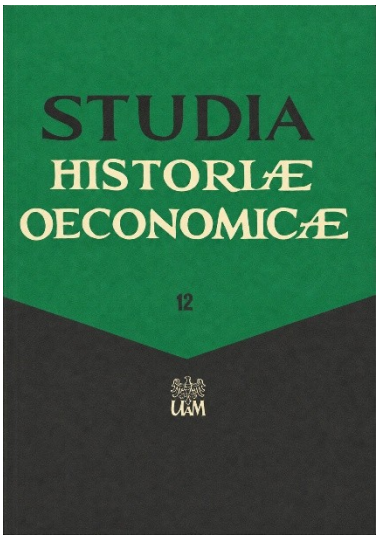

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REGIONAL HISTORICAL RESEARCH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

I. The existence of lively development of regional and local research in Poland, particularly marked after World War II, is confirmed in its enumerative and informational aspects by bibliographies: that is in Polish historical bibliographies and in general regional bibliographies. It is also confirmed by a generally dynamic activity of regional centres, a part of which may be characterized as research centres. This situation justifies the necessity of reflection on the theory and method of regional research, a necessity which is pointed out here not for the first time. The significance of that type of research for the development of historiography is a natural corollary.

In a situation of a particular development of the empirical regional research the discussion centred upon theoretical and methodological problems tended to be accidental and fragmentary. One may note only a few statements of historians which are in a varying degree interesting and innovatory.[1] Although

[1] S. Arnold, *Historia a regionalizm* (History and Regionalism). Ziemia, R. X: 1925; K. Buczek, *Zagadnienie regionalizmu w nauczaniu historii w szkole średniej* (The Problem of Regionalism in the Secondary School Teaching). In: Pamiętnik VI Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Wilnie, I. Lwów 1935; S. Herbst, *Regionalne badania historyczne w przeszłości i w Polsce Ludowej* (Regional Historical Research in the Past and in People's Poland). Kwart. Hist., R. LXIII: 1956; E. Maleczyńska, *W sprawie badań nad historią lokalną (artykuł dyskusyjny)* (On Local History Research — A Discussion). Śląski Kwart. Hist. „Sobótka", R. XV, 1960; W. Kwaśniewicz, *Badania historyczno-terenowe. Podstawowe wskazówki w zakresie problematyki i metodyki badawczej dla nauczycieli historii* (Historical Field Studies. Fundamental Instruction in the Problems and Methods of Research for History Teachers). Wiadomości Historyczne, R. III: 1960, nr 1; K. Buczek, *O regionach historycznych* (On Historical Regions). Małopolskie Studia Historyczne. R. VI 1963/4. [Druk 1965], s. 143 - 155; J. Topolski, *Przedmowa* (do:) *Dzieje Wielkopolski. T. 1* (An Introduction (to:) A History of Great Poland. Vol. 1). Poznań 1969; A. Podraza, *O potrzebie opracowania dziejów Małopolski (Uwagi dyskusyjne)* (On the Need of Writing a History of Little Poland — A discussion). Studia Histor. R. XV: 1972, s. 161 - 175; H. Madurowicz-Urbańska, *Metodologiczne i metodyczne aspekty regionalizacji historyczno-gospodarczej* (Methodological and Methodical Aspects of Socio-Economic Regionalization). Historyka. T. V: 1975.

such a discussion is very difficult it is indispensable, if we are going to approach regional research as one of the elements of the development of historiography and such a role of regional research is beyond doubt.

II. In this context there arises an important problem of the origin of regional research. It has to be recalled that there are several impulses and stimulants of regional research.

Let me begin with those most vital ones. The first one is the cultivation of tradition; tradition in the most comprehensive meaning of the word. This is an authentic aspect of the origins of regional research and it is, in most cases, spontaneous in its features and it grows out of broad and deep fundamentals of national history of civilization, also out of folk culture. The other stimulant is the bond that develops among people in small territorial communities (a family, a neighbourhood, a village, a small town, a quarter of a town, a town, a region and the area connected with it). This is also a source of authentic and spontaneous impulses which condition, though only to some degree, the operation of the factor of the cultivation of tradition, including historical tradition. All the above mentioned factors operate continuously. Regional research influenced by such stimulants has always led up to, by its very nature, activity of desultory and non-organized (or weakly organized) character. Work has been uneven in terms of scholarly value of the research undertaken. This is emphasized by the fact that research in the history of folklore, in ethnography and country-side studies have been much better organized.

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century organized forms of scholarly life began to influence regional research (mainly learned societies and universities). They constitute also today a separate source of that type of research. This process was enhanced by the establishment and development of such branches of scholarship, apart from history, as ethnography, ethnology, anthropo-geography, and sociography. Also of great importance to the development of regional research was the influence of the broad social movement born at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries called "regionalism". It originated mainly from the scientific, cultural and political traditions of France and it was formulated by its chief leader, Charles Brun and as a result it developed very much in Europe since the end of the nineteenth century,[2] and in Poland mainly in the interwar period. "Regionalism" had many forms and was characterized by ambitions of wide impact. As a result it could not dispense with the historical content of the phenomena which it wanted to shape one way or another. In brief, regionalism could not do without "histo-

[2] *Ruch regionalistyczny w Europie*. Książka zbiorowa pod red. A. Patkowskiego (Regionalistic Movement in Europe. A Book by Many Authors Edited by A. Patkowski). T. 1 - 2. Warszawa 1934.

ry". It was for regionalism a source of its life and a field of its activities, which brought about in effect an expansion of regional history. This was true not only in the case of French regionalism which was the most radical in its historical tendencies, but also in the case of the much more moderate in every respect Polish regionalism.[3] In the inter-war period the following Polish historians, each of them committed to the cause of regionalism in a different degree, expressed their opinions: S. Arnold, K. Buczek, F. Bujak, M. Handelsman, and E. Maleczyńska. Stanislas Arnold wrote in 1925, "The attitude that history should maintain in regional work is in a way imposed upon it is a foregone conclusion, by the concept of "region" itself. This concept, however, is in most cases a product of history and a result of geographical-historical processes. To know those processes is one of the more important objectives of regionalism".[4]

The above mentioned impulses of regional research functioned for a long

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[3] Scholarly aspects of Polish regionalism can be found in: *Praca naukowa na prowincji. Wstęp ogólny* F. Bujaka (Research Work in the Provinces. A general introduction by F. Bujak) and in the following publications: T. Banachiewicz, *Astronomia na prowincji* (Astronomy in the Provinces); O. S. Pawłowski, *O pracy naukowej na prowincji w zakresie geografii* (Geographic Research Work in the Provinces); K. Szulc, *Praca naukowa na prowincji w zakresie obserwacji meteorologicznych* (Scientific Work in the Provinces in the Form of Meteorological Observations): J. Czarnocki, *Praca naukowa na prowincji w zakresie geologii* (Geological Scientific Work in the Provinces); B. Hryniewiecki, *Praca naukowa na prowincji w zakresie botaniki* (Botanical Scientific Work in the Provinces); J. Grochmalicki, *Praca naukowa na prowincji w zakresie socjologii* (Sociological Research Work in the Provinces); A. Maciesza, *Praca naukowa lekarza na prowincji* (A Doctor's Scientific Work in the Provinces); J. S. Bystroń, *Ludoznawstwo na wsi* (Folkloristic Work in the Country); J. Kostrzewski, *Praca naukowa na prowincji w zakresie archeologii przedhistorycznej* (Research Work in Prehistoric Archaeology in the Provinces); K. Nitsch, *Badania językoznawcze na prowincji* (Linguistic Research in the Provinces); J. Rutkowski, *O zadaniach pracy naukowej na prowincji w zakresie historii* (The Objectives of Historical Research in the Provinces); F. Bujak, *O pracy naukowej na prowincji nad zagadnieniami gospodarczymi* (Research in Economic Problems in the Provinces); W. Podlacha, *Współpraca prowincji w badaniu i ochronie zabytków sztuki* (The Cooperation of the Provinces in Art Treasure Research and Preservation); A. Chybiński, *Muzykologia na prowincji* (Musicology in the Provinces); M. Treter, *Muzea prowincjonalne* (Provincial Museums); S. Małkowski, *O potrzebie organizowania ośrodków pracy naukowej na prowincji* (On the Need of Organizing Scientific and Scholarly Work Centres in the Provinces). Nauka Polska T. VI: 1925, s. 81 - 286 „Potrzeby nauki" ("The Needs of Science and Scholarship"), *Muzea regionalne. Ich cele i zadania.* Książka zbiorowa opracowana przy współudziale: (Regional Museums. Their Aims and Objectives. A book by many authors with the participation of:) S. Arnold, F. Bujak, A. Chybiński, J. Czarnocki, R. Danysz-Fleszarowa, A. Górski, B. Hryniewiecki, T. Jaczewski, R. Jakimowicz, A. Janowski, S. Małkowski, K. Moszyński, J. Mydlarski, W. Niebrzydowski, L. Niemojewski, A. Patkowski. Wydawnictwo Sekcji Powszechnych Uniwersytetów Regionalnych Związku Nauczycielstwa Polskiego Szkół Powszechnych. Warszawa 1928.

[4] S. Arnold, op. cit., s. 9.

time in conjunction, although each of them with a different strength. Today organized forms of scholarly activity are in the front line. They tend to emphasize to a high degree the cult of tradition, including historical tradition. This is a context for a proper development of regional history. But what actually is regional history?

III. As the answer for that question is not easy, one is inclined rather to point out to certain basic concepts which are generally associated with "regional history". I would include the following ones: local history, history of small communities (collective groups), of small places (settlements), the history of a region, and historical regions — therefore all that type of scholarship which do not coincide with the general state or national frame of reference — and in that sense are "regional". Local history can denote and denotes research in the history of individual towns or other settlements. In that particular sense, using the contemporary language of sociographers and anthropogeographers we must talk about research in small systems of local communities which are also defined in terms of time. I think that it would not be bad if we remembered that term in our further development of that type of research. But the etymology of the word "local" or "what is characteristic of a given place" leads up to opposition of phenomena of a more particular and more individual character and sometimes even unique, to what is comprehensive, general, on a mass scale. In that sense "local history" does not comprise a spatially and socially eliminated object of investigation, but is an aspect of scholarship. The local factor, the local element as an aspect of scholarship is to be found both in research concerned with small local communities and with those concerned with bigger territorial areas. It may be utilized to a varying degree, moreover, it competes, because it shapes the final character of a work, with the other fundamental element (the general current) at the level of a community of problems in the historical process seen as history of a state of a nation.

Research in small local communities may be opposed to the history of a region, because the history of a region is not a sum total of the history of individual towns and villages (seen here as local entities), it is not a collection of insignificant local events. Important are also the factors which put together, unify those units of a lower order into larger wholes. On the other hand, the history of a region is not, "a regional section of national history".[5] Also research in the history of a territory which we often call a region in an uncontrolled way, not always leads up to a basic result within the range of regional research; i.e. to a definition of a historical region. In one word the history of a

[5] K. Buczek, *O regionach historycznych...*, s. 147.

region and a historical region are by no means the same thing, in terms of methods, objectives and results of scholarly work.

The above presented statements may seem to be obvious if we consider them in disjunction with actual scholarly practice. In conjunction with that practice difficulties are legion, but this should not exclude a possibility or even necessity of shaping that practice in accordance with the requirements of theory and methodology. It is true that on the one hand those requirements are part of the postulates of a historian's "workshop" but they also are a result of theoretical and methodological assumptions of other social sciences (sociography, human geography, economic geography, economics and regional science). The subject matter of research concerned with the investigation of a historical region is, not only because of its empirical content, but also for methodological reasons, a very important element in the development of regional research, and thus consequently in the development of historiography.

The concept of a historical region, as we know, developed in Polish regional-historical writing rather early. A historical region was in most cases understood as a *traditional area*, activated in its life the components of which are various differentiating features likeł geographic, socio-demographic, economic, cultural and those conditioned by history. The pioneering French school, *géographie humaine* demonstrated long ago with a creative continuation today that there are ties between the natural environment of man and the content of material civilization, spiritual culture and the content of political life. Such regions, transformed by human will, constitute at the same time areas of settlement, supply and exploitation bases. In recent literature on the subject the psychological factor is included. By this factor is understood a whole system of symbols by means of which the population of the area under investigation builds up its consciousness of the existence of that area and of belonging to that area.

In the conceptions of Polish historians recently proposed (the sixties and the seventies) those conceptions are in most cases confirmed, in particular in the case of Topolski who in his work in historical regions aims at looking for integrated wholes.[6] But, e.g., in the case of Buczek, the political, political-administrative (local authorities) element is so much preferred[7] that his whole "system" of historical regions is subordinated to one direction.

The conception of a region (including a historical region) as an integrated

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[6] J. Topolski, *Przedmowa* (do:) *Dzieje Wielkopolski*. Tenże, *Model gospodarczy Wielkopolski w XVIII w.* (The Economic Model of Great Poland in the Eighteenth Century). In: Studia i Materiały do dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza, t. 10: 1971, z. 2.

[7] K. Buczek, *O regionach historycznych...*; A. Podraza, *O potrzebie...*; J. Topolski, *Przedmowa* (do:) *Dzieje Wielkopolski...*

whole is connected also with the above mentioned "regional science", which formulated many important and remarkable scholarly assumptions.[8]

(1) A region is a whole of a definite structure. Between the elements of this *complex* there are definite correlations. Definite correlations exist also between the elements and the whole of this complex. In the case of a historical region the selection of which coincides with recognizing them as region forming factors there is an additional very essential element, namely time and its interference (mutability). (2) The objective empirical historical reality is the object of research. Both the elements of the complex and all the stages of research procedure have an empirical character. (3) Region (including a historical region) is an expression of an area in which phenomena are grouped. The spatial delimitation is above all a result of the relation: man (society) — environment (geographical, natural) and the function of space which is connected with it. Those problems, though not foreign to historians, deserve more attention, even more so because in contemporary methodology of geography there is more and more consistent movement away from the traditional Newtonian conception of space towards the concept of a multidimensional space, which may be of great importance for historical research. (4) Apart from spatial delimitation, the temporal one and grasping the interference of time is one of the fundamental indices of a historical region. Hence a historical region is also a complex phenomenon of mutually conditioned factors also of a temporal character. Hence the investigation of a historical region is not a mere reference of the phenomena investigated to one temporal cross-section but it is also a series of such cross-sections and thus as a result a series of transformations. It seems therefore that historians dealing with historical regionalization will strive towards attaining the knowledge of two aspects (two forms) of relativization of a given historical region in time.

In the first case a historian investigates a region in a definite (past) time, which designates the object of his investigation in a chronological sense with a

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[8] D. Whittlesey, *The Regional Concept and the Regional Method.* American Geography: Inventory and Prospect. Syracuse 1954; W. Isard, *Regional Science, the Concept of Region and the Regional Structure.* (In) Papers and Proceedings of the Regional Science Association. VII: 1956, s. 13 - 26; K. Dziewoński, *Niektóre problemy badawcze regionów gospodarczych w Polsce* (Some Scientific Problems of Economic Regions in Poland). Przegl. Geogr. T. XXIX: 1957 r. s. 593 - 613; И.Г. Саушкин; *Некоторые Методологические проблемы районнзования.* Философские вопросы естествознания. 1960 с. 389 - 402. W. Isard et al., *Metody analizy regionalnej. Wprowadzenie do nauki o regionach* (Regional Analysis Methods. An Introduction into Regional Science). Warszawa 1965; A. Wróbel, *Pojęcie regionu geograficznego a teoria geografii* (The Concept of a Geographical Region and the Theory of Geography). Warszawa 1965. Prace geograficzne IG PAN nr 48; A. Piskozub, *Kształty polskiej przestrzeni* (Spatial Shapes of Poland). Warszawa 1968; A. S. Kostrowicki. *Z problematyki badawczej systemu człowiek—środowisko* (Some Scientific Problems of the Man-Environment System). Przegl. Geogr. t. XLII: 1970, s. 3 - 18.

corresponding element in the definite economic, social, political and cultural situation. Although the element of time is not eliminated, the element of change is. In the second case it is the problem of change and the typology of change, it is a problem of the transformation of one structure into another, accompanied by attempts at finding the laws of those changes by means of investigating the so-called temporal structures. This aspect is very dear to a historian but unfortunately there are no publications of that sort in historical regionalization. It need not be emphasized that because of the lack of such publications the regularity of the transformations in the regional structure of a country does not receive enough attention. But a "historical region" is among other things, as it was referred to in the past, is a "traditional area" and therefore its historical content. It is significant that this was emphasized particularly by some geographers. Among the Polish geographers this was most emphasized by K. Dziewoński. "In a historical investigation of regions a question often arises what part is played in it by old units, disappearing quickly, at one time or fading away slowly, in an evolutionary way; do the old boundaries remain after the disappearance of the region itself or do they vanish and how fast they do so (...). All those things give past entities and patterns of regions a tendency of longer survival and even of rebirth in different conditions. Thus in the process of differentiation of the internal relations of a new larger region, the old division into smaller independent spatial units finds very often its reflection in the inner structure of the larger units, sometimes in terms of zones. One could formulate a general thesis concerning the processes of degradation of boundaries, replacing with it the more superficial views of the disappearance of regions formed in the past".[9]

A generally accepted concept which is essential for the investigation process is a hierarchy of regions and partly connected with it regional structure (a structure of lower and a higher order — a group or regions of different order). The concept of the hierarchy of regions by the very fact that it belongs to the basic elements of the economic region theory, is also a very important problem for historical regionalization. Among historians' publications it was strongly emphasized by K. Buczek.[10]

IV. Historical regional research utilizes both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Some work of that kind comprises most certainly the fundamentals of a historian's erudition. It must be however pointed out that the problem of methods in historical regional research is an open one and that in their development there are possible perspectives which are not indifferent in their final result to the development of historiography. If historical regional research

[9] K. Dziewoński, op. cit.

[10] K. Buczek, *O regionach historycznych...*

really associates itself with the theoretical foundations and conceptual wealth of other social sciences, this must also pertain to the methods those other sciences apply.

Among the traditional descriptive methods the monograph method is still significant for regional research. By this method is understood a multiple, comprehensive and complete description in which statistical (numerical) computations and tables have an auxiliary significance.[11] It cannot be denied that a monograph so understood may be somewhat dangerous. It cannot be denied too, that because of very often unfavourable conditions in terms of sources and information, a monograph based on a particular choice is such a form of investigation process which a historian cannot reject for the historical sake of regional research. It is even more important because in present-day sociography scholars return to the methodological and methodical values of the monograph, particularly integral monograph. This idea is transferred upon the field of regional research by J. Topolski.[12] It has a great importance for deepening the role of micro-analysis in historical research.

The monograph method is given preference in most cases over other methods in local research, even when larger units are concerned. For the methods of investigating larger spatial units and those varied in their character perspectives originating from recent (for the historians) methodic suggestions offered by other social sciences are essential. A particular significance may be attributed to those perspectives which comprise in their approach the methods of research associated with "region science", thus making the methods of regional-historical research more exact. Fundamental initial assumptions in the methods of regional research as dealing with integrated wholes are very important in particular to historical regional research. For a further emphasis of the importance of that kind of investigating procedure it is relevant that regional research comprise highly varied subjects of interest. Our own interest and research may be concentrated on particular subjects or on the whole and this, as it was mentioned above, helps us to approach regionalizing research proper (in a way research of a higher degree). To be sure, research concerned with larger wholes is easier, particularly in studies in historical socio-economic regions. Among the factors delimiting such spatial and cultural structures which we regard as parts of the concept of "historical region", studies in definite socio-economic areas stand a better chance of materializing (mainly because of the character of source facilities) than studies carried out in the spatial aspect and concerning other phenomena (political, cultural ones, etc, etc.). But attempts at such approaches are quite possible.

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[11] J. Steczkowski, *Rozważania na temat opisu naukowego* (Some Notes on Scientific Description). Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej w Krakowie, 1965, nr 31.

[12] J. Topolski, Przedmowa (do:) *Dzieje Wielkopolski...*

It must be emphasized that in a case in which the extant historical record material fulfils basic statistical requirements a historian cannot give up some limits of quantitative investigation procedure. Above all it will be useful to adopt such a method procedure which is confined to descriptive statistics (and this is confirmed in research practice). This involves: collecting, putting into order, grouping (qualitative grouping will be here of particular importance) and analysing of the numerical material by means of a variety of numerical characteristics.

Spatial grouping comprises the foundations of regional research and such a grouping is a kind of classification because of many features. This makes it a difficult problem. Within this particular range attention has to be paid to those methods which can be successfully applied in regional historical research. To that category belong taxonomic methods. The application of numerical taxonomy in a historian's research is now quite an open question. In the context of the opinions expressed here it is quite another problem, demanding a separate treatment.

V. The source of the impulses of regional research, the subject and method of that kind of research — all problems discussed above, define the function and the significance of regional research in the development of historiography. They are however connected with some pre-conditions if they are to play this beneficial role. Those pre-conditions are: to what an extent regional research really in their practical aspect answer the cultural needs and consciousness of a regional area and whether the subject of the research is properly understood. Those pre-conditions must also include fundamental values of a historian's erudition and also a positive attitude of scholars towards everything that undergoes the process of change in the *historical method* and in the methods of *other social sciences*. Those pre-conditions are not easy and in practice we very often arrive at a result quite different from the one we have expected in the theoretical sense. These are the facts connected with the difficulties of regional research but they are not our chief concern in the present paper.

However in a case in which historical regional research (also with the influence of purely organizational factors) fulfil the required pre-conditions the beneficial function and significance of that type of research for the development of historiography may be described in the following way:

(1) It is an *inspiring* and *mobilizing* function in terms of the development of historical problems related to the local currents in history and the significance of those currents for the history of the nation as a whole and the state as a whole. It is possible not only to enrich the range of local problems in research but also to formulate it so to enrich the "general current" at the same time. In that sense regional research is complementary to general research. This is a function consisting not merely in mobilizing the local staff of the

so-called "region enthusiasts", but also mobilizing within the range of regional research many scholars in academic centres (universities and other institutions of higher learning as well as learned societies).

(2) It is an *integrating* function in a tripartite relationship. In terms of scholarship it is a beneficiary function of integration of research because of the fact that the criterion of *the whole* lies at the foundation of regional research. It is in that sense that the research results may play a beneficial role from the point of view of the development of methods. It is an integrating function in the organizational sense if because of the subject of regional research, it aims at a scholarly and organizational mutual understanding between the representatives of regional areas and the central ones. It is also helpful when it aims at inter-communication between representatives of various branches of knowledge or representatives of the public life of a region in question who are responsible in the administrative and organizational sense for the particular spheres of "life" in that region.

(3) From the point of view of methods, regional research may additionally play a beneficial role by enhancing the values of *micro-analysis* in historical cognition. It cannot be forgotten that in the present trends of the development of the methodology of history the mutual relation of micro- and macro-analyses becomes very important and even requires revision.

(4) It is also a function of *preserving*, particularly in the case of recent history. Regional research preceded by organization work in terms of preservation of sources utilize the widest scope of original and authentic regional documentation (of a variety of types). The role of regional centres in finding out, preservation, in some case discovery and transfer ring to national activities concerned with collecting documents is tremendous. This applies also to collecting records of present-day life.

In discussing the preservation of cultural wealth, mainly in the case of the preservation of historical monuments we use very often the term "revaluation". I think that on the basis of "preservation", in terms of preserving from destruction mainly the fundamental documentation, the revaluation factor also plays a part in regional research, revaluation in the broad terms of reference, i.e. such a one that often recovers and always consolidates the place and the significance of regional history in general history.

Translated by H. Zbierski