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BOOK REVIEW: WĄSOSZ. HISTORIA MIASTA I GMINY [WĄSOSZ: HISTORY OF CITY AND MUNICIPALITY]

Abstract: The book *Wąsosz. Historia Miasta i Gminy* [*Wąsosz: History of the City and Municipality*], authored by Krzysztof Popiński (2022), a scholar at the Department of Philosophy and Economic History at Wrocław University of Economics, offers a comprehensive history of Wąsosz, a Lower Silesian town located at the intersection of Silesia [Śląsk] and Greater Poland [Wielkopolska]. This monograph serves as a gateway to understanding the region's multifaceted past, uncovering layers of history that extend far beyond the memories of its current residents. By focusing on Wąsosz, the book provides a nuanced perspective on the complex historical developments of the Silesian region. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in exploring Poland's regional history through the lens of a small, yet historically significant, town.

Keywords: city, economy, politics, culture, local community, local history, present day

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The monograph *Wąsosz. Historia Miasta i Gminy* (*Wąsosz: History of the City and Municipality*), authored by Krzysztof Popiński (2022), a scholar affiliated with the Department of Philosophy and Economic History at Wrocław University of Economics, delves into the socio-economic, cultural, and political history of Silesia, Poland, and Germany during the 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries. Popiński's extensive body of work, comprising nearly 100 publications, includes articles, book chapters, and monographs, such as his notable study of the city of Wołów. This particular monograph explores the history of Wąsosz, one of the many small towns in Lower Silesia, situated at the historical intersection of Silesia and Greater Poland.



To the general reader, the idea of dedicating a monograph to a small, historically unremarkable town might seem unnecessary. However, for the local community, this effort to explore both its distant and recent history serves as a gateway to uncovering the roots of their shared identity. Monographs like this, which focus on small “homelands”, offer invaluable insights into the lives of local communities across various dimensions – social, economic, cultural, demographic, and sociological. These smaller communities form the building blocks of larger regional and national entities. Their stories, meticulously documented by regional historians, collectively contribute to the broader narrative of a nation’s and a state’s history. The monograph of the town and commune of Wąsosz, written by Krzysztof Popiński, opens the door to the world that existed before its contemporary inhabitants. Especially since this opening takes place for the second time – the previous one took place in 2002.

Krzysztof Popiński’s first monograph on Wąsosz (Popiński, 2002) marked an initial step in exploring the town’s history. However, as a popular science work, it provided only a limited perspective, focusing exclusively on the town itself. The current monograph (Popiński, 2022) represents a significant expansion of this earlier effort, covering not just the town of Wąsosz but also the neighboring settlements that together constitute the present-day urban-rural commune. This broader approach delivers a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the region’s historical and administrative development. The author, approaching the same topic for the second time, significantly raised the requirements he set for himself when creating it. First of all, he expanded the chronological framework of the work, ending it in 2022. In the previous work, the narrative ended in 1990 – that is, at the time of the first fully free local elections after World War II and the beginning of Poland’s political transformation.

Although the chronological and substantive structure of the work basically remained the same, the author added another chapter to the previous layout of the monograph. The entire monograph is divided into six chapters, in which, apart from the first chapter, the author discusses individual periods of the history of the city and the commune.

Thus, the above-mentioned first chapter is the shortest of the chapters, but the author included in it a discussion of the natural landscape, and climatic and natural conditions in the commune, which is important for understanding the spatial conditions of the city’s development.

In the second chapter, the author discusses individual periods of the city's history. Paradoxically this chapter, which in theory covers the longest period of history, in practice takes up the smallest part of the monograph – only 3 pages.

The subject matter of chapters III to VI covers subsequent historical periods in Wąsosz history, which the author distinguishes based on political events. Each of the chapters from III to VI has been divided into parts – in classic monographic works the term subchapters is used. Depending on the epoch, there are from four in chapter III to nine in chapter VI. In the individual parts of each chapter, the author presents political, administrative, economic, cultural and religious issues as well as manifestations of the ordinary everyday existence of the inhabitants of the city and the commune. It shows the history of Wąsosz and the surrounding area against the extensive background of the history of the Góra district, as well as Silesia, Poland and Germany.

Thus, Chapter III covers the period from the founding of the city to the takeover of Silesia by the Prussian state. Chapter IV covers the times of the Prussian state, the Second German Reich, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich until 1945. Chapter V contains the entire history of the city during the communist system – that is, the years 1945–1989. Finally, the last VI chapter – which the author titled – Contemporary Times of the Wąsosz Commune in the years 1990–2020, covers the period of social, economic and political changes at the turn of the century. The monograph ends with a significant date – a year which, from the perspective of the past few years, is a breakthrough year in the history of not only this local community but also of contemporary civilization – the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic completely changes contemporary civilization – social ties, economy, politics and culture. So this is a good point to end the story.

Unlike in his first work on Wąsosz (Popiński, 2002), the author adopts an academic approach, employing critical analysis of the sources. At the same time, he tried, and he succeeded brilliantly, to make both the content, layout, and especially the language of the book as reader-friendly as possible. In the process of composing the subsequent chapters of his book, the author systematically engaged with a diverse array of historical sources. In chapters III and IV the author presented the life of the 18th, 19th and 20th century inhabitants of Wąsosz and its surroundings, basing mainly on publications by German authors. The works of pastors Filip Hanke and Karol Rabiger are worthy of attention (Hanke, 1887; Rabiger, 2010–2012)

on the history of Wąsosz written by them before World War I. The importance of these publications is emphasized by the fact that both authors had access to documents that have not survived to this day.

These monographs were supplemented by articles published in the 1990s in the magazine "Guhrauer Kreiszeitung" published in Germany ("Guhrauer Kreiszeitung" 1990–1994). Their authors were history enthusiasts associated with the community of former German inhabitants of the Górow district. Post-war Polish regionalists also wrote about the ancient history of Wąsosz and its surroundings – Antoni Bojakowski (1965), Zygmunt Kempa (1991) and Adam Polański (1995), and nowadays, above all, authors associated with "Kwartalnik Górowski". The author used all these books and articles scrupulously in his monograph.

However, for the period after 1945, author of the monograph *Wąsosz. Historia Miasta i Gminy*, conducted a source query in the state archives in Wrocław and Leszno, where extensive documentation has been preserved regarding the Wąsosz commune in the times of the People's Republic of Poland (APW, 82/806/0/7-117; APL, 34/799/0/9-22; APL, 34/386/0/1-17). A huge source of information about this period were articles by local regionalists, published since 2003 in the "Kwartalnik Górowski" (2003–2020), presenting various aspects of the social, economic and cultural life of Wąsosz.

As the author writes, "Work on the book took place in special conditions. The Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult for me to access the archives and prevented personal contact with many people. However, in the end, it did not stop me from completing it" (Popiński, 2022: 13).

So what makes this monograph different from other similar monographs of cities and communes in both Silesia and Greater Poland?

It should be emphasized that the entire monograph is written by one author, a historian dealing with research in modern and contemporary history. He treats earlier periods somewhat neglectfully – especially in the Middle Ages. Perhaps asking medievalists to cooperate would broaden the perspective on this period of the history of Wąsosz and the surrounding cities. Entire teams write many monographs of towns and regions of historians, for example *Dzieje Gniezna pierwszej stolicy Polski* [*History of Gniezno, the first capital of Poland*] – edited by J. Dobosz (2016); *Dzieje Turku* [*History of Turek*] – co-authorship by E. Makowski, Cz. Łuczak and J. Grzelczyk (2002); *Dzieje Wągrowca* [*History of Wągrowiec*] – edited by E. Makowski (1995); *Historia Zielonej Góry* [*History of Zielona Góra*] – edited by W. Strzyżewski (2011, 2012). They appear to be even better because each era is presented by researchers who possess a thorough knowledge of it.

In the case of the monograph *Wąsosz. Historia Miasta i Gminy*, this situation doesn't take place. However, it must be acknowledged that the closer the discussion gets to the present day, the easier it is for the author to navigate the topics covered. In doing so, he utilizes all available sources of information. The only exception is the period from 1945 to 1989, during which he does not use sources produced by the Communist Party or its affiliated parties (such as the ZSL and SD), which could provide additional details to the documents produced by local administrative bodies.

It is known that writing the history of a local community – especially if it concerns contemporary times – is not that easy. Local regional historians who remember the times the historian talks about in his monograph would like to find in it their perspective on this local history. Krzysztof Popiński in this work – especially in the last two chapters, broadly describing the local reality, tried to emerge from this conflict unscathed. He gave voice to many local representatives and, remaining somewhat in the shadows, tried to present the history of Wąsosz and the surrounding area as objectively as possible.

Wąsosz and the surrounding commune are therefore an interesting place located on the border of two worlds that ceased to exist in the post-war period, and in the present day this place has become a cultural and social melting pot for its new post-war inhabitants.

The monograph *Wąsosz. Historia Miasta i Gminy* can serve as an example of writing regional history, which is part of a larger whole and, in the era of globalization, allows us to always look back to find common roots. It is therefore worth reaching for this monograph to learn about the interesting history of the local community through the prism of a small Silesian town and see how it can be told in an engaging way.

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