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## WROCLAW'S CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE CITY'S HISTORICAL POLICY

### KULTUROWE DZIEDZICTWO WROCLAWIA W POLITYCE HISTORYCZNEJ MIASTA

**ABSTRACT:** Until the political breakthrough of 1989/90, the cultural heritage of Wrocław had been the subject of an irresolvable historical and ideological dispute between Germany and Poland, burdening their mutual relations. The exclusive use of the national paradigm by both sides in their approach to the city's history made it impossible to bring their stances closer together. The author shows this dispute against the background of the general Polish attitude to the phenomenon of German cultural heritage in Poland after World War II and explains its evolution in Wrocław and Silesia.

**KEYWORDS:** public history, historical heritage, historical policy

The notion of cultural heritage is nowadays so problematic that it requires us first to define in what sense/scope it will be used here. It is strongly impacted by the very term 'culture', which has been understood in various ways in the past and in our times is defined in a virtually inflationary way. One of today's most renowned cultural scholars calls the turn to culture "part of the cultural history of the last generation".<sup>1</sup> This means that not only has the research paradigm changed before our eyes, but we ourselves have begun to perceive the world around us differently, taming the previously 'high' notion of culture in sometimes peculiar ways.<sup>2</sup> In the thick-et of definitions, there is, however, a general tendency to contrast culture with nature

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, Cambridge 2004, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> See Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford 2000.

rather than civilization. In the broad understanding of culture implied by such an approach, culture includes both the patterns of human behaviour and the result (“products”) of human spiritual and material activity. In this sense, cultural heritage is nurtured and transmitted from generation to generation socialisation output (understood as cultural patterns of behaviour fixed in social contact), as well as spiritual and material output of a given population in the area it inhabits. This understanding of cultural heritage, which in this case could also be called cultural tradition, as an integral whole of various values, is increasingly in line with the current theory and practice of museum services, as well as that of monument protection and conservation. This is the understanding of heritage that we will be concerned with here.

“The town maintains its identity, which was the same three hundred, nine hundred years ago, against the river of time sweeping over it”<sup>3</sup> – this statement by Serenus Zeitblom, chronicler of “the life of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn”, from Thomas Mann’s novel *Doctor Faustus* – applied to the thousand-year history of Wrocław, which was Piast in its beginnings – might, until recently, have provoked opposition in German readers (especially the older ones, who were former residents of the city),<sup>4</sup> whereas the Poles would mostly accept it naturally as something obvious to them – for they both used to proceed from a strongly nationally profiled narrative of the city’s identity, a narrative that only now, before our very eyes, seems to be becoming a thing of the past.

The capitulation of Festung Breslau on May 6, 1945, marked the beginning of the end of Wrocław’s centuries-long German tradition; this was sealed in August by the Potsdam Decrees. After the expulsion of the German population (how else could this forced displacement be called?) and the establishment of the two German states, the Polish history of the city was not acknowledged in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) territorial losses in the East were tabooed. In preserving the memory of the suffering of 1945–1947 (when the last large transports of former Breslau residents left for the West, although the resettlement campaign continued until 1955<sup>5</sup>), the Slavic-Polish contribution to the city’s history was removed from popular German historical consciousness, even

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus*, transl. John E. Woods; New York: Vintage, 1999, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Prince Edmund von Hatzfeldt, a descendant of the German aristocratic family that was once strongly rooted in Silesia, who had been visiting Wrocław regularly since the 1970s, said during a conversation in the editorial office of “Odra” twenty years later: “I come to Breslau, not to Wrocław. And no one can blame me for that”.

<sup>5</sup> See Teresa Kulak, *Wrocław. Przewodnik historyczny*, Wrocław 1999, p. 278.

though it had for centuries co-shaped the atmosphere and climate of this important cultural and civilizational transmission node between the Reich and Poland.<sup>6</sup> (*Mutatis mutandis*, this brings to mind the post-war Polish attitude toward Lviv/Vilnius and the Ukrainian and Lithuanian residents of those cities.) In fact, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sensitivity to this state of affairs was still present in Germany, even if, in the absence of historical insight, it was fed only by imponderabilia that after all do never emerge in a vacuum. The Königsberg writer Fanny Lewald noted this in the second volume of her 1862 autobiography *Meine Lebensgeschichte*: “Wrocław [...] in my heart has never made the impression of a German city, and even more so a foreign city, and in 1832 it appeared to me particularly foreign. [the November Uprising in the Russian partition and Wrocław’s enthusiasm for it – M.Z.]. It was not a question of the market square [...], or old churches, or single, sometimes very old houses, which struck my eye and did not appear to be German. No, it was something, incomprehensible to me – something in the physiognomy of this city that I used to call Polish”.<sup>7</sup> The Prague-Leipzig writer Carl Herloßsohn observed a decade later: “Wrocław is a strange city, composed of various elements, of which the dominant one is Prussian-Silesian. Alongside this there is a Polish element and [...] also a traditional Austro-Silesian one”.<sup>8</sup> In 1888, the Silesian regionalist Franz Schroller wrote that “Wrocław was somehow covered with Polish tarnish and still had much of a Polish habitus” (which he himself did not agree with).<sup>9</sup>

We could find more such testimonies. It is essential, however, that these examples already make us aware, in their imprecision, of how difficult it is in a borderland (which Silesia is after all) to distinguish and separate all ethnic and cultural influences, dependencies, traces, and layers – and whether it is necessary/worth to do so... (we will return later to this question). Be that as it may, such (and similar) opinions did not fit in after 1945 with the nostalgic image of the “eternally German”

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, this process continued until the turn of the millennium, that is, until Georg Thum’s book, *Obce miasto. Wrocław 1945 i potem*, transl. Małgorzata Słabicka, Wrocław 2005 (German edition: 2003). It is characteristic here that it would be in vain to look for any reflections on the Polish accent in the history of the city in *Breslau – Biographie einer deutschen Stadt*, Günter Elze, 1993, or in Gerhard Scheuermann’s two-volume *Breslau-Lexikon*, 1994 (actually, the anti-Polish character of this compendium is only barely concealed). Incidentally, both authors are natives of Wrocław.

<sup>7</sup> Fanny Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, Vol. 2: *Leidensjahre*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Orbis Wratislaviae. Wrocław w relacjach dawnych i współczesnych*, ed. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Marek Zybura, Wrocław 2018, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Franz Schroller, *Schlesien. Eine Schilderung des Schlesierlandes*, Glogau 1888, Vol. 2, p. 309.

city, a myth pushed especially strongly during the Third Reich by the Institute for Eastern Europe, with its headquarters on Sand Island (Wyspa Piasek). The Germans had taken this myth with them, and media control over it was exercised until German reunification in 1990 by the expellees' associations, in which the "Wrocław apocalypse of 1945"<sup>10</sup> and the loss of the "ancient German city" functioned as if in ahistorical space, with no reflection on the causes of this fact. The obverse of the "place of memory" that Wrocław became in this German historical consciousness was its bright, happy German past, while the reverse was its apocalyptic Polish takeover – that is, its end, *Untergang* (Gleiss).

In turn, the question of German cultural heritage in Poland (and thus also the cultural heritage of German Wrocław up to the end of World War II) must be said in this context to be a never-ending subject in Polish–German relations. It should be stated at the very beginning, before any further considerations, that the political controversies and the agitated emotions – which accompany these relations – are relatively recent. This heritage has been inscribed in Polish history since the early days of Polish statehood because of the role of the Germans in our history<sup>11</sup> and the shifting of borders, which involved appropriating the material culture of the lands occupied by the ethnic element living there. It is possible to tendentiously exaggerate the role of the German factor (and thus of the German heritage) in Polish history, as German nationalist historiography has until recently done, using the term *deutsche Ostarbeit*.<sup>12</sup> It can also be marginalisation, as was done by Polish nationalist historiography, or even questioned outright. It is also possible, by reversing the German argumentation, to push forward the myth of a German *Drang nach Osten*,<sup>13</sup> as Polish National Democracy party did. The medieval settlement

<sup>10</sup> This is how Horst A. Gleiss has titled his 10-volume documentation of the siege of Breslau: *Breslauer Apokalypse 1945. Dokumentarchronik vom Todeskampf und Untergang einer deutschen Stadt und Festung am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Wedel–Rosenheim 1986–1997.

<sup>11</sup> See Marek Zybura, *Im gemeinsamen Haus. Zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Polen*, Berlin 2019.

<sup>12</sup> The "predatorily anti-Polish historian" from Poznań (T. Ulewicz), Kurt Lück wrote directly about "Deutsche Aufbaukräfte in der Entwicklung Polens" (the title of his 1934 book), or about "Deutsche Gestalter und Ordner im Osten" – this is in turn a volume edited by him in 1940 and reprinted in 1957 by Viktor Kauder under the politically more correct title: *Deutsch-Polnische Nachbarschaft* (The memory of how the Germans "shaped and ordered" East/Poland was still very fresh), but with an undisguised intention as to the meaning of the book in its subtitle: *Lebensbilder deutscher Helfer in Polen*.

<sup>13</sup> This myth was dismantled already in the 1960s by Antoni Gołubiew, and a decade later by Benedykt Zientara: *Z zagadnień terminologii historycznej: "Drang nach Osten"*, [in:] *Spółeczeństwo, gospodarka, kultura. Studia ofiarowane Marianowi Małowistowi w czterdziestolecie pracy naukowej*, ed. Stanisław Herbst, Warszawa 1974, pp. 425–433.

under German law in Piast-ruled Silesia, including Wrocław (rebuilt after the Mongol invasion in 1241 under Magdeburg Law) and its consequences, belongs equally to the German heritage in Poland as do the centuries-long symbiosis of Royal Prussia with the Polish Crown (of which Ducal Prussia was a temporary fief) or the Saxon Wettins on the Polish throne. This narrative could be continued even further. German settlers, especially merchants and craftsmen, shaped the appearance of Polish cities and villages. Over the centuries, they contributed to our clerical, ecclesiastical, scientific, military, and other staff, that is, they grew into Polish everyday life. The mutual relations in which the issue of the material and spiritual culture implemented here by the Germans (the substance of their legacy in Poland, which has grown over the centuries and which is now our heritage) did not constitute a significant ground for national or political frictions – they developed, accordingly, in a variety of ways, with displays of indifference, familiarity or feuds, as is the case in every human community.

It was not until World War II, which confronted Poles with Germans on an unprecedented scale and bound them even more firmly than any other event in the past, that the issue of German cultural heritage in Poland was included in the catalogue of mutual offences and demands. It still casts a shadow on Polish–German relations, a symbol of which is the so-called Berlinka<sup>14</sup> in the collection of the Jagiellonian University Library. This happened as a result of the border agreements of Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam between the victorious coalition powers, and the territorial shift of Poland to the West in 1945.<sup>15</sup> One third of its national territory was to consist of the former German eastern provinces.

The historian Sebastian Haffner once observed that in the social context of generational change, “[e]ach new generation must submit its own vision of the past. This is not because the new generations suddenly acquire absolute knowledge unknown to their predecessors, but because our fluid reality each time reveals

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<sup>14</sup> Berlinka is the Polish name for a collection of German manuscripts from the Prussian State Library in Berlin, which since the end of the Second World War are located at the Jagiellonian University Library in Kraków. See Michał J. Żółtowski, *Zbiory Biblioteki Pruskiej w Polsce. Studium przypadku*, Warszawa 2012.

<sup>15</sup> See Longin Pastusiak, *Teheran, Jalta, Poczdam. Wielka Trójka o zachodniej granicy Polski*, [in:], *Powrót nad Odrę i Bałtyk z perspektywy siedemdziesięciu lat*, ed. Antoni Dragan *et al.*, Warszawa 2017; also: Jan Czuła, *Pożytki z Jalty*, [in:] *Polska Rzeczywistość Ludowa. Od Jalty do Października '56*, ed. Paweł Dybicz, Warszawa 2019, pp. 163–170.

a new aspect of the truth about the past”.<sup>16</sup> Haffner was thinking here of England, but it is a statement that can also be applied to the attitude of Polish society towards the German heritage in the lands taken over in 1945 – also in Wrocław. The fact that successive generations reveal “new aspects of the truth about the past” for themselves (let us complement Haffner with Pierre Nora here), is due to the fact that history and memory are by no means synonymous – because “memory”, writes Nora, “is life: it is constantly transmitted by living people and therefore it is in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting. [...] History wants to be an intellectual operation, secularised, analysed, and critically argued. Memory sacralises what we recall/remember – and history expels it from the sphere of the sacrum; its role is disenchantment. Memory is a creation of the group, which it binds it together from within”.<sup>17</sup> And this mechanism works so because memory is the space in which the internal cement of a given community is created, and there is never any lack of attempts to manipulate memory, i.e., to “invent traditions” (*de facto* constructing them) – to quote Hobsbawm.<sup>18</sup>

As far as Wrocław is concerned (as well as all post-German territories taken over by the Polish state in 1945), this phenomenon occurred after the war, because there the memory of the city was simply “amputated” (A. Zawada). Moreover, the takeover of the region and its capital came quite unexpectedly for the Polish public – although already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Poland was then still under Partitions) such notion appeared in the writings of the ideologue of Polish nationalism, Roman Dmowski, who grew out of the political program of Jan Ludwik Popławski and Bolesław Chrobry. Dmowski proposed the so-called “Piast ideology”, termed also as the “Western thought”, which postulated the restitution of the Polish state within its medieval Piast borders.<sup>19</sup> However, its significance in the consciousness of the Polish public remained marginal because it put in brackets six centuries of the history of Poland, which since the time of Casimir the Great had been developing territorially, politically, and culturally in a consistent eastward direction. Its lands were taken by the Russians, but the return of this “borderland”

<sup>16</sup> Quote from: Uwe Soukup, *Ich bin nun mal Deutscher. Sebastian Haffner. Eine Biographie*, Berlin 2001, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. 13 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Das Erfinden von Traditionen*, [in:] *Kultur & Geschichte. Neue Einblicke in eine alte Beziehung*, ed. Christoph Conrad, Martina Kessel, Stuttgart 1998, pp. 97–118.

<sup>19</sup> See Roman Dmowski, *Niemcy, Rosya i kwestya polska*, Lwów 1908. On the “Western thought”, see Grzegorz Strauchold, *Myśl zachodnia i jej realizacja w Polsce Ludowej 1944–1957*, Toruń 2003.

eastern Rzeczpospolita was desired by the Poles during the Partitions. The centuries-long eastward expansion weakened the memory of the medieval cradle of the state in the west and emotionally bound Poles ever more strongly to the eastern centres of Polish power and culture. The Polish memory of Silesia was getting weaker and weaker, although the Wrocław pastor Johannes Kurtzmann still claimed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that Silesia was “die Tochter der Mutter Pohlen”, and the writer Johann Gottlieb Schummel, impressed by his *Reise durch Schlesien im Julius und August 1791*, included in this work an apologia for the Polish language in Silesia.

A few years after Dmowski's speech, Marian Słubicz, a publicist from Cracow, argued that although in the 10<sup>th</sup> century the Polish western border “lay on the Oder”, yet in 1914 “it would be possible to find only a few Poles whose heart would beat more vividly at the thought of Kołobrzeg or Wrocław – but their home towns are Lwów [now Lviv], Stanisławów [now Ivano-Frankivsk], Wilno [now Vilnius], and others”.<sup>20</sup> Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939 actualised Dmowski's anti-German option, but the idea of territorial retaliation in accordance with the “Piast idea” was not considered for a long time. The Polish government-in-exile in London saw in a possible westward shift of Poland at the expense of Germany the danger of future German revanchism, which Poland could oppose only through a close political alliance with the Soviet Union, which would be tantamount to giving up its own sovereignty. As late as December 17, 1944, Tomasz Arciszewski, the prime minister of the government-in-exile, emphasized in this context in an interview with the *Sunday Times*, that “[w]e want neither Wrocław nor Szczecin”.<sup>21</sup>

One of the “benefits of Yalta” was Wrocław, which opens the issue of the Polish attitude to the city's existing cultural heritage. For its former inhabitants, traumatised by the madness of defending Festung Breslau and being expelled to Germany, the city's historical clock stood still. Due to the exchange of population, the socializing component of German cultural heritage was not preserved in the now Polish Wrocław. It disappeared from the city along with its former residents. Their contacts with the incoming population were too short and superficial for a lasting transmission of behavioural patterns characteristic of the community that had been established there for generations. For the successive waves of new settlers from the Polish eastern territories annexed by Stalin in 1939, as well as from

<sup>20</sup> Marian Słubicz, *Polska między Wschodem i Zachodem*, Kraków 1914, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Quote from: Krystyna Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy. Polska 1943–1948*, Poznań 1990, p. 108.



central Poland and neighbouring Wielkopolska, the historic clock of Wrocław began to tick again in Polish rhythm. In light of the urgent need to build the foundations of a new, Polish identity for the city among its new inhabitants and to subject it, together with these inhabitants, to the modes of a new, Polish historical policy – for it had to be incorporated into Polish reality – the “Piast idea” was resorted to and it was a late success for Dmowski over his rival Piłsudski!<sup>22</sup> It is an obvious truth that the Polish Wrocław and the new Polish western territories were a compensation for the Polish northern and south-eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic, i.e., for the so-called *Kresy* (Bordelands). Thus, Józef Mackiewicz rightly mocked that “the former allies of our new allies” presented them to us in Tehran and in Yalta. In the new political conditions, his statement was censurable. The state launched a massive propaganda campaign whose “fuel” was the “Piast idea” with the myth of “the return of the western territories to the Motherland” or “regaining the Piast heritage”. The creation and dissemination of the Piast “invented tradition”, using the concept of the Western territories as compensation, socio-technically referred to as the “Recovered Territories”, was intended to suggest the allegedly illegitimate nature of German rule over them for two reasons. First, for the sake of international, especially Western, public opinion, for which the “ancient Polishness” of these lands was emphasized, as well as the historical rights to them and to “Piast Wrocław”<sup>23</sup> (of which this opinion was not particularly convinced). Secondly, and even primarily – because of the new inhabitants, socio-technically called “repatriates”, in order to mobilize in them a readiness to rebuild Wrocław and the region. This could only succeed if these people, often severely affected by history and expelled from their homes and farms, would accept the “post-German” (as they said) strange-land (as they used to call it) as their new homeland. It was necessary to give them a home, i.e., a new identity, and to remove the feeling of living in a territorially and politically provisional situation, replacing it with the awareness of being connected to Polish roots. They had difficulties with that, like the student Joanna Konopińska, a resident of Wrocław since

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<sup>22</sup> It should be noted here, by the way, that the western Polish border was of secondary importance to Piłsudski, so perhaps – had it not been for the outbreak (and success!) of the Wielkopolska Uprising, Wielkopolska would most likely have remained outside the borders of the Second Republic.

<sup>23</sup> The piquant irony of history, in the context of invoking “historical rights” to the annexed lands, lies in the fact that the absurdity of such procedure was discredited by the Polish historian and diplomat of the Enlightenment era, Feliks Łoyko, who ridiculed the historical justification of the First Partition of Poland by Prussia so severely that Berlin abandoned this argumentation during the Second Partition.



1945, who noted in her diary: "At every step I come across objects belonging to someone else, testifying to someone else's life, about which I know nothing, about people who built this house, lived here, and now perhaps, are no longer alive. How to start a new life here? No, I cannot imagine that I will ever be able to say that this is my home".<sup>24</sup> It was therefore necessary to give the settlers a sense of "being at home", which was an urgent task of historical policy, because everything was foreign here: the landscape, the aesthetic and symbolic layer of buildings, the forms and degree of their industrialization (in Wrocław) and agricultural development (in the region), as well as the cultural fabric and even local history.

It is not a coincidence that the Office of the General Plenipotentiary for the Regained Territories initiated publications such as Władysław J. Grabski's *200 miast wraca do Polski* [200 Cities Return to Poland]. The author explicitly admits that he is writing his book "for the widest strata of society, wishing to familiarise them, in a way, with history, and to revive the history of the recovered cities for the use of present-day Poland, its inhabitants, administrators, and neighbours".<sup>25</sup> It seems that this was not a matter of their re-Polonization as part of the process of "familiarization" with the Western Territories, but of their programmed de-Germanization and Polonization of the heritage embedded in them. The "Piast Wrocław" – after 1945, in the public perception, has become the second Polish Lviv (although, contrary to the legend that persists to this day, the majority of its new inhabitants did not come from Lviv, but the city's "Lvivness" was rooted here by, among others, the Lviv staff of the now Polish University, the Ossolineum as well as by the Raławice Panorama, and the monument of Aleksander Fredro), which became an important laboratory for the progressing integration of the "new homeland" with the rest of the country.

The great propaganda event intended to consolidate the people of Wrocław and the nation around the Polish mythology of the "Recovered Territories" was an exhibition (from July to October 1948), anti-German in intention and message. It was meant to document the achievements of the reconstruction of the territories taken over from the Germans, to prove to the Polish population and foreign public, both their Polishness and the organisational and administrative efficiency of their

<sup>24</sup> Joanna Konopińska, *Tamten wrocławski rok 1945–1946*, Wrocław 1987, p. 53. The author titled second volume of her notes, completed in 1948, the title *We Wrocławiu jest mój dom* [In Wrocław is my home], but this is the title she gave *ex post* when preparing for publication at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>25</sup> Władysław J. Grabski, *200 miast wraca do Polski. Informator historyczny*, Poznań 1947, p. 5.

new owner. Both aspects were significant, but the latter was more important because the reluctance of the Anglo-Saxons, at the Potsdam Conference, to make too large territorial concessions to Poland in the west, was still remembered. This was expressed by Churchill, who worried at the time whether the “Polish goose” would not choke on too large a portion.<sup>26</sup> The exhibition was an opportunity for the city to hasten the demolition and removal of war damage from streets and squares: “Wrocław literally revived”, noted Joanna Konopińska in July, impressed by the enthusiasm with which the inhabitants took up the appeal of the authorities to join in the preparations for the Exhibition.<sup>27</sup> It proved to be a great propaganda and political success for Polish state and was very well received by the citizens of Wrocław and visitors (over one and a half million) from all over Poland, and fulfilled its integrating function.<sup>28</sup> Not coincidentally, at the same time the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace was organised in Wrocław on August 25–28, gathering participants from nearly 50 countries. Following their return, they were to testify of Silesia’s Polishness before the world. However, it was easier to convince the arrived Poles, who had to make a living somehow here, than the guests from abroad. The Polish-friendly Swiss writer Max Frisch, confronted during the Congress with “historical” evidence “that Silesia is Polish land”, commented that: “The same words could be quoted against us by Austria, demanding that after seven hundred years we return to its rule”, and added: “It is only [...] in the aspect of reparations that one can, I think, talk about [Polish] Silesia”.<sup>29</sup>

The effectiveness of the state historical policy in the “Recovered Territories” (as evidenced by the success of the Wrocław Exhibition) was determined by the support given to it by the Catholic Church, which also had a material interest in the matter, taking over not only post-German Catholic, but also Protestant church property. The Catholic Church immediately responded to the appeal of the ideologists and practitioners of Polonization of the city and the region, and joined the work of Polonization by implementing Catholicism. As early as August 1945, the Primate began to organise the structures of the Polish Catholic Church in the

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<sup>26</sup> Czuła, *Pożytki*, p. 168.

<sup>27</sup> Joanna Konopińska, *We Wrocławiu jest mój dom. Dziennik z lat 1946–1948*, Wrocław 1991, p. 224.

<sup>28</sup> Jakub Tyszkiewicz, *Sto wielkich dni Wrocławia. Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych we Wrocławiu a propaganda polityczna Ziem Zachodnich i Północnych w latach 1945–1948*, Wrocław 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Max Frisch, *Dziennik 1946–1949, 1966–1971*, transl. Jakub Ekier, Krzysztof Jachimczak, Warszawa 2015, p. 228.

“Recovered Territories”, passing full ecclesiastical authority temporarily to apostolic administrators appointed by the Vatican. After his death in 1948, this policy was continued even more actively by his successor, Stefan Wyszyński, who in 1952 appointed a new Polish cathedral chapter without consulting the Holy See. Addressing the faithful in Silesia, he spoke: “Behold, on the Piast land of Lower Silesia, our fathers – Piast dukes and knights – erected heavenly temples to God. And you have returned to them, like children, after a long journey to the threshold of your own home”. Motivating them to intensify their efforts, he emphasized: “We do not consider ourselves respectable guests here, we work for the future of Poland in this land”.<sup>30</sup> These words could just as well have come from a paper delivered by a government propagandist to the then local activists of the Polish Western Association or the Society for the Development of the Western Territories. They unambiguously testify to the state-creating involvement of the Catholic Church in the process of integrating the former German eastern provinces into the Polish state.<sup>31</sup> A significant support for this state-church policy was given by writers, who helped to “reinterpret the region’s millennia-long past in a Polish-Catholic spirit”,<sup>32</sup> such as Zbigniew Hierowski and Zbyszko Bednorz, who developed programs for the cultural acquisition of the new lands.<sup>33</sup> It was no coincidence that in November 1947 Wrocław hosted the participants of the Third National Congress of the Polish Writers’ Trade Union, who debated the strategy of literary Polonization of the city and the region. A poem for the subsequent economic development by Zofia Walicka-Neymanowa was characteristic – it described the new settler who came to the yesterday’s German lands, who “kneeled and with his face lowered over the fields / and with his hand, worn, trembling with emotion / he took these fields... forests... meadows... these larking songs / into Polish possession / with a sacred sign of the cross”.<sup>34</sup>

Even if literature did not spread the Piast myth among the new inhabitants in a confrontational manner (as it was the case in the so-called Piast novels by Karol Bunsch), it did laser on the “Recovered Territories” as if on a palimpsest, which

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<sup>30</sup> <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/tematy/stefan-wyszynski/82238,Prymas-Wyszynski-wobec-Ziem-Zachodnich.html> (accessed: December 29, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> On the subject, see: Robert Żurek, *Kościół rzymskokatolicki w Polsce wobec Ziem Zachodnich i Północnych 1945–1948*, Szczecin–Warszawa–Wrocław 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Wojciech Browary, *Historie odzyskane. Literackie dziedzictwo Wrocławia i Dolnego Śląska*, Wrocław 2019, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Zdzisław Hierowski, *Program kulturalny dla ziem odzyskanych*, “Odra”, 1945, 7, pp. 1–2.

<sup>34</sup> “Polityka”, 1995, 47, p. 1.

can be seen, for example, in Anna Kowalska's texts dedicated to Wrocław. She wrote that "[i]n some Rome guidebooks, a transparent sheet of paper with the plan of the ancient city can be placed over the plan of the modern city. The reader can easily identify each street, each building, what they were in antiquity, what they are in modern times. Now, the citizens of Wrocław are slowly placing a new, for them readable card of Polishness on the German city. Scholars, on the other hand, draw a plan of the former Polish stronghold. Sometimes, a storm helps the researchers – a house collapses during a windstorm and a thick layer of plaster falls off the neighbouring building, and then an old sign of an ancient Polish inn appears to the eyes of a passer-by".<sup>35</sup> The principles of such "archaeology of Polishness", as he called it, were proclaimed as early as 1946 by Emil Kaliski, who stated: "Records [of the Polishness of these lands – M.Z.] are faded, sometimes indistinct, sometimes destroyed. Therefore, with the greatest care, in order to preserve all that has miraculously survived to our times, it is necessary to reconstruct it again. And to reconstruct not only that which, despite the destruction, survived above the ground, but to reconstruct also that which, unprotected by the Germans, disintegrated in the course of the passing centuries, to be later hidden underground".<sup>36</sup>

Both texts reveal the national criterion, which for a long time dominated the official Polish approach to the post-German legacy in the acquired territories. From the very beginning, the services for the protection and conservation of historical monuments, which started to be established in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, were guided by the principle of "protection from destruction of objects of specific and recognised cultural, artistic, historical, and scientific values", as Jan Pruszyński, an expert in this field, described it.<sup>37</sup> However, the practical application of this principle and its interpretation in a given place and time differed from country to country. Thus, to the above-mentioned national criterion, in the new conditions of the Polish political system and its historical policy, the criterion of class was added. This categorical tandem proved particularly disastrous for the acquired cultural assets, especially those of an architectural nature, which were of the youngest date. The then existing regulations established the 1855 limit as the terminus *ante quem* for registering objects as historical monuments. Moreover, the canon of artistic quality functioning at the time eliminated works with neo-Gothic, Art

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<sup>35</sup> Anna Kowalska, *Opowieści wrocławskie*, Warszawa 1955, p. 225.

<sup>36</sup> Emil Kaliski, *Wrocław wrócił do Polski*, "Szarpa Warszawska", 1946, 9, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Jan Pruszyński, *Ochrona zabytków w Polsce*, Warszawa 1989, p. 33.

Nouveau, and eclectic style features from the protective umbrella. In general, however, the patriotic-national and political principle of the conservation service was a selection factor. It led to partial or even complete destruction of historic buildings or complexes in Lower Silesia that survived the war in very good or satisfactory condition. This practice was continued in Silesia also in the later period, as documented by reports in the archives of the Central Board of Museums and Monuments Protection.

The General Conservator-Restorer of Monuments, Jan Zachwatowicz, in 1946 developed the *Program i zasady konserwacji zabytków* [Program and principles for the conservation of monuments], in which he wrote: "The importance of the relics of the past for the nation has been brought out with drastic vividness by the events of recent years, when the Germans, wishing to destroy us as a nation, demolished the monuments of our past. [...] Refusing to accept that monuments of our culture be ripped away from us, we will reconstruct them, we will rebuild them from their foundations, in order to pass them on to the generations, if not in an authentic form, then at least in an exact one, alive in our memories and available in materials".<sup>38</sup> These words clearly indicate that this was a program addressed to *Polish* cultural heritage, and in the lands of Lower Silesia, the new Poland, it could only be applied selectively. In order to implement the program in central Poland, where the reconstruction of Warsaw became the program's flagship, specialised demolition companies were set up in the west and north of the country, operating until the end of the 1950s. They were engaged in "recovery" of building materials and elements from the post-German architectural substance. Among other places, Warsaw received shipments of bricks from tenement houses in Wrocław, Nysa, Brześć, and other places, as well as from the Lower Silesian Junkers' palaces, which were then demolished because they did not meet national and class criteria. In addition, there was also the criterion of religion, as it sometimes happened that an evangelical church was demolished in order to build a Catholic vicarage from the material thus obtained. What was not demolished or utilised by the 1960s, started to fall into disrepair in the following years, and was removed from urban areas by sapper demolition in the 1980s. The most striking example of such devastation was in Wrocław, where in 1974 the ruins of the medieval St. Clare's Mills were blown up.

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<sup>38</sup> "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki i Kultury", 1946, 1–2, p. 48.

De-Germanization practices sometimes took grotesque forms in the city. From the reprint of the image of the city from Schedel's *Chronicle* (1493) published in 1983 by the Society of Wrocław Enthusiasts (sic!), the inscription Bresslau was removed, and such forgery was offered for sale in bookstores. Yet in Wrocław antique shops one could – with a bit of luck – buy the original of this engraving. In turn, at the beginning of the 1990s, during the restoration of the historical city border stone, dating from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the original “Breslau” inscription was removed and replaced with the Polish “Wrocław”. It would seem that these kinds of absurdities constitute an irrevocably gone past in Breslau, yet a book published in 2019 contradicts this, with its author beginning it with a statement: “In 1938, Wrocław was part of the great Silesian province. It was inhabited by almost 630,000 people, mainly Germans and Poles, and a small number of Czechs”.<sup>39</sup> This statement, which is inaccurate, clearly a lie, and a blatant de-Germanization of the pre-war demographic potential of the city, is incomprehensible and astonishing. It remains a relic of the physical destruction of the preserved substance of German cultural heritage in the city, consisting in its “de-Germanization”. The then Olsztyn provincial restorer Zbigniew Rewski put it bluntly in his speech at the national conference of historic buildings restorers in Łańcut in 1948, when he spoke of “de-Prussianization”.<sup>40</sup> However, the “de-Prussianization” of architecture caused irreparable damage. In the 1970s, some well-preserved baroque stuccowork was removed from several Wrocław churches as part of the regothisation of their interiors and an ideologically pushed return to the Piast period.

The destruction of the acquired historical cultural heritage in Lower Silesia affected not only real estate historic substance, but also movable objects. The resulting damage to the cultural landscape of the region, concerning individual towns, settlements, historic complexes, or buildings, is even more painful because it is impossible to compensate for the numerous movable monuments, which were once located there, and which were transferred during the so-called “translocation” to central Poland. Therefore, the original appearance and artistic functionality of historical objects, complexes, etc., are often impossible to recreate. In other words, it means their permanent cultural and artistic depreciation. In this context, a few

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<sup>39</sup> Joanna Hytrek-Hryciuk, *Między prywatnym a publicznym. Życie codzienne we Wrocławiu w latach 1938–1944*, Wrocław 2019, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Zbigniew Rewski, *Zagadnienie odpruszczenia krajobrazu i zabudowy na Ziemiach Odzyskanych a konserwatorstwo*, “Ochrona Zabytków, Kronika”, 1948, 3–4, p. 164.

telling examples from Wrocław should be mentioned. Outstanding works of medieval art from Silesia, such as the famous Beautiful Madonna from the St. Elizabeth Church, the Altar of St. Barbara from the St. Barbara Church, and the Triptych of St. Hedwig from the Bernardine Church, were taken to Warsaw. A reading of the Silesian section in the catalogue of mediaeval table paintings in the National Museum in Warsaw, written by Tadeusz Dobrzeński, is a historical proof of an unprecedented artistic conquest, whose victims were not only churches and museums in Wrocław, but Silesia in general, all the area up to Zgorzelec. The catalogue, published in 1972, euphemizes the predatory nature of this action (to which the Warsaw collection owes its creation), informing in the imprints of individual objects: "acquired in 1945 (1946)". How it was possible to "acquire" works of art in 1946, in Silesia, which was already Polish at the time, and where museum infrastructure and conservation and protection services were already in place, remains a mystery to Warsaw museum specialists.

As a result of this procedure, of all the provinces incorporated into Poland in 1945, Silesia suffered the greatest losses, being the richest among them in historical monuments. The fatal consequences of these decisions for genetic and style research do not need to be specifically emphasized. Moreover, part of the gathered collection (it is difficult to say which part, as the documentation of the shipments was kept superficial and incomplete in order to obscure the origin of some objects) was never to be seen again, ending up in museum storerooms. There it disappeared, not only from the eyes of the ordinary public, but also from those of art historians. Such was the fate of, for instance, the lion's share of the rich furnishings of the Krapps' Chapel in St. Elisabeth Church in Wrocław (including the valuable, wood-carved, so-called the Krapps' Passion), which has been in storage at the National Museum in Warsaw since 1946.

The top-down promoted Piast myth, by which the state propaganda tried to reduce the past few hundred years of German presence in Silesia to the dimension of its few-century-long occupation, fell on deaf ears among the inhabitants of Wrocław born after the war, as it had no compensatory value for them. Escape from the syndrome of historical and cultural depravity imposed upon them for decades was achieved through scholarly references to German individual memory (through increasing numbers of personal contacts in those years) and collective memory (contained in the literature and material culture produced in this area). This was consistent with the (sub)conscious mnemonic mechanism which causes



that “we are invaded by doubts about memories that are only ours [...]. When the memory is not shared, it seems false”.<sup>41</sup>

This process went hand in hand with a re-evaluation of thinking about Polish–German relations – including the cultural heritage taken over from the Germans – which had been progressing in Poland since the 1970s. From the climate of this debate emerged in the 1980s in the circle of Wrocław art historians the originally uncensored *Memoriał o stanie zabytków na Dolnym Śląsku* (Memorial on the State of Monuments in Lower Silesia).<sup>42</sup> The authors focused in detail on this one region, but when summarizing the post-war period in this area, they nevertheless made a general evaluation of the “cultural policy in the Recovered Territories” when they wrote about the “losses” which the Silesian region suffered as a result of this policy and about the fact that “architectural monuments, sculptures and paintings, already negatively perceived according to the model of class struggle as works of art of the owning and exploiting strata, were treated particularly brutally in Silesia as part of the so-called removal of traces of Germanness”. This is a statement that applies in its entirety to the other Western and Northern Territories as well. Emphasizing here the problem of cultural heritage taken over from the Germans, the authors of *Memorial* presented, for the first time in the Polish debate on this issue, a position free of national-state perspective. The departure from single-value and antagonistic schemes, however, could widely take place only after the political breakthrough of 1989/91.

It was then that an awareness began to make its way into the historical self-knowledge of the people of Wrocław, the awareness that was expressed in 1993 by the Wrocław author Sebastian Lamarck (aka Stanisław Bereś): “I lived in a German house, where for generations German children were born and German old people were dying. I slept on a German couch, looked at German paintings, bathed in a German bathtub, ate from German pots and plates, played with German sabres, wrote with a German pen and ink, and leafed through German books [...]. Even when I took off my school blouse from the hanger, the inscription »Steuernagel« revealed itself. It was the name of the doctor who used to live in my apartment. He never did anything bad to me, and I lived between his stuff. [...] Sometimes it occurred to me: »Jesus Christ! We’re living among stolen possessions«”.<sup>43</sup> In the same year Maciej

<sup>41</sup> David Lowenthal, *Przeszłość to obcy kraj*, “Res Publica”, 1991, 3, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Originally published in: “Biuletyn Dolnośląski”, 1986, 2, pp. 2–5.

<sup>43</sup> *Amarcord wrocławski. Rozmowa z Sebastianem Lamarck*, “Odra”, 1993, 5, p. 51.

Łagiewski, director of the Wrocław Historical Museum, spoke in an interview for "Odra" of a "city devoid of memory" (1993, No. 10), which the literary scholar and writer Andrzej Zawada soon afterwards made more precise when he wrote directly about a city "whose memory has been amputated".<sup>44</sup> At that time, the restoration of the city's memory was met with a regular aggressive campaign by the right-wing press. One of its authors wrote: "The effects of reviewing the materials on the expansion of Germanness in Wrocław are simply horrifying. It turned out that Wrocław is quickly catching up with Opole and Szczecin in re-Germanization activities such as: the restoration of German names at the expense of the existing Polish ones, and the particular reverence shown for various reminders of the German past". The author quoted above did not hesitate to make the false accusation that "[a] very grim role in this regard is played by local traitorous pseudo-elites, especially by academics ready to worship Germany on their knees in exchange for high grants, fees, lectures, scholarships, awards, and decorations".<sup>45</sup>

The way to overcome the national-state paradigm with regard to Wrocław and build a new identity based on the dialectic and multicultural tradition of the place was indicated by Andrzej Zawada, who gave his essays the meaningful title *Bresław*. The city authorities have been supporting the people of Wrocław on this path from the very beginning, with a huge role played by Bogdan Zdrojewski, the city's first mayor in 1990–2001. Thanks to him, the metaphor of "the meeting place" has been attached to Wrocław, popular among both domestic and foreign visitors, and inextricably linked with it. It is also symbolised by the above-mentioned permanent exhibition *1000 lat Wrocławia* [1000 years of Wrocław], opened in 2009 in the City Museum, which shows, according to Andrzej Zawada, that today's city "could only have come into being as a sum of varied cultural heritage, brought here by all new inhabitants of Wrocław, and the heritage gathered by the inhabitants of Wrocław from previous centuries and epochs. Combining this heritage, gluing the individual components together, supporting the merging into one young and energetic urban organism"<sup>46</sup> – this is a task which the Polish inhabitants of Wrocław have succeeded in accomplishing after 1989, but which they must not give up working on.

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<sup>44</sup> Andrzej Zawada, *Bresław. Eseje o miejscach*, Wrocław 1996, p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Jerzy Robert Nowak, *Pełzająca germanizacja Wrocławia*, "Nasz Dziennik", February 14/15, 2009. Cf. polemic by Beata Maciejewska, *Germańska fala zalewa Wrocław*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", February 21/22, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Andrzej Zawada, *Drugi Bresław*, Wrocław 2015, p. 76.

## STRESZCZENIE / SUMMARY

Autor analizuje stosunek władz Wrocławia do miejscowego dziedzictwa kulturowego. Podkreśla, że do przełomu politycznego lat 1989/1990 stanowiło ono przedmiot nierozwiązywalnego sporu historycznego i ideologicznego między Niemcami a Polską, co obciążało wzajemne stosunki. Stosowanie przez obydwie strony wyłącznie paradygmatu narodowego w podejściu do dziejów miasta uniemożliwiało zbliżenie stanowisk. Autor ukazuje ten spór na tle ogólnego, polskiego stosunku do zjawiska niemieckiego dziedzictwa kulturowego w Polsce po II wojnie światowej i tłumaczy jego ewolucję we Wrocławiu i na Śląsku aż do dzisiaj.

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