to illuminate the past.

In historiography, which has recognised itself as a science, these duties are fulfilled by congresses, conferences devoted to reviewing research and confronting it with new tasks and methods of studying the past. Sometimes attempts to fulfil this task are made by special issues of journals, trying to focus the attention of the academic milieu on the need for self-reflection. For researchers dealing with history — or variously identified histories — of Poland, this task is performed by, among others, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*. Of course, it is possible to regard as the implementation of this mission the work reflected by another metaphor often attributed to our periodical’s ‘method’: Stendhal’s “mirror carried along the high road” of Polish historiography.

This is the third occasion on which the Editorial Board has decided to emphasise in a special way this need for a comprehensive analysis of scholarly achievements, for a current account, an audit. In both the previous cases, an anniversary provided the occasion. The first of these audits was introduced by the sublime words of the then President

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<sup>1</sup> *Mistrza Wincentego Kronika polska*, transl. K. Abgarowicz, B. Kürbis, foreword and commentaries B. Kürbis, Warszawa, 1974, p. 179.

of the Polish Historical Society: “With this volume of *Kwartalnik* [*Historyczny*] the Polish Historical Society celebrates [– –] the 50th anniversary of its service to science and the nation”. These were the opening words of Franciszek Bujak’s *Foreword* to the double issue of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* in 1937.<sup>2</sup> On this occasion, *Kwartalnik* considered it appropriate to celebrate the jubilee by attempting to present the collective achievements of Polish historical science in the half-century between 1887 and 1937. This presentation included articles in the following categories: by Ludwik Piotrowicz (antiquity), Władysław Semkowicz (auxiliary sciences), Kazimierz Tymieniecki (the Middle Ages), Władysław Konopczyński (early modern times, 1505–1795), Marcei Handelsman (the age of partition, 1795–1918), Józef Umiński (ecclesiastical history), Stanisław Kutrzeba (legal history), Marian Kukiel (military history), Stefan Inglot (social and economic history), Mieczysław Gębarowicz (historical archaeology), Aleksander Birkenmajer (history of mathematics, natural sciences and medicine), Stanisław Łempicki and Kazimierz Hartleb (history of culture), and finally Józef Feldman (the Polish contribution to the study of modern history).

Half a century later, on the occasion of the centenary jubilee, with no solemn introductory words, owing to the reluctance of the then Editor-in-Chief, Professor Jerzy Michalski, to provide them, the Editorial Board of *Kwartalnik* repeated this form of a collective survey of Polish historical research in the intervening fifty years (1937–1986). Here it is worth mentioning both the categories proposed by the Editorial Board, and the names of those to whom the task of surveying was entrusted: Jerzy Kolendo (Polish research on antiquity), Gerard Labuda (the Early Middle Ages), Antoni Gąsiorowski (the Late Middle Ages), Andrzej Wyczański (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), Andrzej Zahorski (the eighteenth century), Stefan Kieniewicz (the period of national uprisings), Lech Trzeciakowski (the post-insurrectionary period 1864–1914), Tadeusz Jędruszczak (the Polish Second Republic), Czesław Madajczyk (the Second World War and the Polish People’s Republic), Aleksander Gieysztor (syntheses, compendia, and historiographical aids), Jerzy Topolski (methodology), Henryk Samsonowicz (regional historiography), Ryszard Kiersnowski (auxiliary sciences), Jerzy Maternicki (history of historiography).<sup>3</sup>

Only thirty-three years have passed since the last survey of historical research in Poland. We are not celebrating any jubilee. Nonetheless, the

<sup>2</sup> F. Bujak, ‘Przedmowa’, KH, 51, 1937, 1–2, p. I.

<sup>3</sup> See KH, 94, 1987, 1.

attempt to encourage joint reflection on what of interest has been achieved in Polish historical research since 1987 is tempting for several reasons.

Firstly, the natural change of generations of scholars suggests that it is a good moment for reflection on the achievements recorded in the works of our masters, and for a comparison with our agenda for the future. Today, only Antoni Gąsiorowski, Henryk Samsonowicz, and Jerzy Maternicki are still alive from the team of great scholars who in 1987 summarised the legacy of Polish historiography of the previous fifty years. 'Time flies, eternity awaits'. Even if historians may have doubts about eternity, they work to give a peculiarly permanent shape to the passing of time or past time. Part of our duty to the community, at least as we understand it in *Kwartalnik*, is to recall, evaluate, and consider the work of our predecessors, especially those with whom we worked our apprenticeships in the historical profession, and in whose schools we matured. And this is what we encourage you, our readers, to do.

This assessment is not the only consideration, however. One might think it was better to wait another seventeen years to a full half-century since the last survey. Let us imagine how different the evaluation of Polish historiography's achievements since 1936 would have been if it had been undertaken in 1970, rather than 1987, as *Kwartalnik* undertook to mark its centenary. We might also speculate how different the picture of this historiography (measured by the history of the Polish Historical Society and *Kwartalnik*) might be when looked at in 2037 rather than in this volume for 2021...

So, why this hurry to launch our survey? Shortly after 1987, the political context for historical research in Poland changed significantly. Assuredly, it was not equally important for everyone, but it was certainly not without significance for the historical community as a whole. Changes in the political context are, of course, still taking place, which is also reflected in the texts collected here.

Secondly, it seems to me — as the initiator of this survey, I am switching to the first-person so as not to burden the other editors of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* with my subjective impressions — that it is not only the new political framework within the Third Polish Republic following its entry to the European Union which is important in this context. Even more important are the changes in the forms and content of participation in the global circulation of information and interpretation of reality which have accelerated so rapidly over the last thirty years. They may have an even more significant impact on the historical environment. How, therefore, are research topics and the ways of researching them changing? What scientific results do they bring? How do we evaluate

them? These simple questions also seem to be worthy of reflection, and this does not require us to await the next jubilee; indeed they suggest that we should not.

The changes in the paradigm of research into what we understand to be the history of Poland can be seen in the categories of research listed above with which a mere thirty-three years ago *Kwartalnik* sought to act as a mirror carried along the high road of our historiography; these categories were deemed sufficient to cover all that was considered important in the achievements of Polish historiography. There is no doubt that political history lay at the centre with social, economic and cultural issues subordinated to it; political history, moreover, that was divided into epochs, with clearly emphasised periods of 'national uprisings' and 'post-uprising history' for the nineteenth century. Methodology, the history of historiography, and regional history were all relegated to the margins. Many researchers today would in all probability challenge this structure, and even claim that it is 'unscientific'. How many topics, terms, and approaches — today considered important by the dominant grant-giving, 'fashion-creating', and 'fashion-imitating' centres — are not included in those categories? Is there any place left in the formally recognised historiography for regional studies regarded in 1987 as an essential part of history? Some change has undoubtedly taken place here, change that seems to be gathering pace.

This phenomenon is also evident if we quote from the definition of the main task of *Kwartalnik* itself, formulated by Franciszek Bujak in his *Foreword* to the fifty-first volume of our periodical cited above "To publish small works as samples of strict historical method and to combat dilettantism, ignorance, and lack of objectivity through conscientious evaluation of the current historical literature on the Polish and Slavic past".<sup>4</sup> Many will probably agree that this is still a necessary activity. How many, however, would object to the 'naïve' belief in one 'strict historical method' or even question the very concept of objectivity? Calls for interdisciplinarity, for a way out of the historical 'backwater' are heard from many directions, backed by serious arguments, but on what principles does this interdisciplinarity rest? In other words: what kind of historiography — now often referred to as 'post-' or 'trans-': postmodernism, post-truth, post-factualism, transhumanism.

If we say: 'Polish historiography' or 'Polish history', then the field in which a particular tension has emerged in the last three decades is determined by the relation between the autonomy of historical science and the

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<sup>4</sup> Bujak, 'Przedmowa', pp. I-II.

question of its relationship with an imagined — in one way or another — political, cultural, or social entity with its own institutional dimensions, or — an object of research designated by the word ‘Polish’ or ‘Poland’.

History and service: to the Nation, the Republic, and the community whose history is told from various perspectives: how are these relationships, dependencies, and duties to be understood? The changes taking place in this respect can be observed not only when we compare the discussions at the last XX General Congress of Polish Historians in Lublin — in 2019 — with the understanding of service of the chronicler to the Commonwealth expressed by Master Vincentius, because, of course, his metaphor of the accountant was associated with his duty towards the political-historical community. One does not even need to refer to that idea of ‘service to science and the nation’ seen as self-evident by the President of the Polish Historical Society in 1937 when he explicitly stated that “national historiography aims to build a strong and healthy national and state consciousness on the part of the nation”.<sup>5</sup> From more recent times, one might quote the proclamation of the Congress of the Polish Historical Society prepared for the XIII General Congress of Polish Historians in Poznań in September 1984, the last to be held before the fall of Communism, which also marks the chronological scope of our survey. For many participants in this survey — as for the author of its questions — that Poznań Congress may well have been the first one in which they participated. Let us, therefore, quote these words: “In our country, knowledge of the past has special importance. Throughout the years of captivity, it strengthened hearts and laid the foundations of national consciousness. It has protected and still protects to this day particularly valuable social values: a sense of dignity, patriotism, freedom, democracy, tolerance and the pursuit of truth”.<sup>6</sup>

Should historical knowledge ‘protect patriotism’? What seemed natural for the authors of the 1984 Congress Proclamation was probably not so indisputable a few years later. When, in 1989, Francis Fukuyama announced in the pages of the *National Interest* quarterly the ‘end of History’, and East-Central Europe was going through its *annus mirabilis*, in Poland marked by the elections of 4 June, one could already sense the feeling once expressed by the poet in a different political context in the words: “And in spring — let me see spring, not Poland”. There was

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. III.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Odezwa Zjazdowa PTH’, in: *Pamiętnik XIII Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich, Poznań 6-9 września 1984 roku*, part 1: *Referaty plenarne. Sekcje*, ed. H. Izdebski, Wrocław, 1986, p. 5.

a feeling of weariness with 'patriotic duty', a feeling of discredit with regard to historiography on account of its services to the collapsing (or transforming) system of power and ideology, and finally a mood of anticipation of that 'end of History' in a post-national or at least transnational civilisation of prosperity. All this taken together provoked questions about the relationship between history as a science and the idea of its service to society, attributed so intensely to it in Poland; and perhaps not only in Poland.

It so happens that I had the opportunity to formulate similar questions in a survey conducted in 1989 by the quarterly *Arka*, which was then emerging from the underground. Nine historians took part in the survey: Jerzy W. Borejsza, Andrzej Chwalba, Marek Kazimierz Kamiński, Jan Kieniewicz, Stefan Kieniewicz, Andrzej Paczkowski, Piotr Wandycz, Krzysztof Zamorski, and Tadeusz Żenczykowski.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, most of them are no longer with us. Of those alive — Andrzej Chwalba, Jan Kieniewicz, and Andrzej Paczkowski — also decided to answer the questions asked thirty-two years later by *Kwartalnik Historyczny*. Even then, however, there were certain differences that are even more evident today. Stefan Kieniewicz had no doubts in 1989:

A hypothetically free and wealthy Pole of the next century will still deal with problems that will require some quantum of knowledge about the past. We are not going to make him stop feeling a Pole, are we? [–] We will still have, as ought to be assumed, the same neighbours as today. If we are to continue to exist, we should live with them in friendship and concord. And that will require us, among other things, to have some knowledge about our neighbours' past — about how they see and understand their own history themselves, and thus our place in the past. [–] In the century which is coming to an end, the dates: 1918, 1920, 1956, 1980, 1989 have some meaning. It is up to us to pass on the history of these dates to the next generation. Not for vainglory, but for memory and as a warning.<sup>8</sup>

Some participants of that 1989 survey expressed their hope that science dealing with Poland's past would finally be freed from non-scientific servitude — in a finally free, modernising country. In early 1990, however, Jan Kieniewicz saw the duty of possible service in a new perspective: "History will be necessary for us in the search for the key to the common home of Europeans".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 'Ankieta *Arki* — pytania do historyków', *Arka*, 1990, 29, pp. 29–51.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Indeed, entering not only into the sphere of influence of such a robust ‘Gellnerian-Andersonian’ model of interpretation of the nation but also of a trans- or post-national policy of remembrance consciously supported by the institutions of the European Union, also created an essential context for practising ‘national’ history in the following decades. It is not only in Poland that this question has provoked interesting discussions.<sup>10</sup>

In our country, the debate on the question of ‘service’ of historiography, at least that dealing with the history of the twentieth century, was further intensified by the establishment, in 2000, of the Institute of National Remembrance and its (partially changing) ‘educational and scientific’ agenda. Shortly afterwards, around 2005, this debate was intensified by the concept and practice of ‘historical politics’ which was ‘discovered’ at that time by Poland, in reaction to, among other things, the radical historical propaganda of Russia conducted by Vladimir Putin and the contemporaneous controversies over the German idea of the Centre against Expulsions.<sup>11</sup> Of course, there have been many more contexts and motivations for intensive reflection and re-evaluation of relations between historiography and Poland (the nation, the state, and its politics) in the last three decades. There is no reason to list them all here. In fact, many of them make themselves evident in the responses to our survey. I only mention these examples to show how justified is the need to include this aspect in the reflection on the transformations of Polish historiography or the historiography dealing with the Polish past over the last three decades.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, K.H. Jarausch, T. Lindenberger, ‘Contours of a Critical History of Contemporary Europe. A Transnational Agenda’, in: *Conflicted Memories. Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*, ed. iid., New York–Oxford, 2007, pp. 2–5 (here also chap. 3: S. Berger, ‘Writing National Histories in Europe...’, and chap. 4: P. Lagrou, ‘Between Europe and the Nation. The Inward Turn of Contemporary Historical Writing’); N. Sznajder, ‘European Memory. Between Jewish and Cosmopolitan’, in: *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. U. Blacker, A. Etkind, J. Fedor, New York, 2013, pp. 59–78; J.G.A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History. Essays on Theory and Method*, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 239–270; id., *The Discovery of Islands. Essays in British History*, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 259–308; A. Nowak, ‘Political Correctness and Memories Constructed for “Eastern Europe”’, in: *Memory and Change in Europe — Eastern Perspectives*, ed. M. Pakier, J. Wawrzyniak, New York–Oxford, 2015, pp. 38–56; Ch. Delsol, *Kamienie węgielne. Na czym nam zależy?*, Kraków 2018 (originally published in French: 2014), pp. 240–274.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *Bez taryfy ulgowej. Dorobek naukowy i edukacyjny Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej 2000–2010*, ed. A. Czyżewski, S.M. Nowinowski, R. Stobiecki, J. Żelazko, Łódź, 2012; *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów*, ed. S.M. Nowinowski, J. Pomorski, R. Stobiecki, Łódź, 2008.

In some way, these changes, connected both with ‘methodological’ and ‘political’ contexts, are reflected in the survey formula proposed here. Unlike in the jubilee issues of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* in 1937 and 1987, we no longer assume that we will capture all or even the most critical achievements of Polish historiography and trends in its transformations by appealing to the authority of a few selected, eminent scholars deemed capable of creating such an objective picture. The purpose of the survey is to elicit a variety of responses, and to produce various points of view on the same reality that we hope we still share. Instead of an indicative mood, we proposed — let me put it this way — an exploratory one.

The idea of the survey was presented and approved after discussion at the meeting of the Editorial Board of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* in early February 2020. In March, we distributed it to 183 invited respondents: 161 in Poland and 22 abroad. They were chosen to represent the broadest possible spectrum of active scientific centres of historiography in Poland and the research issues and the methods used. We also wanted to include comparative views from the outside — and for this reason, we invited historians from abroad and those interested in Polish history who represent specialities other than traditional historiography.

The original deadline for submitting responses, the end of June, was extended by one month — owing to the apparent difficulties in the lives of many of us caused by the pandemic’s effects. We finally received texts from 76 authors. The national respondents represented the following academic centres: Białystok, Toruń, Kielce, Łódź, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Katowice, Kraków (Jagiellonian University, Pedagogical University, Institute of History PAS, Jesuit University Ignatianum), Lublin (John Paul II Catholic University, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University), Olsztyn, Opole, Poznań, Warsaw (Institute of History PAS, University of Warsaw, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Institute of Political Studies PAS), and Wrocław. This group include several political scientists, a sociologist and a political geographer, two researchers from the Institute of National Remembrance, and a ‘freelance’ genealogist. There are also contributions sent by five scholars (including a literary scholar) from centres in Great Britain and the USA, by two representatives of German historiography, and one each from Lithuania, Russia, and Ukraine. Andrii Portnov, currently Professor at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), sent his comparative reflections on Ukrainian — and not only Ukrainian — historiography in the last three decades. As with the review article by Prof. Tomasz Zarycki analysing the achievements of Polish historians from a sociologist’s perspective, his text is published separately. It is worth adding that the oldest of our



survey's participants published their first scholarly papers in the early 1960s, while the youngest made their debut already in the twenty-first century, which represents a span of over forty years in the 'generational' distribution of the views presented here.

Does this 'sample' reflect a faithful and representative map of current scholarship on Poland's past? Of course not. It is a mere reflection of the efforts to achieve diversity, showing — at least in part — the genuine multiplicity of research perspectives in the broadly-defined range of topics of interest to us. That these efforts have not always been successful is suggested by the fact that only nine female researchers responded to our survey. A few important voices, although their participation was promised, were ultimately unable to contribute for reasons beyond their control. It happens.

We would like to thank all those who shared their reflections with *Kwartalnik Historyczny*. According to the survey's principles, we did not edit their responses: we print them as submitted (with the simplest corrections). We decided not to translate three texts sent in English, recognising that the language's status as the contemporary 'Latin' of the scholarly world does not require it.

Finally, let us reiterate: in all probability this survey does not constitute an objective account of the last thirty-three years of historiography. Each answer makes different entries into the debit and credit columns. Nevertheless, we can now compare these voices, reflect on the views they express about the scholarly field we practice and confront them with our particular perspectives. It may be an opportunity for our community to exchange thoughts or to initiate a conversation.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, I invite you to read the responses and to take part in a continuous dialogue to find your own voice — in polyphony.

Andrzej Nowak, Editor-in-Chief — with sincere gratitude to the persons who contributed in a special way to the realisation of this unique form of collective reflection: Dr Waldemar Bukowski and Dr Monika Jusupović.

## The Survey

The years 1988–1991 are described in Poland's political history and our entire region (known as Eastern Europe or East-Central Europe) as a time of a significant change or even a 'breakthrough'. Regardless of whether this political caesura was of any importance for Polish historiography,

especially with regard to the history of more remote epochs, the three decades that have since passed are certainly a time of a natural 'change of guard'. It is enough to recall the departure on the threshold of that period of such researchers as Witold Kula, Karol Górski, Tadeusz Łepkowski, Emanuel Rostworowski, or the nestors of our community, such as Henryk Wereszycki, Marian Małowist, and Stefan Kieniewicz, who had published their first monographs before the Second World War. In the following decades, further outstanding scholars passed away; scholars who had set the research standards in our field over the previous half-century, such as Aleksander Gieysztor, Janina Leskiewiczowa, Anna Sucheni-Grabowska, Andrzej Wyczański, Marian Biskup, Gerard Labuda, Jerzy Michalski, Józef Andrzej Gierowski, Roman Wapiński, Krystyna Kersten, Zbigniew Wójcik, Brygida Kürbis, Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa, Sister Urszula Borkowska, and — recently — Jerzy Wyrozumski, Piotr Wandycz, Janusz Tazbir, Jerzy Kłoczowski, Jerzy Jedlicki, Jerzy Wojciech Borejsza, Karol Modzelewski, Jerzy Holzer, Janusz Żarnowski...

We list these names in reflection — and assuredly, this list can and should be supplemented with other eminent personalities of our profession who are no longer with us — to make us more aware that there are certainly new generations of researchers, disciples of the disciples mentioned here. They look at history with different eyes, perhaps already perceiving different research problems, describing them in a different language, using new analytical tools.

Thirty years is less than a quarter of the entire history of our *Kwartalnik*. But it is more than one generation. It is the average length of an academic career, from doctorate to retirement. After the change that transformed the political framework of the Polish community, these three decades, in the face of so many new inspirations and intellectual 'fashions' influencing historical research, make us reflect.

Therefore, the editors of *Kwartalnik* take the liberty to suggest that we reflect — at this moment in history — on where we are coming from, and where we are heading in Polish historiography, as it develops — in all probability — increasingly close ties with historical research conducted all over the world? What does Polish historiography mean in 2020? Or perhaps the singular is not appropriate here as we should rather say: historiographies — dealing with Poland variously understood?

We would, therefore, be grateful if you would answer the following questions:

1. What, in your opinion, are the most important, most inspiring research achievements — of this historiography or these historiographies — in the last thirty years?

2. And above all: What are the most critical problems, ‘topics’, or ways of interpreting the past that should be, in your opinion, the subject of particular professional/academic interest in the coming years, assuming that history is not yet over? These questions concern both the area of more specific professional specialisations such as medieval studies, military history, or cultural history, and the entirety of Polish historiography or historiographies. In other words: how do you imagine the development of our shared field of knowledge or interest?

3. And can it remain shared? Is there a place for synthesis in Polish historiography or historiographies? How, if at all, do you imagine them?

4. Finally, how do you evaluate the social function of historiography in the future? At the time of the creation of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* and for many years thereafter, its understanding was impacted by the imperative of serving — but not as a lackey according to the subtle distinction made by Władysław Konopczyński — the society/nation. And in 2020 and the years that follow — how do you see this role or function, and how might it be undertaken?

*Andrzej Nowak*