

## Whose region is it? A few words on a certain research project and Silesian history

### Abstract:

This collection of articles represents the output of the first stage of research on the history of the region of Silesia, conducted under the patronage of the European Science Foundation as part of the project ‘*Cuius regio. An analysis of the cohesive and disruptive forces determining the attachment and commitment of (groups of) persons to and cohesion within regions*’. Silesia, one of the regions analyzed in the project, is an example of a borderland territory whose historical development was substantially influenced by various cultural traditions. The primary goal of the research on the Silesian history was to determine the factors that led to disintegration and subsequent re-creation of the region, for there are arguments indicating that the history of the local community has been – and continues to be – the product of a dynamic process whose course was not determined solely by the factor of its constant existence within the limits demarcated within the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Kingdom of Bohemia.

We are hopeful that the book will inspire a discussion in the academic community on a new dimension of the social history of Silesia, on issues connected with the development of Europe’s regions and on universal mechanisms present in the formation of regional social cohesion.

### Keywords:

Silesia, regional history, social cohesion

### The *Cuius regio* project and the history of Silesia

This collection of articles represents the output of the first stage of research on the history of the region of Silesia, conducted under the patronage of the European Science Foundation as part of the project ‘*Cuius regio. An analysis of the cohesive and disruptive forces determining the attachment and commitment of (groups of) persons to and cohesion within regions*’.<sup>1</sup> The study on the history of Silesia, financed by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education,<sup>2</sup> is part of a much broader international initiative conducted by research teams from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain. The aim of the project, initiated and coordinated by Prof. Dick de Boer from Groningen, is to develop new standards of conducting and presenting academic research in the area of regional history by means of comparative analyses based on materials connected with the histories of communities of various regions of Europe. Silesia, one of the regions analyzed, is an example of

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the project is available at [www.cuius-regio.eu](http://www.cuius-regio.eu).

<sup>2</sup> *Cuius regio. An analysis of the cohesive and disruptive forces determining the attachment and commitment of (groups of) persons to and the cohesion within regions*, decision of the Minister of Science and Higher Education No. 832/N-ESF-CORECODE/2010/0.

a borderland territory whose historical development was substantially influenced by various cultural traditions. Over the centuries it frequently changed hands between competing local rulers. Due to these long-term transformations, today various national communities perceive Silesia in different ways, as do even the inhabitants of its different parts. Germans view Silesia first and foremost as a territory situated in the middle part of the Odra region with its capital in Wrocław (Lower Silesia), Poles associate it with the territory of the upper part of the Odra region (Upper Silesia) and Czechs link it with the so-called Opava Silesia located within the current borders of the Czech Republic.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, present-day inhabitants of Silesia themselves express a range of views on their regional affiliation, often identifying Silesia with only one of the current administrative units of Poland.<sup>4</sup> The activity of socio-political movements declaring support for the autonomy of Silesia (Silesian Autonomy Movement) and demanding minority status for Silesians should also be highlighted.<sup>5</sup> This conglomeration of various forms of self-identification is further complemented by attempts to establish the so-called euro-regions that would include parts of Silesia.<sup>6</sup>

Historical tradition places the territory called Silesia in the upper and lower sections of the Odra valley (hereafter, when speaking of the period when this territory was not yet identified as part of the region now referred to as Silesia, I will use the name ‘the Odra region’).<sup>7</sup> From the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it was frequently a source of conflict between the rivalling local dynasties which later gave rise to the states of Bohemia and Poland. Naturally, these territorial feuds did not take place without the participation of the Holy Roman Empire and its magnatial clans. The shaping impact of the collision of different cultural traditions further intensified within the Silesian community between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries together with a great influx of German settlers. Complex and intertwined political, ethnic and cultural transformations led to the dominant Polish-speaking culture of that time being replaced by a German one. From the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Silesia was divided into a number of administrative units and inhabited by a multi-ethnic community, whose economic interests were diversified and whose history was strongly influenced by particular aspects of the local political history. The obvious

<sup>3</sup> Krzysztof Nowak, *Pojęcia Śląsk i Śląskość na pograniczu polsko-czeskim (obszar byłego Śląska austriackiego)*, [in:] *Granice i pogranicza. Historia codzienności i doświadczeń*, ed. Marzena Liedke, vol. 1, Białystok 1999, pp. 245–255.

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Zloch, *Polens neue Regionen auf dem Weg in die Europäische Union. Die Beitrittsvorbereitungen auf dem Gebiet der Regional- und Strukturpolitik*, ‘Osteuropa’, 50 (2000), issue 4, pp. 367–381 (refers to the voivodeship of Silesia introduced in 1999, which includes the so-called Upper Silesia).

<sup>5</sup> Kazimiera Wódz, *The Silesian Case. Silesian Identity in a Region of the Polish State*, [in:] *Regional Identity & Diversity in Europe. Experience in Wales, Silesia and Flanders*, David M. Smith, ed. Enid Wistrich, London 2007, pp. 64–101.

<sup>6</sup> Hans-Åke Persson, *Viadrina to the Oder-Neisse Line - Historical Evolution and the Prospects of Regional Cooperation*, [in:] *Regions in Central Europe. The legacy of history*, ed. Sven Tägil, London 1999, pp. 211–257.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the geographic characteristics of Silesia see the article by Gerard Kosmala, also available in this volume.

questions that come to mind at this point involve how and for what purpose one should compare the history of such a unique community with that of other regions of Europe?

The question of developing a methodological framework for a comparative analysis of the history of regions selected for the project was discussed by members of project research teams during meetings in Morbach and Tallinn (2010). Drawing on the concept of the region – as developed on the basis of humanistic geography – and on the views of Michael Keating and Aansi Passi, a decision was made to approach regions predominantly from the perspective of the communities of their inhabitants and these communities' relations to particular territories. Changes in a region's borders are determined not only by geographic conditions, but most importantly by economic and cultural activity, as well as by shared administrative systems and historic traditions.<sup>8</sup> The size of a community, as well as the geographic range of the region influenced by the cementing forces found in links of social identification, evolve over time.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this project, several spheres have been designated as crucial for the functioning of socio-historical phenomenon. Their isolation in the course of research on individual regions is intended to facilitate comparison of results obtained by the project teams. The following spheres are those to be examined: activity of the administrative apparatus; economic factors; cultural/regional identity of the community studied; the role of social groups within the community; issues of ethnicity. The study of all the regions selected for the project focuses on exploring all the aforementioned spheres in what are termed regional formative periods, including the pre-formative period (until the years 1517–1525), the period between 1525 and 1648, and the period from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century to the Napoleonic Wars.

In order to make it possible for researchers in the *Cuius regio* project to compare their results in a wider European context, all interested parties need access to the latest findings and analytical results relating to the regions under study. As far as the history of Silesia is concerned, this is to be facilitated by a series of publications beginning with this volume. The periodical classification of research on the history of Silesia is slightly different from that adopted for the project as a whole, due to the specific character of the history of this particular region. The region's initial formative period is dated between approximately 1163 and 1526. The medieval period of the history of Silesia, as outlined by these dates, closes with the establishment of the Habsburgs as the ruling dynasty of Bohemia. The period of Habsburg sovereignty over Silesia sets the chronological limits of the second stage of research, that is the years 1526–1740. Phenomena

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<sup>8</sup> The issue is presented on the basis of examples of transformations of contemporary administrative structures and the matter of the growing importance of the regional dimension in relation to the structure of modern nation-states by Michael Keating, *The invention of regions: political restructuring and territorial government in Western Europe*, 'Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy', 15 (1997), pp. 383–398; idem, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe. Territorial Restructuring and Political Change*, Aldershot 1998.

<sup>9</sup> See Aansi Paasi, *The resurgence of the 'region' and 'regional identity'. Theoretical perspectives and empirical observations on regional dynamics in Europe*, 'Review of International Studies', 35 (2009), pp. 121–146.

exerting a crucial impact on the cohesion of the Silesian community from this period did not, however, decrease in significance until 1811. Therefore, some of the considerations contained in the second volume will in fact extend to this date. However, the bulk of the research on the community of the Odra region during Prussian rule will be discussed in the third volume of the series, devoted to the history of the Silesian community divided between the Kingdom of Prussia (later the German Empire) and the Kingdom of Bohemia (later the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1740–1918). A separate volume will cover the period between 1919 and 1945, that is the times of Silesia's division between Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic), Germany and Poland and the period encompassing World War II. The series will be concluded with a discussion of Silesian history in the period from 1945 to ca. 2010.

Somewhat less attention will be devoted to the last of those periods than the remaining ones for two reasons. Firstly, the chronological range of the entire project ends with the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, the character of historical phenomena observed after 1945 in the Odra region is unique when compared to those witnessed before the end of World War II. What had taken place before was in fact part of an undisturbed historical continuum during which a population evolved whose culture, while undergoing constant, dynamic change, maintained continuity of its original traditions in its natural space, the Odra region. The replacement of this German-speaking Silesian community with settlers displaced from central Poland, then territories under occupation by the Soviet Union, inaugurated a difficult period involving the formation of a new Silesian identity. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that following the year 1945 the chance for building a unified Silesian identity was simply thwarted. Instead, Silesian identity was dismembered: split between Lower and Upper Silesia, associated with vaguely defined areas of the Land of Lubusz (Ziemia Lubuska) and Opole Silesia (Śląsk Opolski), along with Opava Silesia (Śląsk Opawski). Attempts are also presently being made to promote a German image of Silesia in the Silesian-Lusatian borderland. These phenomena deserve more in-depth study in the future in the context of results generated by research on the relatively stable population of the Odra region in the period prior to 1945.

In line with the project's objectives, authors of articles presented in this volume have focused their attention on phenomena related to the aforementioned thematic areas which may have played a pivotal role in either strengthening or loosening the bonds within the community of inhabitants of the Upper and Middle Odra Valley. The specific course of history resulting in the territory of the Odra region's incorporation – while retaining extensive autonomy – into the Crown of Bohemia, gave rise to a widespread conviction about the region's administrative and cultural unity which allegedly existed from as early as the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, at the very outset of the monarchy of the Piasts and the Přemyslids. We now regard this vision as anachronistic. In line with the project's main objective, we think of a region as a dynamic phenomenon whose principal feature is a long-term and conscious process of the preservation of bonds within the community

inhabiting a certain geographical territory. That is why the researchers, having abandoned the method of retrogression, aimed to present in their analyses the factors that could have led to the development of regional links in the Odra region between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. What must be emphasized here is that they by no means predetermined that the very emergence of these bonds led to irreversible changes in the structure of the region, which took place independently of the changes that occurred in its surroundings and within the regional community. The attempt to isolate phenomena leading to both integration and disintegration of Silesian society is not only a search for the answer to the question of the exact moment and conditions that facilitated the formation of this type of community. The primary goal is to determine the factors that led to its disintegration and subsequent re-establishment, for there are many arguments indicating that the history of the local community in the Odra region has been – and continues to be – the product of a dynamic process whose course was not determined solely by the factor of its constant existence within the limits demarcated by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Kingdom of Bohemia.

The research on the region of Silesia was coordinated by Lucyna Harc, Przemysław Wiszewski and Rościśław Żerelik. Work on each of the aforementioned periods was performed by excellent specialists, and the efforts of each team were coordinated by a specialist in research on a given period of Silesian history and a member of the grant team. The first team was led by Mateusz Goliński and Przemysław Wiszewski. The group of specialists included geographers, historians and historians of art from Katowice (Gerard Kosmala), Wrocław (Romuald Kaczmarek, Wojciech Mrozowicz, Stanisław Rosik, P. Wiszewski) and Warsaw (Marcin Pauk, Ewa Wólkiewicz, Grzegorz Myśliwski). We are hopeful that the fruits of their work and the collection of articles covering subsequent periods of Silesian history will inspire a discussion in the academic community on a new dimension of the social history of Silesia, on issues connected with the development of Europe's regions and on universal mechanisms present in the formation of regional social cohesion.

## **An outline of the medieval history of Silesia (ca. 950–1526)<sup>10</sup>**

There is much discord between historians as to when and by whom state authority was first established in the Odra region. Some scholars advocate the view that already in the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century the rulers of Great Moravia exercised a degree of control over the lands. The majority of scholars, however, argue that the dukes of the Czech

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed list of literature on the discussed issues see chapters below. Sources on general history of medieval Silesia: *Geschichte Schlesiens*, vol. 1: *Von der Urzeit bis zum Jahre 1526*, ed Ludwig Petry, St. Michel 1983, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Since this is a re-edition of a work produced prior to the World War II, see also later works on the subject: Wienfried Irgang, *Quellen und Literatur zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte Schlesiens in Auswahl*, [in:] *Geschichte Schlesiens*, vol. 1: *Von der Urzeit bis zum Jahre 1526*, pp. 480–510. The latest bibliography on the history of Silesia prepared in cooperation with Herder-Institut in Marburg, Slezské Zemské Muzeum in Opava and Wrocław University is available online at: [http://www.wroclaw-uw.sowwwa.pl/sowacgi.php?&lang=en\\_GB](http://www.wroclaw-uw.sowwwa.pl/sowacgi.php?&lang=en_GB) (accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2013).

Přemyslid dynasty, especially Boleslaus I the Cruel of Bohemia (915–967) and Boleslaus II the Pious of Bohemia (967–999), were the first sovereigns of the Odra region. Mieszko I (d. 992), the first historic ruler of the Piast dynasty or his son, Boleslaus I the Brave (992–1025), annexed the territories in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> Boleslaus I the Brave cemented the incorporation of the Odra region into his realm in AD 1000 with the establishment of the Bishopric in Wrocław as one of the dioceses of the Archdiocese in Gniezno, which at the time extended to all the lands controlled by the Polish duke. The Přemyslids, however, did not accept that they had lost control over Wrocław. Taking advantage of the crisis that affected the Piast realm following the death of Mieszko II (1025–1034), Duke Břetislaus I reclaimed the Odra region after invading Poland in 1038. Following his death, the province was again annexed in 1050 by the son of Mieszko II, Casimir I the Restorer (1034–1058). However, as Bohemia and all its neighbouring lands were at the time the feudal property of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III, Casimir was unable to launch his military campaign without Henry's permission. Henry III accepted Casimir's rule over Silesia in 1054 on the condition that he and all his heirs pay tribute for the land to the sovereigns of Bohemia. The issue of tribute payments ignited the tinderbox of conflict between the Dukes of Bohemia and Poland. The first one to refuse to fulfil his tribute obligation was Boleslaus II the Bold (1054–1079), but the practice was reinstated by Ladislaus Herman (1079–1102). His son, Boleslaus III the Wrymouth (1099–1138), also refused to do so, and from then on the issue was a recurrent motif in the political game between the rulers of both dynasties.

According to the current state of our knowledge, Boleslaus III the Wrymouth was the first Piast to rule the province of Silesia while his father was still alive. Following Wrymouth's death in 1138, his realm was divided between his sons, the oldest of whom, Ladislaus II, was to rule Silesia and Lesser Poland and, due to his senior status, played the role of the Piast dynasty leader. Nonetheless, he was soon accused by his younger brothers, Boleslaus IV the Curly and Mieszko III the Old of attempting to rule in an autocratic fashion. As a result of a civil war that broke out between the Piast brothers, Ladislaus II the Exile was banished in 1146 from Poland. From this moment on Silesia was ruled by Boleslaus IV, who was forced in 1163 by Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa to transfer his power over the Odra region to the sons of Ladislaus II. The middle part of the Odra region with the centrally-situated fortress of Wrocław went into the hands of the oldest son of Ladislaus II – Boleslaus I the Tall (1163–1201). The southern part of the region, in turn, was allotted to his younger brother, Mieszko the Tanglefoot. Not much later, the third of the brothers – Conrad Spindleshanks – annexed the lands situated in the northern edge of Silesia, together with their capital of Głogów. As a result of the subsequent series of battles, the son of Boleslaus I the Tall, Jaroslaus, who held the office of

<sup>11</sup> Sławomir Moździoch, *Schlesien im 10. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Boleslav II. Der tschechische Staat um das Jahr 1000. Internationales Symposium, Praha 9. - 10. Februar 1999*, ed. Petr Sommer, Prague 2001 (=Colloquia Mediaevalia Pragensia, vol. 2), pp. 417–440.

the Bishop of Wrocław, claimed power over the lands (including the major fortress of Opole) sitting between those of his father and those of his uncle Mieszko, in the south. By the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Odra region had thus been divided politically and territorially into three parts: the northern part including Głogów, the middle part with Wrocław as its main city, and the southern part with Racibórz. Simultaneously, the name Silesia started to be used in reference to the lands formerly controlled by Boleslaus the Tall, i.e. the northern and middle Odra region encompassing Głogów, Legnica and Wrocław.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century can be described as a period of extensive cultural, civilizational and economic transformations of the Odra region's community, and from the very outset it was marked by the intensive efforts of local dukes to enrich the local community with colonists from the lands of the Holy Roman Empire and the Romance countries. This policy thoroughly transformed the legal structure of rural communities, making them resemble communities of the Holy Roman Empire. At the time, Silesia saw the foundation of the first towns modelled after their western counterparts, whose citizens were granted special legal privileges based on the laws of Magdeburg. By the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century numerous German knights were introduced to Silesian ducal courts. Together with the community of settlers composed of burghers and villagers, they developed a new German-speaking Silesian culture that soon began to dominate that of the Polish speakers.

In spite of these changes, the Piast rulers of the lands of the Odra region's upper and middle segments made numerous attempts to regain power over all of Poland throughout the entire 13<sup>th</sup> century. The one who came closest to reaching this goal was Henry I the Bearded (t. 1201–1238) with his son Henry II the Pious (t. 1238–1241), who ruled the entire Odra region, Lesser Poland and half of Greater Poland, including Poznań. The Mongol invasion of 1241 and the death of Henry II the Pious in the battle of Legnica put an end to the hegemony of the Silesian Piasts in Poland. The rule of the sons of Henry II the Pious was from then on restricted to the territory of Silesia proper, with capitals in Głogów, Legnica and Wrocław. The ultimate attempt to restore dominance over the remaining Polish rulers of the Piast dynasty was undertaken by Duke Henry IV the Righteous of Wrocław in the 1280s. He managed to gain control over Cracow in 1290, but his triumph was soon thwarted by his death. His quest was continued by Duke Henry I (III) of Głogów. He seized power of Greater Poland but, unfortunately, his dreams of claiming the royal crown were never fulfilled. He was forced to accept the royal dignity of the King Wenceslaus II of Bohemia and Poland and his son Wenceslaus III. Following the death of Wenceslaus III (1306), it was Ladislaus the Elbow-high – the ruler of Kuyavia – who sought power over Lesser and Greater Poland. After Henry I (III) of Głogów died in 1309, his sons lost control over Greater Poland. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the lands reigned over by members of various lines of the dynasty of the Piasts of Silesia were divided between their numerous heirs. As a result, the Odra region saw the greatest

political fragmentation in its history; at its peak more than thirty dukes were in power at the same time.

Weak and conflict-prone dukes were unwilling to acknowledge the sovereignty of Ladislaus the Elbow-high, who in 1320 proclaimed himself King of Poland. Having accepted the military and political dominance of the King of Bohemia, John of Luxembourg, between 1327 and 1339 the majority of the dukes of the Odra region recognized his suzerainty by paying him feudal homage. The heirless Duke Henry VI the Good of Wrocław bequeathed his duchy to King John, who came into possession of the land in 1335. Earlier, following the abdication of the Piast ruler Boleslaus III the Generous in 1311, King John awarded the Duchy of Opava – as its feudal lord – to Nicholas in 1318, who came from a collateral line of the Přemyslid dynasty. Nicholas was also granted power over Racibórz following the death of Leszek in 1336. Half a century later, after the death of Bolko II the Small (1368) and his wife Agnes (1392), kings of Bohemia became direct sovereigns of the Duchy of Świdnica-Jawor. As a result of these circumstances the Odra region became part of a new political system, which resulted in the severing of ties between Silesians and the Polish political community. The new connection with the Crown of Bohemia assumed principle significance. Even the independent dukes of Silesia, Opole, Racibórz and Cieszyn became formal subjects of the Bohemian ruler, who took direct control over the region's capital of Wrocław and the Bohemian-Silesian borderland, thereby securing himself the potential to launch immediate military interventions in the region. Despite the obvious political dominance of the Kings of Bohemia over the dukes of the Odra region, the latter group, together with the states of hereditary royal duchies, Świdnica and Wrocław, retained extensive autonomy within the borders of their realms. This was manifested in the fact that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century there was no royal office whose competences would extend to the entire Odra region.

This situation changed only in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Following the Hussite rebellion against Sigismund of Luxembourg, the rightful King of Bohemia, the duchies of Silesia supported their sovereign by establishing regional alliances. As a result, Silesian armies participated in military invasions of Bohemia, and Silesia became the target of retaliatory Hussite campaigns. At the same time, in the course of warfare with the common enemy, the dukes of the upper Odra region were for the first time regarded as the rulers of Silesia. This title had formerly been reserved only for the heirs of Boleslaus I the Tall. The conclusion of the Hussite Wars and assumption of power over Bohemia by Ladislaus of the Habsburg dynasty did not improve the dire situation of Silesia's inhabitants. The majority of elites did not acknowledge the rule of George of Poděbrady, the regent appointed by Ladislaus. Following Ladislaus' sudden death in 1457, George was accused of poisoning the king and as a result he – being elected by the Czechs – was denied acceptance as the sovereign of Silesia. This sparked a long period of military conflicts between the members of a Silesian coalition headed by the town of Wrocław with George,

who was considered a heretic. The Silesians openly favoured Mathias Corvinus, who managed with the support of the pope to annex Silesia in 1464 and crowned himself King of Bohemia in 1469. The streak of warfare was not broken even by the death of George in 1471, for his crown as well as the fight against Mathias Corvinus was taken over by Ladislaus Jagiellon. As a result of this prolonged feud, Silesia was invaded by the armies of Casimir Jagiellon, King of Poland, who supported his son Ladislaus, King of Bohemia. In 1474 a Polish army even besieged Wrocław, but to no avail. Mathias Corvinus kept control of Silesia until his death in 1490, and it was only then when power was transmitted to Ladislaus Jagiellon, and following his death in 1516, to the minor Louis. The death of the latter ruler in the battle of Mohács in August 1526 opened the way for the Habsburgs to claim power over the throne of Prague. On 24<sup>th</sup> October 1526, Ferdinand I Habsburg became the new King of Bohemia, and his coronation marked the initiation of this dynasty's 200 years of rule in the Odra region.

Throughout its medieval history, the community of the Odra region underwent a multitude of transformations in the course of which a number of alternative systems for regional organization of the territory came about. Eventually, in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the strong influence of political factors resulted in the creation of an administrative unit named Silesia, whose territory overlapped to a large extent with that of the 'historical region of Silesia'. However, this did not imply the formation of a coherent local community. The evolution of both individual members' sense of identification with the community and of administrative, economic and cultural aspects in the context of the formation process of the local community constitute the focus of the research presented in the chapters to follow.



Map 1. Political fragmentation of Silesia, c. 1350 (Dariusz Przybytek)