

# SHORT NOTES\*

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## GENERAL WORKS

Hanna Rajfura, Patrycja Szwedo, Barbara Świadek, Marek Walczak, and Piotr Węcowski (eds), *Śmierć, pogrzeb i upamiętnienie władców w dawnej Polsce* [Death, Funeral and Commemoration of Rulers in Old Poland], Warszawa, 2020, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 282 pp., ill., English sum., list of abbreviations

This book is a joint project of historians from the University of Warsaw and art historians from the Jagiellonian University. It continues the prior research on death and funerals conducted by representatives of these two schools. Quite unusually, it does not open with an introduction, but an article by one of the editors, Marek Walczak, who presents problems posed by the study of funerals and the ceremonial involved. The author largely, but not exclusively, focuses on the issue of dissecting corpses. The article works better as an introduction to the book than as a stand-alone text.

Next comes the study by Urszula Augustyniak on what can be called the ritual of interregnum. She writes about the death of a ruler as, on the one hand, an interruption or disturbance of the natural order, but on the other hand, an event which made possible political actions that could not have been performed while the ruler was alive. The next article is by Wojciech Sowa, who examined the gravestone and tomb of Władysław the White in the Saint-Benigne church in Dijon. The author based the text on archival findings that has not been used to date.

The subsequent texts deal with the following topics: Jakub Kubieniec writes about the liturgy of death in late medieval Cracow, and Bożena Czwojdrak about funerals and commemoration of queens in the Polish late Middle Ages. Marcin Starzyński discusses poems commemorating the death of a king. Barbara Świadek focuses on the tombstone of Jan Olbracht, as well as other

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\* Authors of short notes: Antoni Grabowski (AG), Marta Jaworska-Oknińska (MJO), Adam Kożuchowski (AK), Grzegorz Krzywiec (GK), Rafał Rutkowski (RR), and Hubert Wilk (HW).

objects used in the cultivation of the memory of the king in Wawel Cathedral. Mateusz Grzęda writes about the ideological significance of the tombstone of Sigismund I the Old, supposedly inspired by the motif of Hercules at the crossroads. Agnieszka Januszek-Sieradzka discusses the financing of the funeral of Sigismund II Augustus, and Jarosław Pietrzak is interested in the post-mortems of Polish kings and queens from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Aleksandra Barwicka-Makula's text on the death and funeral of Anne of Austria, wife of Sigismund III Vasa. Next, Joanna A. Kościelna writes about the causes of passing of the members of House of Griffin in the years 1600–37, and list the subsequent deaths. Monika Ogiewa-Sejnota follows up on the topic, as it were, as she presents the funeral of the last Griffin, Bogisław XIV: the ceremonies took place in 1653–4 (the actual date of burial was 25 May 1654). The next text is by Maria Kałamajska-Saeed and concerns the *castrum doloris* of Kings John II Casimir and Michał Wiśniowiecki, a two-storey catafalque flanked by two obelisks, which was depicted on a drawing found by the author in the Collection of Manuscripts of the Russian National Library in St Petersburg (Manuscripts Department, f. 40, folder 408). Aleksandra Skrzypietz describes the Roman funeral of Maria Klementyna Sobieska, and Anna Bednarek presents the oldest photographs of Kazimierz the Great's tombstone. The whole volume closes with another article by Marek Walczak on the royal necropolis at Wawel in the early twentieth century, and more specifically on the effects of the cathedral's restoration and the construction of two monuments by Antoni Madeyski: to Queen Hedwig and Ladislaus of Warona.

The result is interesting on the whole, but rather disorganised. Apart from the two texts on the House of Griffin, the rest seems to be arranged in a random manner, which is a pity, because it seems that some of the studies would have benefited from being linked together. Especially because some texts feature elaborate introductions to the subject matter which are lacking in others. (AG)

Tadeusz Wolsza, *Od "Honoratki" do Wierzbowej. Życie szachowe w Warszawie w latach 1829–1939* [From the 'Honoratka' Café to the Club at Wierzbowa Street. Chess Life in Warsaw, 1829–1939], Warszawa, 2020, Instytut Historii im. Tadeusza Manteuffla PAN, Wydawnictwo Neriton, 233 pp., index of persons, bibliography, English sum., 7 annexes, ills

Tadeusz Wolsza is the most distinguished Polish expert in chess history. His most remarkable achievement in this field is certainly the *Biographical Lexicon of the Polish Chess Players and Enthusiasts* (five volumes, 1995–2007). His is also the author of a biography of Mieczysław (Miguel) Najdorf, one of the last

non-professional international Grand Masters, winner of the 'Polish immortal' game, and the father of one of the most popular chess openings.

The present volume encompasses the history of chess in Warsaw from the period when the royal game first began to attract the public attention in the third decade of the nineteenth century, until the golden era of Polish chess, when Warsaw emerged as one of its global centres, a home to a number of the (future) international Grand Masters, and a destination regularly visited by the strongest international players. In Poland, like all around the world, the origins of organised chess were linked to cafes where players and enthusiasts met regularly – and the history of such places is a principal theme of the book. The other subject is the history of the Varsovian chess tournaments, starting with the 1868 edition, up to the 4th Chess Olympiad in 1935. The author also discusses some particular unofficial matches, such as the Warsaw–Moscow match of 1879–82, in detail. Yet another topic is the development of the Varsovian chess organisations, starting in the late 1890s, and the national Chess Association, founded after the 1st Chess Olympiad in 1924 as a local branch of the FIDE. Finally, the book discusses chess periodicals, a number of contemporary comments by chess enthusiasts and supporters, including Poland's first Marshall and *de facto* dictator Józef Piłsudski, and the chess propaganda in the press and radio.

Regrettably, the book remains focused exclusively on Warsaw, which was the leading Polish centre for the royal game in the period under discussion (challenged by Łódź in the first two decades of the twentieth century, when the local association had Akiba Rubinstein, the highest ranked Polish chess master so far, among its members), but far from the only one. It seems that the history of chess in Poland should be the topic of Wolsza's next book, as he is certainly the best qualified historian for the challenge. The volume is wonderfully supplemented with annexes. Number one and two list chess rubrics in the Varsovian press between 1834 and 1939. Number three provides the titles of chess periodicals and the names of their editors. Number four names the Varsovian players at Chess Olympiads. Number five lists the simultaneous games held in Warsaw from 1896 to 1935, including the ones by Frank Marshall, Emmanuel Lasker, Akiba Rubinstein, and Jose Raul Capablanca, also providing their results. Number six enumerates all 265 members of the Warsaw Chess Association in 1920. Number seven presents some of the matches played in Warsaw between 1836 and 1939, with illustrations of the most dramatic moments included. (AK)

Krzysztof Stefański, *Henryk Hirszenberg (1885–1955) i środowisko żydowskich architektów Łodzi* [Henryk Hirszenberg (1885–1955) and the Jewish Architects of Łódź], Łódź, 2021, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 285 pp., index of persons, bibliography, illustrations and list thereof

Krzysztof Stefański is the author of a number of books on the history of Polish architecture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly on the architecture of Łódź. The city that was developing very rapidly in the decades prior to the First World War, was distinguished by a strong, even by contemporary Polish standards, impact of the Jewish entrepreneurs, architects, musicians, and visual artists. The Jews dominated the artistic life of the city up to the late 1920s. The present book focuses on Jewish architects and their legacy: their professional and social lives, as well as the designs.

Chapter one presents the artistic and architectural life of the city before the First World War. Chapters two and three discuss the projects and achievements of the Jewish architects in the three decades before the war, when the historical neo-styles prevailed in the city landscape, then rivalled only by the Polish variant of the Secession movement, and in the two inter-war decades, dominated by modernism. The last chapter focuses on the main protagonist: Henryk (Izrael Hersz) Hirszenberg, younger brother of Samuel, an eminent painter, an outstanding member of the first generation of the Polish-Jewish visual artists. Henryk remains a much lesser known figure than the brother 20 years his senior, although over two dozen public and private buildings he designed are standing in Łódź to this day. Apparently, he studied in Dresden where he married a painter Olga Rothe, for whom he converted to Lutheranism and adopted a Christian name. He won a number of competitions in Russia in the first decade of the century, and settled down in Łódź after the 1905 Revolution. He spent the years of the First World War and the October Revolution in St Petersburg and Moscow (where he remarried), and escaped from the Bolshevik Russia back to Łódź in 1921. The inter-war period marked the peak of his career: he designed or co-designed numerous public and private buildings in the city, and in the region. In 1937 Hirszenberg and his third wife Bela emigrated to Palestine, where he continued to be active as architect, book illustrator, and, from 1949 on, as an expert of the Israeli Labor Ministry, for which he designed several residential buildings and a textile factory near Tel-Aviv, where he died in 1955. (AK)

Jacek Burski, Kamil Piskała, Kaja Kaźmierska, Agata Zysiak, Wiktor Marzec, and Kamil Śmiechowski, *Z bawełny i dymu. Łódź – miasto przemysłowe i dyskursy asynchronicznej nowoczesności 1897–1994* [From Cotton and Smoke: Łódź – the Industrial City and Discourses of Asynchronous Modernity, 1897–1994], Łódź, 2021, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 312 pp., bibliography, annexe, ills and list of thereof

A synthetic monograph on Łódź as the capital of Polish modernisation, a key industrial centre, and also a study that captures the battle of local residents grappling with these changes in the ‘long twentieth century’. Pioneering in its scope, innovative in its methods, the approach developed by the younger generation of researchers affiliated with Łódź (mainly sociologists and historians) certainly demands careful, close reading.

The work is structured around leading moments that reflect the break between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries along with the intensive industrial development that accompanied it, the year 1918, when the system of national governments was implemented and the new Poland was being formed (all the way till 1923), the year 1945, when new Communist governments arose in the wake of the Second World War and the Holocaust, and finally 1989 – a time of turbulent, violent transition from state socialism to post-industrial capitalism.

Four chapters are for the most part based on discourses in the local press: these publications capture the birth of a modern city and modern state in dynamic relation, revealing the visions that shaped contemporary – that is, twentieth- and twenty-first-century – Łódź.

Although the authors differ in their approaches – these studies are situated at the intersection of discourse research, urban sociology, and historical sociology – the glue that holds them together, conceptually, is their stance toward capitalism as a social system, and that the revolutionary change, at least that which took place post-1945, is described comprehensively, with greater empathy than it has been in any other studies to date. Its critical approach, and the range of fresh arguments expressed here, place this study on the shelf alongside others that facilitate understanding of modernisation and its discontents in the region. (GK)

Danuta Jastrzębska-Golonkowa, Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Włodzimierz Suleja, and Tadeusz Wolsza (eds), *Bez emocji. Polsko-litewski dialog o Józefie Piłsudskim* [Emotionlessly: A Polish-Lithuanian Dialogue on Józef Piłsudski], Warszawa, 2020, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Lithuanian History Institute, Polish Institute in Vilnius, 360 pp., list of abbreviations, index of persons

The book concerns the disputed legacy of Piłsudski as a symbol of the complicated and mistrustful Polish-Lithuanian relations. The Polish politician remains one of the emblematic ‘traitors’ in the Lithuanian nationalist tradition because of his role in the annexation of the Vilnius region to Poland in the final phase of the Polish-Soviet war of 1920. The annexation, resulting from a fake mutiny of the Polish troops carried out at Piłsudski’s initiative, was never officially recognised by the Lithuanian Republic, which continued to consider Vilnius, incorporated into the Polish Second Republic in 1922, as its national capital; until it was, for the second time, handed to Lithuania by the Soviet Union in the fall of 1939. It was also a consequence of the failure of Piłsudski’s federalist project for the union of Poland and Lithuania, rooted in his own identity of a Pole raised in the tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and representing the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility.

The book consists of eight papers by the Polish historians, and eight essays by the Lithuanian scholars (including a poet and professor at Yale – Tomas Venclova), first delivered at a conference in Vilnius in December 2017. Apparently, the authors remained faithful to their declaration of keeping a dispassionate attitude towards the annexation of Vilnius, simply by ignoring this source of Polish-Lithuanian controversy. The majority of the papers by the Polish historians is apologetic about Piłsudski, and the Lithuanian ones attempt to be sympathetic about their protagonist. Some of the essays, moreover, like the ones on Piłsudski’s hobbies and his language, have virtually nothing to do with Lithuania and Vilnius. Two of them analyse his image in the Lithuanian press and culture. Eventually, just a single text, considering Piłsudski’s relations with Michał Romer – another Polish-Lithuanian, who opted for Lithuania in 1920 – touch upon the crucial issue of the Polish-Lithuanian controversy. Unfortunately, none of the essays discusses the problem of Piłsudski’s Lithuanian identity in depth. The overall impression the book offers, therefore, is actually not of a ‘dialogue’, but of a conversation in which the participants, kindly and desperately at the same time, avoid uttering any controversial statement. The tensest part of the book is the transcript of the discussion between eight participants (Alfредas Baumbauskas, Marek Kornat, Rimantas Miknys, Andrzej Nowak, Darius Staliūnas, Włodzimierz Suleja, Tomas Venclova, and Alvydas Nikžentaitis) at the 2017 conference, during which the Poles were asked to criticise Piłsudski, and the Lithuanians to praise him. (AK)

## MIDDLE AGES

Andrzej Buko, *Świt państwa polskiego* [The Dawn of the Polish State], Warszawa, 2021, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, 332 pp., bibliography, English sum., index of geographical and ethnical names

The latest book by Andrzej Buko, professor of medieval archaeology at the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology PAS, provides an accessibly written overview of the author's research on the early Piast monarchy. Polish state formation is presented almost exclusively on the basis of archaeological sources. Buko reconstructs the emergence and consolidation of power in Greater Poland [Wielkopolska], following the process of violent expansion into neighbouring territories, which occurred over the course of the tenth century. The foreword to this study includes a brief literature review, summarising previous research on the origins of the Piast monarchy, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Chapter one serves as a general introduction to the state-building process in early medieval Eastern Europe. Later chapters devote more detail to discussions of each region under the Piast monarchy, in descending order: Little Poland [Małopolska] and Silesia, Greater Poland and Masovia, and Pomerania. Chapter five presents an archaeologist's view on the origins of the Piast dynasty, while chapter six covers the Christianisation of their kingdom. In chapter seven, the author uses material culture to sketch a social cross-section of the population that inhabited the lands along the Vistula and Warta Rivers in the tenth century. (RR)

Nina Glińska, *Wczesnośredniowieczna Wiślica. Urbs famosissima in regno Lechitarum* [Early Medieval Wiślica. *Urbs famosissima in regno Lechitarum*], Warszawa, 2020, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, 415 pp.+ CD, English sum., bibliography, index of personal names, index of geographical and ethnical names, ill., tables, annexes; series: *Origines Polonorum*, 14,

The 'Origines Polonorum' series edited by Przemysław Urbańczyk is a continuation of sorts to the various millennial studies conducted (and abandoned) over the past half century. Each volume is dedicated to a separate *gród* [medieval stronghold] within the territory of the first Piast monarchy, providing a compilation of archaeological studies, both old and new. In contrast to previous volumes, this book – devoted to Wiślica – is essentially the work of one author, although it does include a chapter by art historian Aneta Bukowska,

'Nowe badania nad wczesnośredniowieczną architekturą kamienną w Wiślicy' (pp. 299–341). Nina Glińska is an archaeologist of the younger generation, trained at the University of Rzeszów and currently working at the National Institute of Cultural Heritage [Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa]. This book is based on her doctoral dissertation, which she defended in 2019 under Professor Michał Parczewski's supervision. It focused on the archaeology of Wiślica (present-day Świętokrzyskie voivodeship). The town has connections to several historical figures and chronicles, among them the legend of Walter and Helgunda [Legenda o Helgundzie i Walgierzu Wdałym], as well as prince Henryk Sandomierski. Medievalists have located the seat of the "mighty prince on the Vistula" from *The Life of Methodius* [Żywot Metodego] in Wiślica as well. This seat is ultimately the remains of two strongholds, five churches, five burial grounds, and a palace complex. Though archaeological digs were conducted at the site from the early postwar period to the early twenty first century, these findings had not been considered collectively or compiled into a complete publication. Glińska proposes such a synthesis, based on archival documentation from six sites related to the Early Middle Ages. Chapter one situates Wiślica in its surrounding natural environment, while the second provides a history of the settlement that draws on written sources. In chapter three, Glińska reviews the substantial body of existing literature on the six dig sites. The next two chapters offer an overview of the artifacts discovered there, coins, ornamental accessories, armour, etc., and most of all, earthenware. Glińska analyses their chronology in chapter six, and uses chapter seven to describe each individual site in more detail. Chapter eight is followed by the conclusion, in which the author attempts to reconstruct Wiślica's cultural development during the early medieval period. The monograph also comes with a CD, where the reader can find a catalogue of the relics analysed. (RR)

Tadeusz Gacia, Jarosław R. Marczewski, and Agnieszka Strycharczuk, *Maioris ad limina templi... Poezja epigrafična epoki karolińskiej. Badania i przekłady* [Majoris ad limina templi... Epigraphic Poetry of the Carolingian Era: Research and Translations], Lublin, 2020, Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II, 464 pp., bibliography, index of names, annexe; series: Źródła i monografie

The book by Tadeusz Gacia, Jarosław R. Marczewski, and Agnieszka Strycharczuk is a rather peculiar publication. It consists of three chapters and an appendix. Chapter one discusses the Carolingian dynasty, its rule and ideology, as well as the literary renaissance of the time. A reader cannot escape feeling, on the one hand, that the choice of source literature is chaotic, and on



the other hand, one should not be surprised to see almost endless footnote quotations from the literature on the subject. Referred to as “pertinent comment” or “important remark” they give the impression they were used in order to artificially inflate the rather modest footnotes. This chaos and artificial expanding of the text is also evident in the later chapters. The second one discusses the poets whose texts are presented in the appendix (Alcuin, Paul the Deacon, Theodulf of Orleans and Rabanus Maurus). Chapter three is, as it were, the proper part of the book. Here the authors discuss the genre of epigraphic poetry in detail, seeming a little too credulous in assuming that the works preserved in manuscripts had been originally written in this form. One should rather refer to it as the poetry of Carolingian times. The appendix consists of translations of works published in the ‘Monumenta Germaniae Historica’ series. The authors did not consult the manuscripts, did not check the faithfulness of the editions. (AG)

Ewa Wólkiewicz, *Proletariusze modlitwy? Drogi karier, finanse i kultura materialna niższego kleru w średniowiecznej Nysie* [Proletarians of Prayer? Career Paths, Finances, and Material Culture of the Lower Clergy in Medieval Nysa], Warszawa, 2020, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, 616 pp., annexes, list of abbreviations, list of sources

The author is an historian and professor at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology PAS, whose interests are focused on issues pertaining to religious life in late medieval Silesia. Her previous book was devoted to religious observance in Nysa during this period, *Kościół i jego wierni. Struktury kościelne i formy pobożności w średniowiecznej Nysie* [The Church and Its Believers. Church Structures and Forms of Piety in Medieval Nysa; Warszawa, 2014]. Her latest, in many ways a pioneering monograph, is dedicated to the lower clergy, impressive in scope and for the vast amount of work that evidently went into it. The bulk of this work consists of prosopographic annexes on individual priests, their biographies and reports (pp. 183–584). The text’s fundamental section (pp. 7–182) is divided into five chapters (plus introduction). Wólkiewicz discusses the number of clergy in Nysa, their categories (rectors, altarists, etc.), living conditions and material culture, literacy and education, and finally attitudes toward ideas of reform. Her research questionnaire focuses on means of obtaining benefits and prebends as well as the material situation and everyday life of the clergy. As a whole, these considerations challenge the persistent nineteenth-century stereotype – alluded to in the book’s title – of the lower clergy as ‘proletariat’. (RR)

Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. by Jakub Morawiec and Anna Waško, transl. Grzegorz Bartusik, Remigiusz Gogosz, Renata Leśniakiewicz-Drzymała, Jakub Morawiec, Marta Rey-Radlińska, Joanna Srholec-Skórzewska, and Anna Waško, Preface and i–iii, Kraków, 2019 [2021], Księgarnia Akademicka, 240+316+363+368 pp.

It's a monumental undertaking, many years in the making, the work of seven people – largely from the younger generation – several of whom came to the project with prior experience in translating primary sources. The project in question is the *Heimskringla*, attributed to Snorri Sturluson, the last and most comprehensive of the Nordic king sagas (written in the 1330s). The prose epic, a triptych form, is customarily published in three separate volumes, and this edition does not break with custom; what's more, it adds a fourth companion volume in an introductory capacity. This volume, one would assume, was also a team effort; however, only Anna Waško and Jakub Morawiec (professors at Jagiellonian University and the University of Silesia in Katowice, respectively) are listed as editors. Nevertheless, it serves as a valuable and accessible introduction to the issues involved with this text. It discusses Snorri Sturluson's biography, the literature and mythology of medieval Iceland, as well as the sources and manuscripts of the *Heimskringla*. This translation was based on Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's standard edition from the 'Íslenzk Fornrit' series; it's a pleasure to read, preserving the raw severity of the original, and annotated with helpful explanatory or expository footnotes where necessary. Team members translated the text in separate batches, and the editors streamlined these sections into a more unified style. Morawiec was responsible for translating the skaldic meter. As a whole, this work is undoubtedly a milestone in the field of Polish medieval source translation – and not only Scandinavian sources. (RR)

Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer, *Władza i grzech. Supliki z terenów metropolii gnieźnieńskiej do Penitencjarii Apostolskiej w XV wieku* [Power and Sin: Supplications from the Gniezno Archdiocese to the Apostolic Penitentiary in the Fifteenth Century], Warszawa, 2021, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, 346 pp.

Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer, a Warsaw-based researcher affiliated with Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology PAS, is interested in private religious practices and the Jagiellonian monarchy's contacts with the Holy See of Rome. Her debut monograph discusses the Apostolic Penitentiary's acts related to the Gniezno archdiocese. This institution – whose archives opened to researchers in the

1980s – involved itself in various matters on behalf of the Pope, including priests born out of wedlock, regulations concerning the institution of marriage, or the observance of canon law in everyday life. Due to the source material's condition and degree of preservation, the author concentrated on supplications from the fifteenth century. The book consists of three chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. Chapter one is a general overview of the institution itself: what the Penitentiary was. In chapter two she describes Poland's contacts with the Penitentiary and the various forms they took. Chapter three focuses on social life, to the extent that it can be revealed from the study of supplications. Saczyńska-Vercamer's intent with this monograph was twofold: combining quantitative methods with analysis of individual cases, and approaching Polish affairs from a comparative angle. (RR)

#### EARLY MODERN TIMES

Piotr Łozowski, *Rodzina w Starej i Nowej Warszawie w XV i początkach XVI wieku* [The Family in Old and New Warsaw in the 15th and Early 16th Centuries], Białystok, 2021, Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy, 227 pp., ill., annexes, bibliography, index of personal names, list of abbreviations, list of tables, list of charts, English sum., Prace Centrum Badań Struktur Demograficznych i Gospodarczych Przednowoczesnej Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, xi; series: Dissertationes, 30

The aim of the presented study in the field of historical demography, is to identify in as extensive of a scope as possible the demographic condition of burgher families in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, in order to better understand and present both family life in the context of the development of pre-industrial society, as well as the wealth structures and economic development of the urban population. In particular, the focus is on filling the historiographical gap concerning the size of families and the average length of the professional lives of working townsmen. The author proves that the city was a difficult environment for maintaining a family, especially in terms of health, hygiene and sanitation (in comparison with the condition of peasant and noble families), and draws attention to the extremely important role of migration in the demographic development of Warsaw's Old and New Town. The author also presents his findings against a comparative background based on an extensive survey of secondary sources, mainly in Central and Western Europe, but also compared to other Polish urban centres in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, showing that the development of Warsaw's population did not differ from that of typical European urban centres.

The volume discussed has a problem-based structure and is divided into four chapters. The first, introducing the subject, outlines living conditions in the late medieval town and the factors which influenced the development and evolution of the family. Subsequent chapters are devoted to demographic analysis: in chapter two, the demographic structures of the urban family, in chapter three, the duration of professional activity of craftsmen and merchants is examined, and chapter four deals with the anthroponomic structure in both urban centres. The chronological framework of the study is determined, on the one hand, by the presence of sources (town registers dating back to 1416 and 1427) and, on the other hand, by changes of a political and legal nature (incorporation of Masovia into the Polish Crown in 1526). The basis for research is the analysis of statistical materials and data concerning Warsaw's Old and New Town in the period in question, in order to outline a detailed picture of the demographic condition of families living there. The source base consists of well-preserved municipal registers which allowed for the reconstruction of 523 families. The period selected by the author marks the beginning of the dynamic economic development of Old and New Town Warsaw, and is considered a landmark in the development of the future capital of Poland, providing an extremely interesting and wider context for study into the status of burgher families, their functioning, property structure and social standing. Of particular interest are also the author's attempts to develop an insight into the collective mentality and culture of the townspeople on the basis of a reconstruction of the most popular name combinations and naming trends. (MJO)

Katarzyna Setkowicz, *Romans rycerski a początki zawodu pisarza w Hiszpanii. Przypadek Feliciano de Silva (ok. 1489–1554)* [The Romance of Chivalry and the Origins of the Writing Profession in Spain. The Case of Feliciano de Silva, ca 1489–1554], Toruń, 2020, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 478 pp., bibliography, annexe, index of names, ills, English sum.; series: Monografie Fundacji na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej

The book by Katarzyna Setkowicz is the published version of her PhD thesis. I will start with a formal remark; according to the table of contents, it is not divided into chapters, but into parts, although in fact we are dealing with the former. The author herself uses both terms interchangeably. The treatise begins with a very short introduction, in which the author briefly outlines the structure of the work. It consists of four chapters, as Setkowicz uses both terms alternately, an epilogue and three appendices. The first part is a presentation of the current state of research and the research method.

In the second part the author discusses the specificity of the book printed in the sixteenth-century Spain, the third deals with romance of chivalry and the fourth is devoted to Feliciano de Silva, one of the authors of the genre. This chapter, the longest in the entire book, is divided into shorter sections on de Silva's biography, the evolution of his work and its characteristics. Setkowicz also discusses the writer's position in the 'literary field' (using Pierre Bourdieu's terms) and finally lists the sixteenth-century editions of his works. Appendix one consists of a translation of Ferdinand and Isabella's 1502 document on the book market, listing restrictions on the acceptance into print and circulation of printed books. Appendix two includes reproductions of seven pages from various sixteenth-century editions of de Silva's books. Appendix three is a list of first editions of chivalric romances from 1498 to 1602.

Setkowicz declares in the preface that she aims to fill the gap in literature on the professionalisation of writing; she states that the beginning of the separation of the writing profession should be dated back to the sixteenth century. 'A professional writer', according to the author, is not only a person who makes a living solely from writing, but above all one who writes in order to sell their books. The most important characteristic is that the author actively participates in the publishing market and reacts to new trends.

Setkowicz's book is very interesting, however, one of its shortcomings is the author's lack of interest into the realities of the times preceding the period she is researching. The whole subchapter on the history of the genre of chivalric romances is a shallow take on the subject. Also the use of literature from outside the field of author's expertise raises some doubts. For example, Setkowicz quotes Jacques Le Goff not directly, but through Paweł Rodak (p. 34). The study would have been greatly enriched by a broader look at the subject at hand, especially by taking manuscript sources into account. For example, regarding the very intriguing issue of reproducing literary knightly tournaments (pp. 126–7), a phenomenon much older than the fifteenth/sixteenth century. One also has the impression that the author does not see it necessary to explain the terminology and concepts she uses. One of the key methodological tools she applies is the 'literary field', yet she does not provide its definition. One also is under an impression that the author is so immersed in the literature on the subject that she reflexively uses Polish foreign terms instead of their Polish equivalents.

Katarzyna Setkowicz's *Romans rycerski a początki zawodu pisarza w Hiszpanii* is an interesting book; the author cites many texts and translates longer passages, which allows readers unfamiliar with de Silva's work to get to accustomed to it a little. At the same time, however, it is rather frustrating for medievalists, even more so for those specialising in romances of chivalry. (AG)

Krzysztof Mrozowski, *Przestrzeń i obywatele Starej Warszawy od schyłku XV wieku do 1569 roku* [Space and Citizens of Old Warsaw between the End of the 15th Century and 1569], Warszawa, 2020, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 370 pp., indexes of personal and geographical names, diagrams, tables, plans, maps, bibliography, English sum.

Krzysztof Mrozowski's book is based upon his PhD thesis defended at Warsaw University. In the introduction, the author explains the chronological framework adopted in the work (dictated mainly by the state of preservation of the sources), and points to his methodological inspirations (albeit he only lists them, without elaborating on the subject). This is followed by three chapters, the first of which deals with the area of Old Warsaw. Having briefly described the town from its foundation to the beginning of the sixteenth century, Mrozowski moves on to more detailed considerations. The subject of the analysis is the city as described in the town books from the end of the fifteenth century to 1569. Private space and examples of hierarchies of space (e.g. amounts of rents) are presented. Chapter two presents the social topography of the city in the same time frame as the previous part. Mrozowski depicts the structure and occupational topography of Old Warsaw. The final chapter deals with arriving citizens in the years 1508–69; it analyses the dynamics of arrivals, origins and occupations of new citizens and the distribution of their places of residence in the topography of the city.

This very interesting book undoubtedly benefits from numerous plans and maps, which allow for a better orientation in the discussed issue. Mrozowski organises our knowledge of Warsaw and, if only because of this, it is a must-have item regarding the discussion about the city. The modest conclusion of the book as a whole is to some extent supplemented by concluding remarks for each of the chapters. (AG)

Maciej A. Pieńkowski, *Trudna droga do władzy w Rzeczypospolitej. Sejm koronacyjny Zygmunta III 1587/1588 i sejm pacyfikacyjny 1589 roku* [The Difficult Road to Power in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Coronation Sejm of Sigismund III 1587/1588 and the 1589 Pacification Sejm], Warszawa, 2021, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 528 pp., colour ill., list of abbreviations, annexe, bibliography, English sum., index of personal names

The featured monograph focuses on the functioning of the parliamentary system in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the period of interregnum, this time dealing with the Sejm during the turbulent period after the

death of King Stefan Báthory in 1586, and the struggle between two political factions – supporters of two rival candidates for the Polish throne, Archduke Maximilian Habsburg and Sigismund III Vasa. The presented monograph is based on a doctoral thesis defended in 2018. The chronological framework of the work is determined by the first two years of the reign of King Sigismund III, from the post-election sejmiks (local parliamentary assemblies of the nobles) of autumn 1587 to the Pacification Sejm of spring 1589. The author of the monograph has primarily dedicated his attention to the Sejms, sejmiks and other assemblies of the nobility, as well as their legislative activities, which functioned during the turbulent period of the struggle for the crown.

The monograph has a chronological and topical structure. Four thematic chapters are devoted to consecutive important events in the parliamentary history of the period. Chapter one is devoted to the period between the Election Sejm and the Coronation Sejm (August–December 1587), and the direct consequences of the double election. Chapter two is focused on the coronation Sejm of Sigismund III Vasa (at the turn of 1588). Chapter three discusses the period between the Coronation and Pacification Sejms, i.e. from February 1588 to January 1589, including, above all, the consequences of the Battle of Byczyna, the deciding battle in the war for the Polish crown. The last chapter is devoted to the Pacification Sejm, which took place in the spring of 1589, and the parliamentary and legislative activities surrounding it. Due to the international context of the events in question, parliamentary assemblies are also considered in the context of diplomacy and foreign policy operations. The appendices include chronologies of the two Sejms mentioned in the title of the monograph. The author conducted research in both Polish and foreign archives and libraries: he included materials from Ukrainian, Austrian (Vienna) and Italian (Rome) archives. The varied primary source base (published both in print and in manuscript form) is based on Sejm diaries, correspondence, materials from the Crown Metric, court records, Sejm constitutions and records of sejmiks. (MJO)

Jaśmina Korczak-Siedlecka, *Przemoc i honor w życiu społecznym wsi na Mierzei Wiślanej w XVI–XVII wieku* [Violence and Honour in the Social Life of the Vistula Spit Countryside in the 16th–17th Centuries], Toruń, 2021, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 456 pp., concordance of names of localities, ills and list thereof, maps, bibliography, list of maps, English sum., index of personal names, index of geographical names; series: Monografie Fundacji na rzecz Nauki Polskiej

In the featured study, the author examines the phenomenon of violence in everyday life in rural areas in the early modern period in the region of the

Vistula Spit and Szkarpa River. The monograph is based on a doctoral dissertation defended in 2020.

As the author states, violence was an omnipresent and common aspect in the everyday life of inhabitants of rural communities: it was inflicted by everyone in every social situation, in every relation, in every environment. In the introduction, the author undertakes to provide a definition of concepts of violence and honour, as well as a historical outline of the studied region. The author draws not only upon historical research, but also on social sciences and historical anthropology. The main part of the work is divided into two parts. In the first part we find a typology of violence and the relationship of this phenomenon with honour. Verbal violence, physical violence and sexual violence are discussed in turn. The second part contains an analysis of acts of violence and honour in interpersonal relations: in family and social relations (including the relations of power: between secular and ecclesiastical authorities, violence between servants and employers, and also worth mentioning – violence against animals). The examined social group was an underprivileged stratum, the inhabitants of the villages of the Vistula Spit. The specificity of this group was, unlike the overwhelming majority of the country, that they were Lutherans, connected with a specific vernacular culture, speaking German, and identifying overwhelmingly as subjects of the mayor of Gdańsk.

The main primary source base for the study of evidence of violence are court records kept in the State Archive in Gdańsk for the years 1578–1626. For the studied period, the author found more than 800 court cases of violence, mainly concerning verbal acts. The least frequent are acts of violence conducted within the family and examples of assault and sexual violence.

As a starting point, the author of the monograph asked what the acts of violence say about the functioning of social life in the Prussian countryside and what they say about the identity of its inhabitants. She primarily paid attention to everyday conflicts between people, usually ignored in larger historical narratives centred on such displays of violence such as wars. In the author's opinion, it is the everyday displays of violence, closely connected with the understanding of the value of honour by a given community, that constitute the key to understanding the norms of behaviour, problems, social and power relations. In the course of her research, the author asked questions about the forms of violence, the circumstances of its use, the accepted boundaries, the motives of the perpetrators, and examines the social functions of violence (also paying attention to its positive aspects for the community as such). The author's hypothesis is that honour was the most important value for the community under study, and understanding the relationship between honour and violence is one of the most important objectives of her research. The author's reflections that the examined rural community belonged to the community of honour (culture of honour) are particularly interesting:



the honour of an individual was a decisive factor for their identity, social position and their value. The consequences of the loss of honour were extremely severe for a member of such a community. This is linked to verbal violence, which was supposed to deprive the victim of their honour, which later became the basis for a legal complaint. Physical violence was also closely connected to honour, and could be interpreted as an attack on the value of the individual (e.g. slapping, spitting). Here, the author explores the performative function of violence, which aimed at changing the social status of the individual and causing the loss of their value in the eyes of the community. Of course, not all acts of violence were prompted by this, but, as the author points out, this sheds a slightly different light on violence, since violent acts were not always aimed solely at causing physical harm or suffering to the victim. (MJO)

Andrzej Karpiński and Elżbieta Nowosielska, *Požary w miastach Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku i ich następstwa ekonomiczne, społeczne i kulturowe* [Fires in the Towns of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th–18th Centuries and their Economic, Social and Cultural Consequences], Warszawa, 2021, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, annexe, bibliography, English sum., lists of ills and tables, geographical index, subject index, 533 pp.

The presented monograph, which follows the catalogue published in 2020, is a continuation of a study devoted to the history of fires in Polish and Lithuanian towns in the early modern period. The material collected and compiled in the catalogue serves as the basis for analysis in the second part of the edition, the aim of which was to present a synthesised account of the history of disasters caused by more than 4,700 fires in the urban environment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The authors posed questions about both the factors contributing to the outbreak of fires, the direct causes of the fires, their course and their far-reaching economic, social, religious, demographic, cultural and political consequences, as well as what measures could have been and were taken in order to prevent those catastrophes in the pre-industrial city. The structure of the monograph, divided into four chapters (three of them, including the introduction and conclusion, were written by Andrzej Karpiński, while chapter four was contributed by Elżbieta Nowosielska), is arranged according to these issues. Chapter one briefly discusses the typology of cities, their development and urban landscape, and then the factors that particularly contributed to the outbreak of fires in cities, resulting from their spatial layout or development. A narrow and dense urban street layout, the flammable

materials out of which the contemporary buildings were constructed, faulty construction and poor maintenance of chimneys or ovens, for example, all led to extremely frequent disasters caused by fire. Attention was also drawn to causes of fires not directly related to the urban environment, such as warfare, natural causes (lightning, climate) or intentional human actions. It is worth noting that military actions were the most frequent cause of fires in the Polish-Lithuanian towns of the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries (therefore, the highest number of fires was recorded in the war-engulfed seventeenth century).

Chapter two describes the number, scale, frequency and course of fires, and provides examples in the form of an overview of the largest fires that occurred in twenty selected – both smaller and larger – cities from various regions of the Commonwealth in the period studied (Bochnia, Kulm, Gdańsk, Grodno, Jarosław, Kalisz, Cracow, Leszno, Lublin, Lviv, Nowy Sącz, Piotrków Trybunalski, Poznań, Przemyśl, Sandomierz, Toruń, Warsaw, Wieliczka, Vilnius, Zamość). Chapter three discusses the aftermath (short and long-term) of these disasters one by one, paying attention to their consequences for the urban fabric, but also in literature and art. Chapter four is devoted to fire protection, both from the perspective of legal regulations, instructions and legislation, as well as the practical solutions applied and the course of the fire extinguishing procedure. Due to the fact that urban development facilitated the expansion of fire, numerous instructions and fire regulations were issued, which did not translate into the improvement of the fire situation in urban centres. The authors made use of an extremely varied and extensive source base (conducting research in many European archives and libraries), which includes numerous documents issued by municipal authorities. Taken together, the two volumes should constitute a comprehensive attempt to cover the history, analysis and source base for the study of fires in the urban environment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the early modern period. (*MJO*)

Tomasz Kucharski, *Sejmy elekcyjne w Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w latach 1632–1733* [Election Sejms in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Period 1632–1733], Warszawa 2021, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 433 pp., list of abbreviations, English sum., bibliography, index of personal names

The presented study in the field of the history of law and the parliamentary system in the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth provides a thorough and detailed analysis of the operation of the Election Sejm during the periods of the interregnum in the years 1632–1733. The research is based on a doctoral dissertation defended in 2017. The monograph elaborates on the main topic of the dissertation, i.e. the analysis and course of electoral assemblies in the early modern period. The literature on parliamentary traditions,

and especially Sejms in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, is broad and very extensive. The author points out that the debate so far has been too polarised and emotionally driven (too critical towards Election Sejms, a trend which has been reversed in recent years in an attempt to rehabilitate them), and aims to both analyse these assemblies and their phenomenon in the historiography. Above all, however, the author tries to prove that neither the law nor the state ceased to function with the death of the king, and that the Election Sejm, despite functioning in very specific conditions, worked surprisingly well and effectively, contrary to the well-established opinion about their unproductive performance. Furthermore, the author demonstrates the importance and high significance of convocational assemblies (Convocation Sejm), which were always convened before the electoral ones, and sometimes treated in the historiography as less important, but which turned out to be a necessary element for the proper functioning of systemic mechanisms in the interregnum periods and ensured the efficiency and continuation of the political system. As this study is within the scope of the history of law, the author mainly examines the legal framework for the functioning of the election assemblies and their resolutions, however, one of the main goals was also to showcase and highlight other activities of the Convocation and Election Sejms, their non-legislative activities and outcomes.

The monograph consists of an introduction (describing the aim and structure of the work, literature and sources) and seven chapters arranged by subject. Chapter one is a brief description of the interregnum period and the Sejm convened during this exceptional period. The next two chapters are devoted to the analysis of convocational and electoral assemblies (procedures, convening, chronology, organisation, etc.). Chapter four discusses all of the procedures and arrangements related to the election of the king which were carried out at the Sejm (actions preceding the election of the king, the election itself and its announcement and confirmation). The last three chapters are devoted to Sejm resolutions, in turn: Election order, Law on *exorbitantias*, and *Pacta conventa* (all three discussed in terms of form, legal character and procedure). The author has divided the primary source base into official and unofficial ones. The former include legal acts produced by the Sejm, such as acts of the Election Sejm, convocation resolutions, etc., as well as sejmik sources [lauda]. Among unofficial sources, above all, the author cites parliamentary diaries, invaluable sources for the history of the proceedings of the parliamentary assemblies and reconstruction of political disputes, as well as public discourse elements (primarily economic and political writings) connected directly to Sejms. (MJO)

## NINETEENTH CENTURY

Aleksandra Jakubczak, *Polacy, Żydzi i mit handlu kobietami* [The Poles, the Jews and the Myth of Women Trafficking], Warszawa, 2020, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 244 pp., bibliography, list of abbreviations, indexes, ill. and list thereof, English sum.

Aleksandra Jakubczak is an historian of the young generation. The dissertation discussed here was prepared at the University of Warsaw, and the author is currently working toward a doctorate at the University of Columbia. *The Poles, the Jews and the Myth of Women Trafficking* revolves around several problems at the intersection of anti-Semitic discourses and important social issues: human trafficking and sex work, as well as the relationships between genders, (inter)-ethnic relations, and state power. Jakubczak's dissertation simultaneously discusses the reality and the myths associated with human trafficking in all three post-partition Polish territories. The book confronts Polish historiography's conventional assumptions about this topic, which tended to exaggerate and even fabricate the scale and scope of the phenomenon – among other examples, overemphasising the role played by Jews.

The book consists of an introduction and seven chapters. Each chapter covers a broad, overarching theme: narratives about sex trafficking, the issue of 'moral panic' in managing social problems, international imagination, the role of state powers (especially the Russian state) in the sex trade, the question of organised violence and human trafficking, but also coordinated attacks (pogroms) on brothels, and a discussion of birth. Finally: a chapter on the struggle to refute the myth that human trafficking is inherently 'Jewish'. This dissertation contributes to wider discussions in the field of social history, situating regional history within structural and societal processes that operate on a macro scale. Jakubczak reevaluates several arguments about the problem of sex trafficking from Polish lands and Jews' involvement in it. She clearly shows the authorities' investment in the fight against sex trafficking. She also demonstrates how many women turned prostitution to their advantage, illustrating how sex work could function as a means of escape from societal oppression. In light of these conclusions, the author questions the legitimacy of scholarly approaches that treat women exclusively as victims of violence.

This certainly suggests a new approach to Polish-Jewish relations, and at the same time to the history of native anti-Semitism, in this myth of the 'Jew' as exploiter and other. It also presents a fresh perspective that relies on meticulous, critical reading from a range of multilingual archival sources, as well as comparative analyses with research published outside Poland, and accomplishes this feat in under 250 pages. This book is for everyone, not just specialists. (GK)

Anna Kobylińska and Maciej Falski (eds), *Architects and Their Societies: Cultural Study in the Habsburg-Slavic Area, 1861–1938*, Warszawa, 2021, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 249 pp., index of persons and geographical names

The volume includes ten essays on the social history of architecture in the Slavic crown-lands of the Habsburg Monarchy (Cisleithania) and its successor states: Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The essay by Dragan Damjanović concerns the development of the neo-Gothic style in Croatian architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The essay by Anna Kobylińska examines the careers and legacies of the two representatives of the Slovak neo-Renaissance style of the second half of the nineteenth century: Jan Nepomucen Bobula and Blažej Felix Bulla. Dominika Kaniecka's text concerns the reconstruction of Zagreb after the earthquake of 1880, and particularly the designs by a Viennese architect Hermann Bollé. Maciej Falski analyses the architecture of the Slavonian town of Osijek between the 1860s and the Second World War. Jasenka Kranjčević introduces the contributions by Czech architects to the touristic infrastructure at the Adriatic coast. Michał Brudziński comparatively discusses the legacies of the two prophets of the national style in architecture based on the highlands folk architecture in Poland and Slovakia: Stanisław Witkiewicz and Dušan Samuel Jurković. The essay by Aleksander Łupienko concerns the debates on the urban modernisation in Galicia prior to the First World War. Magdalena Bystrzak discusses the debates on modernism in architecture in inter-war Slovakia. The final essay of the volume, by Danuta Sosnowska, is the only departure from the Habsburg Monarchy theme: it regards the life and legacy of the Polish architect Władysław Leszek Horodecki, raised in Odessa, educated in St Petersburg, and active mainly in Kiev before the First World War, than in Poland, and finally in Iran, where he died in 1930. (AK)

#### INTERWAR PERIOD

Jolanta Żyndul, *Żydzi i Piłsudski, Wybór źródeł do historii stosunków polsko-żydowskich w okresie międzywojennym* [Jews and Piłsudski. Selected Sources from the History of Polish-Jewish Relations during the Interwar Period], Warszawa, 2021, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 440 pp.; series: Stosunki Polsko-Żydowskie

*Jews and Piłsudski*, published by the Jewish Historical Institute, is an original attempt to 'look over' Polish-Jewish relations during the interwar period in Poland. This work emerged from the personal correspondence that landed on the Marshal's desk each month – or rather, on the desk of his secretary

Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna. During the interwar period, Piłsudski received several hundred thousand letters from Jewish residents.

The selection is divided into two parts. The first presents letters written by Jews to Piłsudski in his capacity as head of the Polish state, from the initial period of independence through 1923, followed by the second period, dated from the May coup d'état up to his death. The second part involves materials about Piłsudski himself, largely printed in the (trilingual) Jewish press for a public readership, but also encompassing talks given by rabbis, speeches given at public events, and memoirs where people recalled their meetings and relations with Piłsudski. These recollections are just as personal as the letters to Piłsudski, part of a substantial collection of materials shows a fairly coherent picture of a politician who “wouldn't allow the Jews to be harmed”.

What really stands out from the collection, however, is something greater: how a form of respect begins to grow and resemble a cult of personality. This unique and fascinating material, even from the perspective of its contents, offers a particular glimpse into the reality of life in interwar Poland. Overwhelmingly, documents attesting to the people's everyday complaints and concerns intersect with the everyday problems of a newly-formed state, still in the process of formation, as well as rampant anti-Semitism. The materials are accompanied by a brief introduction to the context of the period, aiding interpretation. This selection, as the editor notes, serves as an introduction to the monograph entitled *Piłsudski and the Jews*, which presents a comprehensive image of Marshal Piłsudski's relationship to the so-called 'Jewish question'. A valuable resource for studies of the period, and – on attentive reading – ambiguous in its significance. (GK)

Marcin Jurek, *W polskiej Wandei. Komunistyczna Partia Polski w województwie poznańskim w czasach II Rzeczypospolitej* [In the Polish Vandée. The Communist Party of Poland in Poznań Voivodeship during the Second Polish Republic], Poznań–Warszawa, 2021, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 440 pp.

This is an ambitious study on the history of the Communist party, and, essentially, a genealogy of the various radical leftist intelligentsia groups (among others, the Polish Socialist Party – Left from 1928–30), trade unions, and youth organisations that existed in Greater Poland [Wielkopolska] during the Second Polish Republic.

The work consists of seven chapters; the first five describe the origins, history, development and ultimate dissolution of the Communist Party of Poland (CPP; 1938) in an extraordinarily challenging area for them. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Greater Poland was dominated by various conservative movements, where the traditionalist Catholic Church played

a disproportionately influential role in organising socio-political life, and state authorities' attitude throughout the interwar period remained hostile. Chapters six and seven paint a social portrait of CPP members and activists, while also illustrating their fates during and after the war.

The author, a scholar of the youngest generation, affiliated with the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, acquitted himself well in a daunting task: sifting through the rather dense mythology that accumulated in postwar historiography around Communist activity in this region. He also undertakes a detailed, critical reconstruction of the relatively non-exhaustive source material. In addition, Jurek formulates an interesting research questionnaire about the activities of the Polish radical left, chiefly those parts of the left inspired by the Bolshevik project and the USSR. The work draws attention with its systematic – one might even say scrupulous – archival research, skilful discussion of source material, though its value is slightly undermined by trying to reinvent the wheel, as it were, i.e., questioning the whole of the Polish People's Republic's historiography, too. This study will certainly be relevant to those interested in the history of leftist movements, as well as Greater Poland regional history. It provides a wealth of interesting information and also capably re-assesses a number of inaccuracies. (GK)

Jarosław Tomaszewicz, *“Faszyzm lewicy” czy “ludowy patriotyzm”. Tendencje antyliberalne i nacjonalistyczne w polskiej myśli politycznej lat trzydziestych* [‘Left Fascism’ or ‘Populist Patriotism’. Antiliberal and Nationalist Tendencies in Polish Political Thought of the 1930s], Warszawa, 2020, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 272 pp.

Jarosław Tomaszewicz, *W poszukiwaniu nowego ładu. Tendencje antyliberalne, autorytarne i profaszystowskie w polskiej myśli politycznej i społecznej lat 30. XX w.: piłsudczycy i inni* [In Search of a ‘New Deal’. Antiliberal, Authoritarian and Pro-Fascist Tendencies in Polish Political and Social Thought in the 1930s: the Piłsudskiites and Others], Katowice, 2021, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 580 pp., bibliography, index of names and pseudonyms, English and German sum.

Continuations of previous studies by Jarosław Tomaszewicz, political scientist and scholar of political thought affiliated with the university of Silesia (here the most relevant is: *Naprawa czy zniszczenie demokracji. Tendencje autorytarne i profaszystowskie w polskiej myśli politycznej 1921–1935*, Katowice 2012 [Restoration or Destruction of Democracy: Authoritarian and Pro-Fascist Tendencies in Polish Political Thought 1921–1935]). The author makes a consistent attempt

to analyse Polish political thought from the 1920s throughout the interwar period through the lens of fascism, which he identifies as a phenomenon external to native political thought.

The first work reconstructs and analyses various splits and splinter groups within the Polish left, from the so-called 'left Piłsudski camp' (among others the 'Naprawa' milieu, the Youth Legions, the Polish Radical Party), through the centrist and leftist populist movement (among others, the People's Party – 'Wyzwolenie', the Peasant Party), up to and including the politically diverse workers' movement (among others, syndicalists, revisionists, as well as socialists and Communists) during the 1930s. The second provides a panoramic view of fascist movements, or at least totalitarian movements, not descended from the *Endecja* 'family tree', but in large part from the so-called right-wing *Sanacja*.

Though both works fall somewhat outside the mainstream of world historiography's general trajectory when it comes to research on fascism and right-wing populism, they represent a significant and thoroughly documented collection of case studies. While the research questionnaire might come across as somewhat traditional, not venturing beyond the world of ideas and political thought, the author's encyclopedic knowledge is commendable. The author's meticulousness and attention to detail in reconstruction even the most marginal directions and political currents – which also demand solid expositions – is beyond reproach. The sections devoted to anti-Semitic currents, which Tomasiwicz pinpoints and distills for the first time, are worthy of the descriptor 'pioneering'. In the most general sense, he demonstrates how the phenomenon of radical, eliminatory anti-Semitism existed as a thing apart from 'mainstream' political currents.

Both pieces are prepared well, from an editorial and bibliographical standpoint. Both provide the reader with extensive descriptions of source materials used in the study; it also serves as a guide of sorts to the vast, more of Polish than non-Polish-language primary source literature. While some findings might raise objections – or at least encourage lively debate – one thing that remains out of debate is these works' documentary value. (GK)

Jacek Walicki, *Antysemicki rząd rumuński Octaviana Gogi i Alexandru Cuzy w opinii polskojęzycznej prasy II Rzeczypospolitej* [Octavian Goga and Alexandru Cuza's Anti-Semitic Romanian Regime in the Interwar Polish-Language Press], Łódź, 2021, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 472 pp., bibliography, archival sources, index

This study by Jacek Walicki, a recognised historian affiliated with research centres in Łódź, seems to concentrate on a very specific episode in the annals



of interwar European political history: the appointment of a right-wing conservative regime, Octavian Goga and Alexandru Cuza. This 'team' stayed in power for all of several months, from late December 1937 through mid-February 1938, becoming infamous for their attempts to introduce widespread anti-Semitic legislation. Walicki approaches the question of these events in the Polish political press with enviable thoroughness. The author complemented his archival work – seventeen important press titles, each representing the most urgent, critical currents in Poland at the time – with documents from the Polish embassies in Bucharest, Berlin, and Rome. The work consists of eight chronological chapters, where the government formation is laid out in consecutive stages; the international reaction is overwhelming.

This impressive collection resulted in a significant work of fact, which fills in gaps that past historians have left about this shameful episode. This knowledge breaks up the first phases of international reaction, and then the important, essential stage, gesturing at a 'fascistisation of Polish opinion' in the late 1930s.

The work includes a useful, synthetic conclusion and skilfully organised bibliography broken into archival materials, press, publishing houses, and primary sources. While this is a book for specialists, it will also come in handy for anyone interested in the radicalisation of society and politics during the late 1930s. (GK)

## CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Sebastian Piątkowski, *Życie codzienne Polaków w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w świetle ogłoszeń drobnych polskojęzycznej prasy niemieckiej* [Everyday Life of Poles in the General Government in the Light of Classified Advertisements in Polish-language German Press], Warszawa, 2021, Instytut Solidarności i Męstwa im. Witolda Pileckiego, 226 pp.

Making use of an unusual historical source, the author reconstructs the realities of everyday life of the Polish inhabitants of the rump state of General Government (GG). Aside from titles that had existed before the war and were taken over by the occupiers – *Ekspres Lubelski*, *Gazeta Łódzka*, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, *Gazeta Wspólna*, the array of Polish-language newspapers printed by the Press Corporation Cracow–Warsaw [Koncern Prasowy Kraków–Warszawa] was expanded with a number of new titles. 'Reptile dailies' [*gadzinówki*] came out in the tens of thousands, and while a vast majority of the inhabitants of the GG viewed them with scorn, their sheer numbers made them useful as a conduit for advertisements. Their subjects varied in the extreme, from persons seeking close relatives whose wartime fate was unknown, through

buy or sell advertisements, to personal advertisements. The book's eight chapters follow distinct topics defined by the specific issues addressed in the advertisements. Thus, the reader is treated to chapters devoted to family life, both in terms of everyday existence and attempts to recover family members lost in the tumult of the conflict, or to establish new connections (chapters two and three); economic matters (chapters four, six, and seven); and the labour market (chapter five). The work culminates with a chapter entitled 'On the Challenges and Opportunities of Everyday Life', which analyses advertisements on a vast array of subjects. Here, one finds notices concerning medicine (including unconventional), education (offers of various courses), readership, or even – astonishingly – the art market. As Piątkowski proves on the basis of the advertisements, the trade in paintings or sculptures, which constituted a vital means of preserving capital, was a crucial aspect of everyday life. (HW)

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Bracia miesiące. Studia z antropologii historycznej Polski (1939–1945)* [The Month-Brothers: Studies in Polish Historical Anthropology, 1939–1945], Warszawa, 2021, Instytut Badań Literackich, 527 pp., list of abbreviations, bibliography, index of names, English sum.

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, renowned anthropologist and scholar of Polish anti-Semitism, long affiliated with the Polish Academy of Science's Institute of Slavic Studies, brings together eleven standalone essays on various forms of aggression and persecution against Jews – before, during, and after the war – in Kielce area, understood broadly. (Tokarska-Bakir calls this "Holocaust ethnography", p. 9.) The sketches draw from the rich, comprehensive source materials available at the Institute of National Remembrance Archives. Here, as in other works by Tokarska-Bakir, methodological propositions and examinations address both anti-Semitic violence and the widespread anti-Jewish sentiment that accompanied it at the time. The study benefits greatly from discussion with the latest theoretical work in the field (by and large English, among others Roberta Senechal de la Roche), though it also brings a fresh perspective to essential issues and areas of study that researchers tend to overlook.

Although this work might give the impression of a 'warm-up' to a larger research project, and even to a certain extent leave an aftertaste of the author's last monumental work *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego* [Under the Curse. A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom; Warszawa, 2018], it compiles a range of additional conclusions and analytic-heuristic tools which may prove helpful for future studies on ethnic violence – not just against Jews.

All sketches are very well-written, and bespeak wide reading in sociology as much as historiography; the volume is also capably edited. (GK)

Anna Wylegała, *Był dwór, nie ma dworu. Reforma rolna w Polsce* [There Once Was a Manor House, And Now There is None: Land Reform in Poland], Wołowiec, 2021, Wydawnictwo Czarne, 389 pp., bibliography, index of interviewees, index of names

Anna Wylegała, a sociologist associated with the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, specialises in memory studies. Her newest book discusses the land reform, but the author decided to turn the focus away from the process itself, given that – as she rightfully concluded – the subject is virtually exhausted in terms of historical fact. Thus, she chose to steer her conversations with the inhabitants of villages in the former Kielce voivodeship toward their memories of the events of the 1940s. The book is divided into eight chapters, each of which follows a distinct theme. Among them are the landowners, the peasants, the countryside, as well as the *longue durée* of the reform. The narration follows the methodological precepts of spoken history. Wylegała's interviewees include both the beneficiaries of land distribution and the people who lost their property due to the reform. The interviews are supplemented by memoirs and recollections. The author also conducted a fairly in-depth archival research. The land reform implemented by the decree of 6 September 1944 transformed the landscape of the Polish countryside entirely. The order of things extant at the time of the ascent to power of the Polish Workers' Party [Polska Partia Robotnicza] dissolved, deepening the chaos induced by the winds of war. The land distribution was mostly conducted in an inept fashion, and its legal frameworks left room for interpretation of the rules for dividing and assigning land. For the Polish country, the agrarian reform has become a fact that has defined the life of peasant communities for decades, frequently leading to conflicts, but also becoming a manifestation of a kind of historical justice. That its memory has deep roots and has been shared from one generation to another is illustrated by the fact that Wylegała's interviewees include persons born in the 1970 and 1980s, who learned about the reform as part of their family traditions. It should also be noted that the author decided to include in her book separate chapters concerning the methodology of interview work and her own descriptions of the towns in which she collected the interviews. (HW)

Andrzej Rykała, *W reakcji na powojenną przemoc antysemitcką. Samoobrona Żydów w Łodzi – uwarunkowania społeczno-polityczne i przestrzenne* [Responses to Anti-Semitic Violence. Jewish Self-Defense in Łódź – Socio-political and Spatial Conditions], Łódź, 2020, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 220 pp., annexe, bibliography, index

The author, a professor at the University of Łódź, took on a topic that has generated intense interest over the last decade among scholars of Polish Jews in the postwar period: anti-Semitic violence and Jewish community responses. This study's framework and research methods may not be obvious at first glance – among others, it makes substantial use of historical geography's theoretical foundations – but this interdisciplinary approach yields surprisingly positive results.

The study consists of nine chapters, which present, in chronological-thematic fashion, the role and the place of physical violence against Jews in Łódź and its surrounding areas. The first two chapters are concerned with physical space: how the Jewish community expanded in the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter three illustrates the catalysing role of the Kielce pogrom, while chapters four and five are dedicated to the Central Special Commission – which was founded as a direct response to the wave of anti-Jewish violence – and its local branches. Chapter six, perhaps one of the most powerful, illustrates and analyses individual testimonies and responses to anti-Semitic hostility. Chapter seven discusses the overall state of Jews' physical safety and security, while chapter eight reviews the elections of 1947 and their significance when it came to creating an atmosphere of terror. Chapter nine and to a certain extent the conclusion recall the circumstances under which both the Central and Łódź Special Commissions were dissolved.

The author presents these violent practices in Łódź against the backdrop of everyday violence against Jews throughout the country. These descriptions convey not only prevailing attitudes toward Jews and perpetrators' motivations, but also contextualise the social conditions in which their conduct could take place. Rykała clarifies a substantial body of extant factual knowledge; he also cites and verifies other scholars' findings. The effect results in a brilliant study, which – through its novel methods – makes it possible to examine individual lives and tell these stories in an equally novel way. The study includes an interesting addendum, a useful bibliography, and a well-apportioned index. (GK)

Mariusz Szulc, *Prezydium Krajowej Rady Narodowej w systemie ustrojowym Polski (1944–1947)* [The Praesidium of the Home National Council in the Polish Political System, 1944–1947], Warszawa, 2021, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 280 pp., bibliography, annexes, list of primary sources and literature, English sum.

The book is a historical and legal study of the activities of the Praesidium of the Home National Council [Krajowa Rada Narodowa, KRN], an institution that operated as a ‘temporary parliament’ of Poland between 1944 and 1947. In the span of four chapters devoted to distinct topics, Mariusz Szulc traces in detail both the context of the formation of the KRN and its Praesidium and their conduct. The work is supplemented by an interesting annexe concerned with primary sources, which includes a record of legislative acts and the number of sessions of the KRN and the Praesidium, as well as the general characteristic of the topics addressed during the sessions. Szulc analyses the legal foundations of the KRN, unambiguously proving their unreliability. Among his major arguments is the fact that even in terms of its make-up, the KRN was not representative for the structure of the society it purported to represent. Furthermore, the author points out that the very framework of this political body was borrowed directly from the Soviet Union. He also establishes that the statute of national councils that provided the basis for the KRN was primarily a propaganda document which did not set specific organisational rules. The author also analyses the achievements of the Praesidium, highlighting its crucial role in the shaping of the legislative acts that were then debated by the KRN. A separate chapter is devoted to the topic of the KRN’s impact on the justice system, consisting primarily in influencing the content of the decrees, the power of pardon, or the oversight of the courts and military prosecutors. Among other topics, Szulc devotes attention to the fact of a structural bond between the Praesidium of the KRN and the Special Commission for the Struggle against Misappropriation and Economic Parasitism [Komisja Specjalna do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym]. He points out that both institutions were tied together not only by the person of the Chairman of the Commission, Roman Zambrowski, but also by their budget. The dominant role of the Praesidium of the KRN in the conduct of government in the early post-war period resulted primarily from the political position its leading members occupied in other structures of the state. (HW)

Marcin Stasiak, *Polio w Polsce 1945–1989. Studium z historii niepełnosprawności* [Polio in Poland, 1945–1989: A Study in the History of Disability], Kraków, 2021, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych UNIVERSITAS, 278 pp., ills, bibliography

Marcin Stasiak decided to use the polio epidemic of the 1950s as a point of departure for an attempt to study the experience of disability in post-war Poland. The extremely extensive source material, comprised of archival sources, specialist publications, medical documentation, and, most importantly, numerous interviews, allowed him to look at the matter from several angles. In methodological terms, the author follows the practices of oral history as well as life history. When writing about the experience of disability, he introduces the highly significant figure of the ‘average man’. Such *l’homme moyen*, someone located on the medians, was the ideal for the entire population. This is key to the extent that persons with disabilities – especially in the sphere of mobility – were immediately visible within the dominant majority, even as they were expected to blend in. The book is divided into four chapters. In the first, Stasiak describes the progress of the epidemic, its effects, and the degree to which state institutions were capable of controlling the health of the citizen. The chapters that follow address questions of rehabilitation ‘Ciało’ [Body], private space ‘Dom’ [Home], and public spaces ‘Za progiem’ [Out of the Door]. Of crucial significance is the fact that the author follows his protagonists throughout their lives, a characteristic feature of studies in life history. This allows the readers to observe how disability is experienced by children, teenagers, or adults, and how their interactions with their environments, near as well as far, looked like. Likewise notable is the author’s approach to narration – he quotes his interviewees profusely, without holding back from the reader descriptions of the progress of the disease or rehabilitation, even in their more naturalist aspects. Stasiak’s book is a beautifully written and well thought-out study of a problem that had not previously entered the broad orbit of interests of Polish scholars in the humanities. (HW)

*Odśłony Cata. Stanisław Mackiewicz w listach* [Facets of Cat. Stanisław Mackiewicz in Letters], ed. Natalia Ambroziak, Warszawa, 2020, Fundacja Ośrodka Karta, 387 pp., ills, editorial note

A selection of letters spanning two decades of activity – the ‘London years’ (1946–56) and the ‘Warsaw years’ (1956–66) by Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz (1896–1966), renowned publicist and historical writer, one of the most controversial figures of Polish public life. Most of the letters come from Cat’s

correspondence with Michał K. Pawlikowski, his close friend and colleague from his time at Vilnius journal *Słowo*. Among other correspondents we also find close relatives. The letters to Mieczysław Grydzewski, editor of London émigré journal *Wiadomości*; formerly the editor of the famous interwar periodical *Wiadomości Literackie* are worth particular attention, as are those to Jerzy Giedroyc, editor and founder of Paris *Kultura*.

The letters make a significant contribution to knowledge of Cat's family life; these aspects are described and recalled in detail. Readers interested in his views might find themselves surprised by the lack of political commentary (e.g., about the Holocaust of Polish Jews); they might also be surprised by the lack of elaboration on his often surprising ideological choices. These 'deficits' are more than made up for, however, by substantial sections on the author's private and social lives.

Although some sections are of a distinctly personal nature, they also offer a glimpse into the psychological deprivation faced by an eminent public figure during the Second Polish Republic, later a dissident in the Polish People's Republic. They provide insight into the social life of the Polish cultural elite, and moreover, into their complicated relationships with state authorities. An important contribution to studies of this vibrant personality; it will doubtless resonate with readers of all backgrounds. Unfortunately, the book has no index, which makes reading more difficult; however, its photographs are commendable, including personal photos of Cat himself. (GK)

Romuald Turkowski, *Kolektywizacja wsi wschodnioeuropejskiej widziana z polskiej perspektywy 1948–1960. Studium z zakresu historii społeczno-gospodarczej* [Collectivisation of the Eastern-European Countryside from the Polish Perspective, 1948–1960: A Study in Socio-Economic History], Warszawa, 2020, Wydawnictwo Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego, 781 pp., source, pictorial and personal annexes, bibliography

This extensive study is devoted to the subject of the post-war collectivisation of East European agriculture. Divided into eight chapters on distinct topics, it relies on a collection of diverse sources, if dominated by archival documents. The author conducted research in numerous places, both in Poland and abroad. Chapter one provides a kind of overview of the ruminations on the history of collectivisation that follow. Turkowski uses it to describe the post-war activities of the communist parties geared toward the political disempowerment and liquidation of the peasant movement in countries within the range of Soviet influence. The chapter that follows provides an analysis of propaganda activity devised for gaining support for the idea

of collectivisation. Parts three to eight consider the cases of specific countries where communist parties implemented ideas derived from the Soviet Union with the purpose of reshaping the countryside along Soviet lines. These mini-monographs treat about Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and the German Democratic Republic. The author showcases in an interesting manner the differences in the economical standing of peasants in the specific countries, both before the war and after its conclusion. He also points out the fact that the land reform, theoretically a step along the way to collectivisation, was in many cases viewed as an opportunity to improve the situation of individual farmers. Turkowski also attempts to respond to the question why the collectivisation of the Polish countryside has not reached its final goal, as it had – albeit partially – in other countries of the bloc. (HW)

Paweł Miedziński, *Centralna Agencja Fotograficzna 1951–1991* [Central Photographic Agency, 1951–1991], Warszawa, 2021, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej – Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 496 pp., biographies, photos, bibliography, index of names

This book, devoted to the Central Photographic Agency [Centralna Agencja Fotograficzna, CAF], is an exceptional event on the Polish publishing market. The exquisitely-crafted monographic study of the CAF, with meticulously-designed visuals, from the appearance of the entire volume to the use of photographs made by the employees of CAF as illustrations, stands out vividly from other titles. Miedziński based his study on an exhaustive archival research as well as interviews with former employees of the agency. This is particularly valuable given that these accounts tend to offer a unique insight into the work of photographers. The study is divided into chapters that focus on specific topics. They discuss the genesis of CAF, its structure, employees, and various aspects of the work of photographic reporters, without evading the question of the degree to which the agency's activities were affected by censorship or political considerations. The study is supplied with an astounding selection of illustrative material grouped thematically into galleries entitled 'Celebrazja' [Celebration], 'Władza' [Power], 'Produkcja' [Production], 'Codziennosc' [Everyday], 'Wydarzenia' [Events], 'Ludzie' [People], 'Pomnik' [Monument], and 'Archiwum' [Archive]. Many of the pictures they contain were not previously available to the broad public. The author also chose to deploy an interesting device consisting in setting together several photographic takes of the same scene to showcase how censors decided which images to approve for publication. The book presents the work of photographic reporters in the Polish People's Republic in a highly engaging manner. Its extensive temporal arc, reaching across several decades, presents,



for instance, how technological innovations increasing the efficiency of the agency providing photography for all Polish press titles arrived to Poland. (HW)

Andrzej Paczkowski, *Wojna polsko-jaruzelska. Stan wojenny, czyli kontrrewolucja generałów* [Jaruzelski's War against Poland: Martial Law or the Counter-Revolution of the Generals], Warszawa, 2021, Wielka Litera, fourth edition, 512 pp., bibliography, list of abbreviations

This fourth edition of Andrzej Paczkowski's book on the events of late 1981 is the Polish version of the American edition of the work from 2016, itself an expanded version of the second edition of the title. It grants Polish readers access to what might be the most exhaustive monographic study of martial law in Poland. Over the span of five chapters, Paczkowski delivers a broad panorama of the events of the early 1980s, meticulously reconstructing facts as well as the political, economic, and social context that birthed this massive, multi-layered crisis. The study attempts to uncover why the 'Solidarity revolution' happened specifically in Poland. According to Paczkowski, two factors account for that: the Catholic Church and the existence of individual landowners and entrepreneurs in the country. In the latter part of the book, he painstakingly recreates the details of the planned 'counter-revolution of the generals', consisting in the introduction of martial law, which was devised with the purpose of curtailing the 'Solidarity carnival'. The chapters that follow lead the reader through the realities of the period between 13 December 1981 and 22 July 1983, with significant space devoted to the social resistance and the activities of the Church. The work concludes with a chapter entitled 'Koniec systemu' [The End of the System], in which Paczkowski analyses the collapse of the political system in Poland with the breakdown and dissolution of the Soviet bloc in the background. The author is not content with a specifically Polish perspective; he endeavours to show how others reacted to events in the country. Significant space is devoted to the political activities of the United States, the Soviet Union, or the Vatican. This places the entire story in a broad, international perspective. Compared to the previous editions, this newest one has been expanded with an immensely captivating text that constitutes a formidable example of alternative history, entitled 'Why did General Jaruzelski not implement martial law in 1981?' (HW)

Aleksandra Leyk and Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Cięcia. Mówiona historia transformacji* [Cuts: An Oral History of the Transformation], Warszawa 2020, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 528 pp., list of abbreviations, bibliography, index of names; series: Seria Historyczna

This book is the result of a long-term research project concerned with the experience of Poland's political transformation in major industrial complexes. The study makes use of several dozen out of more than one hundred recorded conversations with workers from five factories privatised by foreign capital before 1997. They are the Wedel Factory, Passenger Car Factory in Warsaw, Cellulose and Paper Plant in Świecie, and the 'Stomil' Car Tyre Factory in Olsztyn, as well as one that has been anonymised. The speakers whose accounts have been used in the book were born in the 1950s, but their statements are not limited to the period of the turn of the 1990s and beyond, instead contributing to a kind of autobiographical narrative. This serves to produce an oral portrait of the post-war 'baby boom' generation. The authors, Aleksandra Leyk and Joanna Wawrzyniak, opted to relate the responses of the interviewees in full. The stories have been grouped according to the place of employment of the former (and current) employees who have agreed to give accounts.

Aside from the aforementioned five chapters, the book is supplemented with three other parts – 'Introduction', 'The Experience and Memory of Transformation', and 'Histories of Privatisation' – which constitute strictly scholarly ruminations on the methodology of collecting interviews and the contexts in which the Polish transformation took place. As a result, the study becomes a highly interesting example of a combination of the methodology of oral history, which naturally tends toward microhistory, and the global perspective of the history of capitalism of the final decades of the twentieth century. One crucial reference point in the interviews is the socialist workplace, which had for decades existed as a kind of 'world unto itself'. Since the interviewees have occupied various positions within the factories, from director to regular worker, their approach to the moment of change of the employer is clearly different. For those lower in the hierarchy, the transformation and the claiming of the workplace by foreign capital was a major event, not only in economic terms, but also for their sense of security and stability. (HW)