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**EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS
OF THE POLISH BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY
AT 17 SŁAWKOWSKA ST., CRACOW**

Abstract

The *Polish Biographical Dictionary* (*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, abbr. *PSB*) is one of the most prestigious publications in Polish historiography. Published since 1935, with the editorial board domiciled in Cracow, at 17 Sławkowska St.; from 1935 to 1949, under the patronage of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences [PAU], 1958–99 – Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences [IH PAN]; since 1999 – both PAN and PAU, with IH PAN acting as the publisher. During the eighty-five years of its existence (temporarily discontinued during the Second World War and the Stalinist period, 1949–58), fifty-two volumes with almost 28,000 biographical entries were published, arranged alphabetically – from ‘Abakanowicz’ to ‘Taube’, and chronologically spanning from the legendary King Popiel until persons who died in 2000. The Dictionary was founded by Władysław Konopczyński, a professor of the Jagiellonian University of Cracow, who was its first editor-in-chief (in 1935–49). Professor Emanuel Rostworowski, his former student and editor-in-chief in 1964–89, heavily contributed to bringing the project up to top standard, which was maintained by his successors, literary historians Professor Henryk Markiewicz (1989–2002) and, from 2003 onwards, Professor Andrzej Romanowski. Between December 2014 and 2019, more than 8,500 entries were digitalised and made available at: www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl.

Keywords: *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, biography writing, censorship, Polish historiography, communism, Władysław Konopczyński, Tadeusz Manteuffel, Emanuel Rostworowski

I
INTRODUCTION

The registered office of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* (*Polski Słownik Biograficzny* – *PSB*) has been housed – since the beginning, eighty-five years ago – in an edifice of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences

[PAU], at 17 Sławkowska Street in Cracow. This fact is quite unusual for a Polish scientific publication. The first fascicle of *PSB* came out on 10 January 1935. Two-column, no photographs, no catchy editorial design, just an ordinary grey cover, it contained biographical entries starting with 'A' and bibliographical notes, in small print, attached. The edition comprised, in alphabetical order, the first biographies of outstanding Poles as well as Polish citizens of various ethnicities and foreigners who played an essential part in Poland's over a thousand year old history. In total, the Dictionary has published close to 28,000 biographical notes. The last, 216th fascicle, numbering 160 pages, dated 2020, and opening volume 53, spans the entries from 'Johann Taube' to 'Feliks Teodorowicz'.

Not only has the *PSB* been a great manual on the most illustrious Poles, from the tenth to the twentieth century, but during the eighty-five years of its existence, it set the standard for Polish biographers and biography writing, becoming a *monumentum aere perennius* of Polish historiography and humanities.

The Dictionary's editors did not yield to the temptation to write biographies according to the canon of searching for a 'mythologised genealogy of the present day',¹ and creating behavioural patterns. The same measure was applied to the biographies of aristocrats and communist activists, heroes of national insurrections and traitors; representatives of diverse religious denominations and fighting atheists; National Democrats and socialists. Thus, this particular 'self-portrait of Polish people', and, through these figures, of the Polish history, free of stereotypes and "independent of the emphases or biases imposed by interim historiographical en-vogue styles".² From fascicle one until today, the *PSB* has been loyal to Władysław Konopczyński's scientific credo from the foreword to the first volume: "Designed for broad circles of the intelligentsia, this Dictionary only seeks to inform rather than disseminate any principle or programme. Neither does it glorify nor decry; it is not a Polish 'Plutarch'; it chases no revelation; it would not revisit and review the old views. If some of the personages lose a bit of their gloriolate in the light of our research, hundreds of

¹ Emanuel Rostworowski, 'Czemu służy Polski Słownik Biograficzny', *Dziennik Polski* (26 Sept. 1984), *Oficyjna* no. 29 [supplement to the newspaper].

² Helena Wereszycka, 'Dzieje ojczyste biograficznym sposobem opowiedziane', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 11 (1981), 3–4.

others, forgotten or underestimated ones, will regain their position in the memory of generations, with the positive harvest of their lives. Favourites of history will no doubt lose by it, but the nation shall gain, as a team of creative generations – and so shall the historical truth”.³

II

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE EMERGENCE OF THE DICTIONARY

The appearance of the first fascicle of the Dictionary in 1935 was preceded by a long preparation and discussion on the concept of the first complementary biographical Dictionary of Poles – and, by a battle for its emergence fought in 1928 to 1931.⁴ A scientific project so massive and daring would have never become a success without the extraordinary determination of Władysław Konopczyński and his associates – a small team of young historians, enthusiasts of the project.

The need for a biographical lexicon was advocated by Konopczyński as early as 1922, in an article ‘O polską biografię narodową’ [Advocating the Idea of a Polish National Biography].⁵ However, it was only six years later, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Poland’s regained independence that the debate flared amongst Polish historians. At the session of the Central Board of the Polish Historical Society [PTH] held on 2 November 1928 in Lviv, Stanisław Zakrzewski and Ludwik Finkel put forward the idea of a biographical dictionary that would commemorate Polish activists and heroes of the post-Partitions period. Historians from Lviv, Warsaw, Vilnius, and Cracow met at the University of Lviv to attend Władysław Konopczyński’s presentation of a biographical lexicon that would encompass the entire history of Poland.⁶ In the spring of 1929, Kazimierz Tyszkowski, a student of Finkel’s, drafted a dictionary that covered only the individuals who after the loss of independence by Poland-Lithuania in 1795 worked

³ Władysław Konopczyński, ‘Przedmowa’, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (hereinafter: PSB), i (Kraków, 1935), VII.

⁴ Piotr Biliński, ‘Władysława Konopczyńskiego „boje” o kształt Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego w latach 1928–1939’, *Klio Polska*, vii (2015), 107–41.

⁵ Władysław Konopczyński, *Przegląd Warszawski*, ii, 1/5 (1922), 161–9.

⁶ Tadeusz Kondracki, *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne w latach 1918–1939* (Toruń, 2006), 210; first published as ‘Początki Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego’ (article), *Teki Historyczne*, xxii (Londyn, 1999), 211.

“for the Nation’s benefit, suffering and fighting for its liberty”.⁷ The publication of the first fascicles was planned for the year 1931.

In parallel, Władysław Konopczyński wrote his draft of a *Polish Biographical Dictionary* that would encompass “those who created the thousand years of Poland before the Partition along with those who saved and nurtured her in the time of oppression”.⁸ The concept was supported by Stanisław Kot, head of the Chair of Cultural History at Cracow’s Jagiellonian University, in his article ‘O biografję polską’ [For the Polish Biography].⁹ In November 1929, Stanisław Kutrzeba, Secretary-General of the PAU, proposed that a subsidy might be acquired for the publication of the two dictionaries; however, it was ultimately decided – at the PTH Central Board’s meeting on 22 June 1930 in Lviv – that the idea to compile a dictionary of the country’s independence fighters be quit.¹⁰

At that time, Konopczyński engaged a team of five, including his seminar attendees Helena Waniczek (who later, in June 1947, married historian Henryk Wereszycki) and Kazimierz Lepszy to contribute to the initial work on the Dictionary. Having no money or dedicated office at their disposal, they met at the Lepszy’s apartment on Bracka St.¹¹ They prepared a file with a dozen thousand names within twelve months. When recollecting this time, Emanuel Rostworowski could not hide his admiration for Konopczyński, their hard-working and always-on-time boss and the handful of disinterested young people fired up by the idea of a *Biographical Dictionary*. “Their labour was a genuine welfare action. Only the results they achieved became an argument for the PAU authorities in favour of granting them a subsidy and taking over the editorial work under their leadership and on their own account”.¹² On 26 January 1931, the Board of the PAU assumed patronage over the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*. The Editorial Committee was set up (its members included: Roman Grodecki, Oskar Halecki, Stanisław Kot, Marian Kukiel, Adam Skałkowski, Waclaw

⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁸ Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU (hereinafter: ANPP), Kraków: ref. no. PAU I-64, 8 (Konopczyński, *Polski słownik biograficzny*, projekt, typescript).

⁹ Stanisław Kot, ‘O biografję polską’, *Pamiętnik Warszawski*, 2 (1929), 160–73.

¹⁰ Kondracki, *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne*, 220.

¹¹ Emanuel Rostworowski, ‘Kazimierz Lepszy i problem biografistyki narodowej’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxii, 2 (1965), 495.

¹² Rostworowski, *Kazimierz Lepszy*, 495.

Tokarz, and others) and the Council of the PSB; Konopczyński was appointed Editor-in-Chief. A set of rules was adopted for the purpose of the edition. After these bodies were established, Konopczyński, together with the Committee's members, compiled the instructions for his associates, authors, and the publisher. His view of the project was optimistic: in a 'Prospekt' (announcement) of 1933¹³ and then in the foreword ('Przedmowa') to the first volume, he predicted that twenty volumes, containing 20,000 biographies in total, would be published over twenty years.

With time, animosities in the Lviv milieu diminished; the historians who were critical toward Konopczyński accepted his concept gradually. Between late 1934 and early 1935, Kazimierz Tyszkowski, Bronisław Pawłowski, and Adam Skałkowski, members of PTH, joined the Council. General Julian Stachiewicz, head of the Military Historical Bureau, refused to cooperate as he opposed Konopczyński's National Democracy-inclined views as well as his historiosophy, with its preference of social and scientific work over armed fighting for independence.¹⁴

III UNDER WŁADYSŁAW KONOPCZYŃSKI, 1935–49

In June 1934, the authors received the commissions along the lines of the Dutch lexicographical system (each fascicle was to contain entries from 'A' to 'Z'). Finally, Konopczyński took the British *Dictionary of National Biography*, published 1885–1900 (2nd ed.: 1908/1909; subsequent volumes have been published every ten years since 1912) as the model for the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, considering the British publication as representing the top scientific standard. From 10 November 1934 on, the English, i.e. alphabetical, system was adopted; approved by the Dictionary's Council on 24 March 1935. It has been respected to date.¹⁵

Between 1935 and 1939, the consecutive fascicles and volumes, produced by the five-member team, were published on schedule,

¹³ 'Prospekt PSB', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xlvii, 2, 1 (1933).

¹⁴ ANPP, Kraków: PAU I-135, no. 2174/31: 'Letter by J. Stachiewicz to S. Kutrzeba of 5 Dec. 1931'; after Kondracki, *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne*, 223–4.

¹⁵ Andrzej Romanowski, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny, przeszłość, terażniejszość, perspektywy* (Kraków, 2010), 11.

as assumed by the Editor-in-Chief. Before the war broke out, four complete volumes (five fascicles each) and four fascicles of volume five (last entry: 'Jan Drohojowski') came out.

When planning to complete the project by the year 1955, Konopczyński could not foresee the stormy and dramatic vicissitudes of the country and the nation, including the publishing project he managed. After the outbreak of the Second World War, the files and materials prepared for the subsequent fascicles were successfully hidden. Władysław Konopczyński, Editor-in-Chief, and Kazimierz Lepszy, the Committee Secretary, were arrested in November 1939 in the so-called *Sonderaktion Krakau*, during which the Gestapo detained professors from Cracow's tertiary schools; luckily, both men survived the toughest moments. Once the German army withdrew from Cracow in January 1945, Konopczyński, as soon as it was practicable, jolted his team to action. On 8 February 1945, the Editorial Committee met for the first time after the war. The files and materials, meticulously coffered during the war, were moved to 17 Sławkowska St. The fifth fascicle of volume five came out, under the patronage of the PAU, reasonably soon, peculiarly dated 1939–46. The time and the country's political system had changed, but Konopczyński remained loyal to his views and passions. At an academic conference held on 26 January 1946, he expressed himself thus: "may science serve life with whatever it can; may science motivate life, but never fetch and carry it".¹⁶ For a year, until autumn 1946, he worked on the Dictionary with no remuneration.¹⁷ 1948 saw the publication of volumes VI (without the biography of Felix Dzerzhinsky, which was withdrawn by the censors¹⁸) and VII (incomplete, without the last fascicle; its complete

¹⁶ Władysław Konopczyński, 'Autobiografia', *Nauka polska. Jej potrzeby, organizacja i rozwój*, i (1992), 117.

¹⁷ Maria Czepe, 'Władysław Konopczyński', in *Władysław Konopczyński 1880–1952. Materiały z posiedzenia naukowego PAU w dniu 21 czerwca 2002 r.* (Kraków, 2002), 75.

¹⁸ For the adventures related to the biographical note on F. Dzerzhinsky and its withdrawal from printing by censors, see Józef Dużyk, 'Słownikowe kłopoty z Dzierżyńskim', *Czas* (4–5 Feb. 1995), 13. The Editorial Board did not qualify for print the entry written before the Second World War by Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski and commissioned Stanisław Płoski (in April 1945) to prepare another one; in spite of five reminders, he returned no entry by early 1947. Konopczyński requested Dr Helena Waniczek, in turn, to do the job, and she fairly quickly compiled an entry which revealed little-known biographical details, such as Dzerzhinsky's wedding ceremony at St Nicholas's church in Cracow and its circumstances. The entry was

edition only came out in 1958, again with a 'long' date: 1948–58). The 'downtimes' caused by chicaneries suffered by the Editor-in-Chief, censorship's interventions, and financial difficulties resulted in a reduced number of fascicles published in 1946–9 – namely, ten, instead of the planned nineteen.¹⁹

It was still as of 27 April 1949 that the Dictionary editorial team distributed guidelines to contributors requesting to observe the editorial instructions and compile the biographical notes "as concisely as possible, ignoring any dispensable details". A review of volumes IV to VII was published, whose author, W.J. Rose, appreciated Konopczyński's effort in work on the consecutive fascicles. The reviewer pointed to the editors' trouble stemming from the fact that a number of authors and contributors, representatives of the Polish intelligentsia, were killed during the war, in 1939 to 1945.²⁰ In 1949, Stefan Kieniewicz, the historian who treated his contributions to the project, since the earliest biographical notes in 1936 until his death, accepted the invitation to join the team as a sort of mission.

Konopczyński's independent academic activity and views were irritating to the new communist authorities. A campaign was unleashed against him, with support from the Minister of Education Stanisław Skrzyszewski. Not only the editor-in-chief and some authors but also individual articles and, finally, the very concept of entry selection were criticised. On 17 May 1949, Konopczyński resigned as Editor-in-Chief of the *PSB* and as Chairman of the PAU's Historical Commission. He perceived the chicaneries against him as a blow against the "dignity of Polish science"²¹ and an example of the degradation of Polish historiography. Seven months later, on 12 December 1949, the Ministry of Education resolved to suspend the *PSB* project.²²

submitted to the head of Voivodeship Office for the Control of the Press, Publications, and Public Performances and was rejected (as of 31 May 1947) due to its alleged 'series of historical inaccuracies'. Minor improvements made by Professors Konopczyński, Lepszy, and Roman Grodecki came to nought; failing (once again) to receive the censors' acceptance, the biography eventually did not appear in print.

¹⁹ Stanisław Trawkowski, 'Polski Słownik Biograficzny w perspektywie porównawczej', in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny. Sesja jubileuszowa w sześćdziesięciolecie powstania* (Warszawa, 1997), 45.

²⁰ Wiliam John Rose, 'Polski Słownik Biograficzny (Polish D.N.B.)', *The Slavonic Review*, xxviii (1949), 297–8.

²¹ Quoted after Czeppe, *Władysław Konopczyński*, 76.

²² Romanowski, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 13.

At the time when the Dictionary was run by Konopczyński (1935 to 1949), a total of seven volumes were published, with entries from 'Abakanowicz, Bruno' to 'Girdwoyń, Kazimierz' (approx. 5,500 notes in total). Konopczyński compiled 113 biographical notes, plus twenty-two in advance. Emanuel Rostworowski, his postwar student, thus appraised his master's work and determination: "he set the requirements very high, adopting the British *Dictionary of National Biography*, the best of the then-existing dictionaries, as the model to follow. The model has not proved to be unmatched".²³ Konopczyński kept a warm relationship with the Dictionary's team until he died in 1952, the date that coincided with the closing down of the PAU.²⁴

IV

1949–58: THE TACIT YEARS

In the years of the progressive Stalinisation of the humanities, when Polish historiography was being made subordinate to the Marxist methodology and the propaganda of the ruling communist party (Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR]), the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* fell silent. The editorial board survived as the PAU's Documentation Unit and collected material for biographical notes and biographies compiled in advance or to be written in a future. During the discontinuation period, which lasted less than ten years, the Dictionary's ethos was preserved. This silence proved to be a blessing as some others who continued to publish in the Stalinist spirit, later, after 1956, had to justify their actions with ideological 'errors and distortions'.

After the Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences [IH PAN] was established, Professor Tadeusz Manteuffel-Szoega, its director, resolved to 'adopt'²⁵ the work that had been conceived in a different epoch. This man of Livonian and baronial ancestry who had been a soldier in the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1920 and lost an arm during the defence of Warsaw, and had collaborated with the Bureau of

²³ Emanuel Rostworowski, opening address to a scientific session on W. Konopczyński as a historiographer – 'Sejsja naukowa „Miejsce Władysława Konopczyńskiego w historiografii (w 25 rocznicę śmierci)”', *Studia Historyczne*, xxii, 1 (1979), 65.

²⁴ Romanowski, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 13.

²⁵ Stefan Kieniewicz, 'Polski Słownik Biograficzny' [paper delivered at a solemn scientific session, 28 Feb. 1978, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the IH PAN], *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxxvi, 1 (1979), 149.

Information and Propaganda during the Second World War (associated with the London-based Polish Government-in-Exile), agreed to take the directorship with the Institute in 1953, when the tough period of Stalinism was in full bloom. A series of his decisions regarding the Dictionary project – beginning with its reactivation, the appointment of the right people to responsible positions, through to shielding the Editors from chicaneries from the communist party activists, turned out to be salutary.

Stefan Kieniewicz, who was aware of the behind-the-scenes of Professor Manteuffel's decision, particularly highlighted his role in rescuing the Dictionary in an address on the occasion of the IH PAN's twenty-fifth anniversary:

It was Tadeusz Manteuffel's enormous merit that, under the favourable conditions of the time, he dunned for the Dictionary to be revived, took it under his protection, providing it with a material foundation and the immunity of an appropriate scientific climate. ... It goes to the credit of the Institute of History that the Institute has resurrected the *PSB* – and, moreover, it enabled the project's functioning under the conditions of autonomy as a broad, and reasonable, concept.²⁶

During the political Thaw marked by the October 1956 upheaval, the IH PAN's Academic Council unanimously supported the idea to have the Dictionary revived. On 6 February 1957, the Head Secretariat of the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences [PAN] officially resolved that the *PSB* be reintroduced and new Editorial Committee set up.²⁷

V

UNDER KAZIMIERZ LEPSZY, 1957–64

The *PSB* was reinstated in 1957 as a publication of the PAN, implemented by its Institute of History; in parallel, a large Editorial Committee was established. Professor Kazimierz Lepszy, a historian associated with the Jagiellonian University and with the Dictionary since its very beginning, was appointed Editor-in-Chief (on 9 April 1957). He was also made Chairman of the Editorial Committee (on the same

²⁶ Kieniewicz, 'Polski Słownik Biograficzny', 150.

²⁷ Romanowski, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 13–14.

day), whilst Helena Wereszycka was made responsible as Editorial Assistant. In the 1957 editorial instructions, Lepszy described his concept of biography-writing as an auxiliary science and postulated that biographies (biographical entries) compiled for PSB only be pieces of encyclopaedic information.²⁸

Post-war communist Poland saw waves of political ‘thaws’ followed by unexpected ‘hoarfrosts’ manifesting themselves in censor officers’ interventions and political pressure. To hide the work he managed, the Editor-in-Chief had, here or there, to pay with his word as servitude to the communist principals in power. As he admitted (in *Wiadomości Historyczne* periodical), the Dictionary had to miss several names representing the radical Left, technicians, agronomists, engineers, and activists from the territories included in Poland after the Second World War (so-called ‘Regained Territories’, or *Ziemie Odzyskane* in Polish). On the other hand, landowners, clergymen (particularly, monks), and the nineteenth/twentieth-century officer corps were ‘over-represented’. In the same text, he proudly emphasised the scholarly and informative aspects of the Dictionary, and its high standard that matched its best English, Dutch, Soviet, or French counterparts. He would undoubtedly say that the editorial team remained loyal to the earlier assumption of refraining from evaluating the persons described, particularly twentieth-century ones, in order to avoid or prevent undistanced personal reckonings.²⁹

Based on the previously collected materials, five fascicles were forwarded for print in 1959, two of which were published in the same year. Since 1959, responsibility for the publication rested with the Ossoliński National Institute [Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich]. Three fascicles were printed in 1960, another three in 1961, and only one in 1962; the years 1963–4 saw the publishing of two fascicles per year. At least twelve months passed between the completion of the work on each fascicle and its being printed. Apart from problems (of various sorts) with the printing office, the reason for the delay was the censorship’s leisurely style of operation. Hence, in 1960, the Directors of the IH PAN appointed the PSB Editorial Board, formed of the Committee’s members, as a body to intermediate between the

²⁸ Rostworowski, ‘Kazimierz Lepszy i problem biografistyki narodowej’, 498.

²⁹ Kazimierz Lepszy, ‘O polską biografję narodową (Na marginesie wznowienia *Polskiego słownika biograficznego*)’, *Wiadomości Historyczne*, i, 1 (1958), 26–7.

editorial team and the political decision-makers. According to Stefan Kieniewicz, this new body “appeared to be useful, in the bilateral aspect: thanks to good advice given to the Editors, and thanks to the self-protection tactic assumed in contacts with various institutions: the practice that bore first fruit a few years later”.³⁰ On 29 February 1960, Kazimierz Lepszy invited two Cracow-based scholars, Emanuel Rostworowski and Henryk Markiewicz, to actively contribute to the work of the Committee as well as the Editorial Board; both of them played an enormously important part in the history of the *PSB*.

In 1962, the Documentation Unit turned into the Documentation and Scientific Information Unit. The other activities of Kazimierz Lepszy, who, in parallel, was also the Rector of the Jagiellonian University (1962–4) and (nonpartisan) MP with the Sejm of the People’s Republic of Poland (1961–4) severely affected the pace of work on the Dictionary; as a result, thirteen fascicles (each of a larger size than before, though) came out between 1959 and 1964, instead of the planned twenty-four.³¹ They contained some 3,000 biographies, in a total of three volumes. It goes to Lepszy’s credit that the Dictionary’s erudite level was maintained, and its scientific and informative nature made even more profound.³²

As was the case earlier on with Konopczyński and the note on F. Dzerzhinsky, now it fell to the lot of Lepszy to crash against the wall of censorship. In the biographies of Polish military officers murdered in the Katyn massacre, the (actual) date of 1940 was irrevocably turned into 1941 – as, for instance, in the biographical note of Andrzej Tadeusz Hałaciński, author of the patriotic military song *My, Pierwsza Brygada*.³³ The note on Cardinal August Hlond, compiled by Rev. Professor Mieczysław Żywczyński triggered a scandal in Roman Catholic Church circles³⁴: its author was charged with showing the former Primate of Poland in a negative light and flooded with a wave of denunciations. The Rev. Jan Pluciński (in *Nasza Przeszłość*, 1962, pp. 312–13) described

³⁰ Kieniewicz, ‘Polski Słownik Biograficzny’, [paper], 150.

³¹ Trawkowski, ‘Polski Słownik Biograficzny w perspektywie porównawczej’, 45.

³² Rostworowski, *Kazimierz Lepszy i problem biografistyki narodowej*, 498.

³³ Andrzej Romanowski, ‘Słownik Pamięci Narodowej’, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (8–9 Aug. 2009), 16.

³⁴ See Jan Ciałowicz, ‘Hałaciński Andrzej Tadeusz (1891–1941)’, in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, ix (Kraków, 1960–61), 545–6. To avoid the need to make an untrue statement, the author concluded his note with the year 1939.

the note as “densely packed with vulgar and foul slogans”.³⁵ The affair was referred to Primate Stefan Wyszyński and, subsequently, to the Rector of the Catholic University of Lublin [KUL]. A critical statement from the Council of the University’s Theological Department and the Senate of KUL regarding the note’s author put an end to this entirely unexpected confusion around a lexicographic entry.

Considering the editorial output of Konopczyński and Lepszy, Emanuel Rostworowski wrote: “Is it a single dictionary, or perhaps we can talk about two dictionaries, in a sense – the one by Konopczyński and the other, by Lepszy?” Although the artwork was identical, and so were the rules of compiling the biographical notes, Konopczyński’s conceptions from the year 1935 did not coincide with Lepszy’s assumptions in 1957.³⁶ In Rostworowski’s opinion, emphasising the nobility-related tradition, the history of Catholic Church in Poland, the history of spiritual culture, the nineteenth-century struggles for the country’s independence, and the events related to the revival of Poland after 1918 (formed as the Second Republic) was essential to the Konopczyński project. Lepszy, who emphasised the earlier assumptions, lowered (to an extent) the threshold of accessibility for revolutionary activists, radical intelligentsia, the workers’ movement, and the peasant movement.³⁷ Professor Janusz Tazbir basically shared this opinion, viewing the *PSB* as two or more different dictionaries, based on the prevailing political conditions and chief editors’ personalities.³⁸

Lepszy’s numerous university-related duties, the core and minor ones distracted him from working on the Dictionary. However, even in the months of 1964, when he ran the organisation of the celebrations of the 600 years of the Jagiellonian University, he would “divert to Sławkowska St. every day to sit down behind his editor’s desk, heaped with letters, biographies, and proofread materials”.³⁹ He died a sudden death, in May 1964, leaving to his successors a well-organised team of

³⁵ See Mirosław Filipowicz, ‘Mieczysław Żywczyński – dylematy kapłana i historyka w PRL’, *Klio Polska* (Warszawa, 2006), 62–3.

³⁶ Rostworowski, ‘Kazimierz Lepszy i problem biografistyki narodowej’, 496.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Janusz Tazbir, ‘Szanse i zagrożenia Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego w przeszłości’, in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny. Sesja jubileuszowa w sześćdziesięciolecie powstania* (Warszawa, 1997), 11–12.

³⁹ Rostworowski, ‘Kazimierz Lepszy i problem biografistyki narodowej’, 498.

editors and associates, and well-functioning relationships with dozens of archives and libraries that supported the lexicographical work.

VI UNDER EMANUEL ROSTWOROWSKI, 1964–89

When Dr Emanuel Rostworowski, a former student of Konopczyński's (the former submitted his M.A. thesis to the latter, his tutor, in 1947), was offered to take a job with the IH PAN by Professor Tadeusz Manteuffel, in 1955, he had already been deeply immersed in studies on the eighteenth century. In 1961, then an associate professor, he was put in charge of the IH PAN's International Relations Section.⁴⁰ However, everything changed in 1964 with Professor Manteuffel's proposal to the young scholar to assume the prestigious position of Editor-in-Chief of the *PSB* and head of the Institute's Documentation Unit. In a letter to his friend Adam Galos of 16 June 1964, Rostworowski wrote, "The succession of Lepszy has fallen on me lately (the *PSB* and the Documentation Unit). The golden freedom I have been enjoying for so many years is over now".⁴¹

Like Konopczyński, a National Democracy-inclined man, used to meet with reluctance from Piłsudski-ite historians in the pre-war *Sanacja* period, now Rostworowski – himself of a landowning background – was completely at odds with the communist reality.

The new Editor-in-Chief devoted himself completely to the lexicographical job. He modified the work on the *PSB*, quitting the previous, entirely encyclopaedic, method of compiling biographical entries; moreover, he increased the requirements for accuracy of the biographies and the details put into them, encouraging the authors and the editors to do special research to effectively expand the content-related scope of the notes compiled and, oftentimes, to discover novel historical contexts.

He laboriously endeavoured to increase the throughput of editorial and publishing work, so that two fascicles per year could make four. This led to three fascicles per year produced in 1965–9, with sizes

⁴⁰ Wojciech Kriegseisen, 'Kilka wspomnień i uwag poświęconych Emanuelowi Mateuszowi Rostworowskiemu', in *Emanuel Mateusz Rostworowski (1923–1989). Materiały z posiedzenia naukowego w dniu 8 października 2014 roku* (Kraków, 2018), 27.

⁴¹ Emanuel Rostworowski's letter to Adam Galos, 16 June 1964, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Biblioteka, Dział Rękopisów: the Adam Galos legacy (copy at Henryk Wereszycki Archive in Cracow, owned by Elżbieta Orman).

corresponding with that of the volumes published before the war. It was only in 1970 that the regular cycle of a larger, four-fascicle volume made annually was resumed; since 1975, a volume would be composed of 120 sheets, thus almost doubling the thirties' size. The year 1975 moreover saw the PSB Editorial Committee turned into the PSB Academic Council, the Editorial Board [Kolegium Redakcyjne] being replaced by an Editorial Committee [Komitet Redakcyjny].

Rostworowski skilled prevarication between the Scylla of the censors' pressure and historians sticking to the communist party's policies, and the Charybdis of the Dictionary's ethos, avoiding any flattering and yielding to influence and emotion, enabled him to win a whole series of skirmishes with censors over understatements and things left unsaid in some of the biographical notes – primarily, those concerning Polish–Russian/Soviet relations, the Second World War and the post-war period.⁴² Henryk Wereszycki, who knew Rostworowski well from their club meetings, wrote of him in a 24 September 1970 letter to Piotr Wandycz: “he is a very serious historian and a man who, together with my wife, does everything possible to avoid falsifications in the Biographical Dictionary”.⁴³ He was irritated at the censors' interventions:

In the PSB, you no longer talk about the ‘war’ of 1920: ‘occurrences’ is your right word instead. We will get to the point where we will have the ‘occurrences’ of November, January [i.e. the insurrections of 1830–1 and 1863–4, respectively], just like those of May [i.e. the Coup of 1926], October [i.e. the 1956 upheaval], and December [i.e. the 1970 riots]: will more of them ever occur? He shall see who lives long enough.⁴⁴

Even today, the Editors could be proud of some of the biographies compiled under the communist regime). Those include entries for such people as President Gabriel Narutowicz and his killer Eligiusz Niewiadomski; Waclaw Krzeptowski, who formed the *Goralenvolk*

⁴² Henryk Markiewicz, ‘Dzień dzisiejszy i perspektywy Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego’, in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny. Sesja jubileuszowa w sześćdziesięciolecie powstania, Kraków 21 czerwca 1996* (Warszawa, 1997), 51.

⁴³ Henryk Wereszycki's letter to Piotr Wandycz, Cracow, 24 Sept. 1970 (copy at Henryk Wereszycki Archive in Cracow).

⁴⁴ Henryk Wereszycki's letter to Stefan Kieniewicz, 15 Dec. 1975, in *Stefan Kieniewicz – Henryk Wereszycki. Korespondencja z lat 1947–1990*, ed. by Elżbieta Orman (Kraków, 2013), 381.

during the war and was hanged in 1945 on the verdict of the Home Army; cavalry rittmeister Witold Pilecki, who organised the resistance movement in the Auschwitz concentration camp and was sentenced by a communist court in 1948 to capital punishment; and Franciszek Niepokólczycki, leader of the Freedom and Independence [Wolność i Niepodległość, WiN] armed anti-communist underground.

Unfortunately, Rostworowski did not manage to win the battle against the Office for the Control of the Press, Publications, and Public Performances over the publication of the biographies of Józef Kuraś (nom-de-guerre 'Ogień' [Fire]), Kazimierz Moczarski, and Bolesław Mołojec. In the subsequent decade, the censors continued to consistently delete April 1940 as the date of the killing of Polish army officers by the NKVD. Only in volume XIX, published in 1974, the biographies of the victims could mention that they perished in the USSR⁴⁵ or "died after 1939". In 1981, the bibliography section featured 'Lista... [The List...], ed. by A. Moszyński, London 1979' (the readers were aware that this abridged reference meant the 'Katyn List', i.e. the list of Polish officers, victims and missing POWs, from Kozielsk, Ostaszków, and Starobielsk camps, murdered by the Soviets in Katyn forest in spring 1940). How unbiased the PSB biographical notes were is attested by, *inter alia*, Janusz Tazbir's account on a meeting with a delegation of Romanian historians from before 1989: the guests "could not believe that a Dictionary [published under a communist rule] could include persons such as Ignacy Mościcki, Józef Piłsudski, Edward Rydz-Śmigły, and then they expressed their astonishment at the fact that the activities and views of these persons never met in the PSB with an 'ideological' resistance".⁴⁶ The PSB must undoubtedly have been the only such publication in the territory from the Elbe up to Vladivostok.

During political turbulences, supported by the IH PAN Directors, Rostworowski skilfully navigated the Dictionary project, successfully preventing the communist authorities' attempts, made in 1968 and then again in 1983, at closing down or suspending it. The project slowed down again in the tempestuous months of the 'Solidarity' movement and with the imposition of martial law on 13 December 1981. The will to contribute to real-life history turned out to

⁴⁵ See Janusz Tazbir, 'Moje cenzuralne doświadczenia', in Zbigniew Romek (ed.), *Cenzura w PRL. Relacje historyków* (Warszawa, 2000), 233.

⁴⁶ Jerzy Szczęśniak, 'Nie wystawia ani znieślawia...', *Kraków*, vii–viii (2005), 94.

be stronger for many an author than the tedious labour of describing history into not-quite-spectacular biographical notes. Two volumes (XXVII and XXVIII) were published between 1982 and 1985, containing entries from 'Jan Pniowski' to 'Mikołaj Przerębski'. The Potocki family is featured among them, with the most extensive note on Szczęsny Potocki, Marshal of the Targowica Confederation,⁴⁷ penned by the Editor-in-Chief. The latter explained his 'trespass' by the fact that probably nobody else would evermore take pains to compile a biography of this tough-to-tackle figure.

Rostworowski was active till the last moments of his life, polishing the biographies of his forebears of the Rostworowski family, while in his hospital bed. He died in October 1989, leaving twenty-two volumes (XI to XXXII, without one fascicle) covering entries from 'Jarosław' to 'Ignacy Różycki'.

In the opinion of Professor Jerzy Michalski, under Rostworowski's management, the Dictionary was brought up to an extremely high scientific level and excelled amongst the nationwide dictionaries that came out in the interwar period (in Sweden, France, the United States, and Denmark), on an international scale.⁴⁸ Rostworowski himself was positive about it; he pointed to highly detailed information (compared to the peers) and considerable resources used by PSB authors.⁴⁹ However, the extending length of the entries was a weak point of the authors' erudite meticulousness. With his twenty years as Editor-in-Chief, Rostworowski affirmed that: "As the editor of *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, I have read, with a pencil in my hand, a dozen thousand biographies of Poles who were active over the thousand years of our history. Ever since, my acquaintance with the eighteenth century became, as it were, an island on the river of the national history perceived through the glimmer of the fates and achievements of thousands of people. As an expert historian, I did not leave my island; in parallel, I found the river of generations flowing though the editor's desk fascinating".⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, xxviii (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków, 1984–5), 183–202.

⁴⁸ Jerzy Michalski, 'Emanuel Mateusz Rostworowski (1923–1989)', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 45 (1989), 5.

⁴⁹ Rostworowski, 'Czemu służy Polski Słownik Biograficzny'.

⁵⁰ Emanuel Rostworowski, *Popioły i korzenie. Szkice historyczne i rodzinne* (Kraków, 1985), 5.

Rostworowski was supported in his lexicographical work by another historian of landowner background, Stefan Kieniewicz (born in Dereszewicze, today in Belarus). Having received a new fascicle, this enthusiast and lover of the *PSB*, would “put aside all the other reading matter and read it from cover to cover”.⁵¹ From 1975 until he died in 1992, Kieniewicz chaired the Academic Council of *PSB*. In his opinion, every Polish historian was indebted to the Dictionary – a debt repayable only through joining the collective effort and making one’s own contribution in the form of articles, compiled as conscientiously as possible.⁵² Facing objections of excessive punctiliousness, he opposed them by arguing that “someone, someday, has to establish the fundamental facts, and let others weave their variations on this theme”.⁵³

Having authored as many as 205 biographical entries and several hundred reviews in the *PSB*, he shared a sharp observation, as part of a discussion on the notion of Polishness: “penetratingly analysing each single biography of our great and merited ones, we can find, with embarrassment, how much each of them has suffered in his or her life from their compatriots...”.⁵⁴ It was already in the eighties that he observed a fading sense of the mission of writing entries for the Dictionary; in a 1988 press interview, he bitterly stated that “the time when the Dictionary was supported out of an ideological motivation is over now. It is collar-work. Several months have to be spent, sometimes, to write a few pages to be published in several years’ time”.⁵⁵ Kieniewicz has left a marked footprint on the Dictionary’s history, along with an extraordinary testament. In the spring of 1992, when he was heavily ill, he called his former students to meet him at the hospital to bid farewell to them. “Propped up by pillows into a sitting position, straight, as he always was, and asked every one of us, one by one, what we were going to deal with; and then he requested us

⁵¹ Stefan Kieniewicz, ‘Zeszyt 47 Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxii, 21 (1965), 428.

⁵² *Id.*, ‘O Polskim Słowniku Biograficznym’, *Rocznik Biblioteki Narodowej*, 1 (1965), 427.

⁵³ S. Kieniewicz’s contribution to a discussion on biography writing, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxi, 3 (1964), 728.

⁵⁴ Stefan Kieniewicz, ‘Polskość codzienna i odświętna, ankieta: Wokół pojęcia polskości’, *Znak*, 11/12 (1987), 166.

⁵⁵ ‘Kilka stron za kilka lat. Z profesorem Stefanem Kieniewiczem rozmawia Jerzy Stankiewicz’, *Tygodnik Polski*, 22 (1988), 1, 10–11.

not to ever forget about *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, approaching it as a social obligation. He said that he had left some biographical notes in advance; that it devours time and is disproportionate compared to the royalties received – but is our obligation as historians. For me, it was the first such farewell, in a nineteenth-century spirit, the one I have remembered throughout my lifetime”: thus Wiktoria Śliwowska, his student and author of many *PSB* entries, recollected years afterwards.⁵⁶ After Stefan Kieniewicz’s death, the Academic Council was chaired by Aleksander Gieysztor.

VII

UNDER HENRYK MARKIEWICZ, 1989–2002

Emanuel Rostworowski was succeeded by Henryk Markiewicz, a long years’ member of the Editorial Committee, outstanding scholar, polymath, bibliophile, and literary history professor at the Jagiellonian University. Contrary to his predecessors, he never held back his left-oriented views.

After 1990, he did not have to grapple with censorship. One of his first decisions was to prepare a special errata insert in volume 33 (1991)⁵⁷ with the correct death dates of Polish officers murdered by the Soviets in Katyn in April 1940. In 1993 (vol. 34 inclusive), the *PSB* ceased to be published by the Ossoliński National Institute. The Dictionary became the IH PAN’s own publication since that time. With the advent of predatory capitalism, uninterested in Polish humanities, the threat loomed once again that the *PSB* project might be suspended. The Foundation for Polish Science [FNP] came to help in 1994⁵⁸ and covered the expenditure on authors’ and reviewers’ royalties, the proofreading and the cost of printing. With Henryk Markiewicz

⁵⁶ Elżbieta Orman, ‘Dyskrekcje i niedyskrekcje, czyli o Polskim Słowniku Biograficznym w korespondencji Henryka Wereszyckiego i Stefana Kieniewicza’, in *Spółczesność, kultura, inteligencja. Studia historyczne ofiarowane Irenie Homoli-Skąpskiej* (Kraków–Warszawa, 2009), 471–2.

⁵⁷ Henryk Markiewicz, ‘Blaski i cienie Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego’, in Leszek Kuberski (ed.), *Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji naukowej zorganizowanej przez Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu Opolskiego w dniach 23–25 września 1997 r.* (Opole, 1998), 9.

⁵⁸ Tazbir, ‘Szanse i zagrożenia Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego w przeszłości’, 14–15.

in office as Editor-in-Chief, the role of the PAU in the creation of the *PSB* was reminded. On 7 April 1999, it was agreed between the chairmen of the PAN and PAU that the Dictionary would be a shared publication of the two institutions, implemented by the IH PAN.⁵⁹

Immediately after he took the position, Henryk Markiewicz faced a complete breakdown in the rhythm of the Dictionary's publication, which markedly occurred in 1989–90. This very much resulted from the political events – the fall of communism and the systemic transition. Markiewicz diligently sought to restore regularity in the publishing cycle so that the last letter in the alphabet could be reached as soon as practicable. He presumed that the year 2015 was plausible in this respect, with a total of fifty volumes completed by then. Importantly, he resolved to close the list of entries at those who died in the year 2000 at the latest, remarking that it was necessary to start working on the national necrology of those who would die afterwards; the respective volumes would be published every five or ten years.⁶⁰ A third series, which Markiewicz considered no less indispensable, would consist of supplements to the core part of the Dictionary. Financial difficulties posed an obstacle not to be overcome for these initiatives; and it has been so till this day. Between 1989 and 2002, thousands of new biographical entries – from 'Ignacy Różycki' to 'Stanisław August [Stanislaus Augustus] Poniatowski' cropped up on his editorial desk and were finally included in nine volumes (XXXIII to XLI). He had one more great reason to be proud as the Dictionary's circulation unprecedentedly peaked, in 1994–6, at 4,000 (later on reduced to 3,000).

Asked in an interview to reveal some secrets of the behind-the-scenes of the editorial team's efforts, Markiewicz said that the editor's work was oftentimes a 'murder' as some entries were written not in line with the instructions, with gaps and errors; with supplemented items, numerous corrections and retouches, such notes were often dissimilar to their original versions. He admitted that one could indeed be cross with the calendar-style presentation of facts; yet, the *PSB* biography was often the only opportunity for such facts to be published.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Romanowski, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 16.

⁶⁰ Markiewicz, 'Blaski i cienie Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego', 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 10. See also *id.*, 'Dzień dzisiejszy i perspektywy Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego', 52.

To give an example, it can nowhere else be read what Henryk Sienkiewicz actually received his Nobel Prize for: apparently, not for his novel *Quo vadis*, as is commonly believed, but for his “merits as an epic author”. Again, no monograph had previously correctly presented his political activity during the Revolution of 1905; nowhere else would one read that Sienkiewicz received an honorary doctorate at the University of Lviv in 1912.⁶²

According to Markiewicz, a considerable portion of Polish historiographic works show the past in problem-oriented, social, political, cultural, economic and other such cross-sections. If not for the *PSB*, an enormous gap in historical knowledge would have appeared, since nobody would have taken pains to reconstruct the life stories of second- or third-rank individuals.⁶³ His work on the Dictionary gave him pleasure and enormous satisfaction. “This is the most responsible and reputable function I have ever exercised”, he noted; “I consider the fact that I have been entrusted with such confidence the greatest success in my life as a scholar. While my appointment could not be welcomed by everybody, I should think it would have never taken place without a community acceptance, so to put it”.⁶⁴ In his late seventies, Henryk Markiewicz requested that he be released from his post as Editor-in-Chief; in 2003, he conferred the responsibility to Professor Andrzej Romanowski, another historian of literature.

VIII

UNDER ANDRZEJ ROMANOWSKI, 2003 – ONWARDS

The new editor-in-chief had to face other challenges than his predecessors – primarily, the even-more-gnawing lack of financial stability. In 2007, the FNP cut two-thirds of the *PSB* subsidy. The crisis was alleviated in 2008–11 as the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage provided the funding. Once the National Programme for the Development of Humanities was launched in 2011–16, the *PSB* was funded from a grant. In the summer of 2017, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education granted a one-off subsidy. The subsequent strivings

⁶² Markiewicz, ‘Błaski i cienie Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego’, 12.

⁶³ Marian Nowy, ‘Konterfekt Polaków’, *Dziennik Polski*, 302 (Kraków, 28 Dec. 1999).

⁶⁴ Henryk Markiewicz, *Mój życiorys polonistyczny z historią w tle* [an interview with the author, conducted by Barbara N. Łopieńska] (Kraków, 2011), 152.

for subventions regrettably misfired.⁶⁵ All this results in the edition and publishing of the main hardcopy series being extended in time and, moreover, work is prevented on the launch of Series II, consisting of supplements to Series I (the Dictionary is missing the entries on, for instance, General Władysław Anders, or novelist Maria Dąbrowska, as they were still alive when fascicles with entries commencing with 'A' and 'D', respectively, came out). The same is true for Series III, which is to feature outstanding Poles who died after 2000 (e.g., Pope John Paul II, poets Wisława Szymborska and Czesław Miłosz, and so on).

Since its beginning, the *PSB* has been an elitist undertaking, rather than 'hitting thatched houses', it was meant to reach the major scientific libraries in Poland and abroad. All the same, in the first two decades of the present century, the steadily decreasing circulation of the Dictionary was poignant: down to 2,200 copies in 2004, 1,700 in 2007,⁶⁶ and 1,200 copies as of 2019. With its lower and lower number of copies, the *PSB* is turning into a rarity these days.

The 'old guard' of the most experienced authors, who shared a sense of mission and an ethos of scholarly work, are gone now. Young historians are reluctant to embark on the job of compiling entries for the Dictionary, as such effort is not gratified in academic terms; the fees, though fair enough, cannot compensate for the strenuous collection of materials for what is usually a rather short article.

The Web edition has become a burning requirement of today's communication, including scientific and scholarly communication. It seemed, at some point, that a mass-media enterprise as big as the Polish Television [TVP] would bear the burden of the Dictionary project. On 8 June 2005, the project called iPSB was presented at TVP's office, attended by members of the *PSB* editorial team and of the managements of IH PAN, Polskie Radio S.A., and TVP S.A. (the latter two being Polish public radio and TV broadcasters). Ten days later, on 18 May 2005, an agreement on the launch of the Dictionary's Web edition was signed, including the publication of biographical notes from the hardcopy version in the Web version (iPSB), until mid-2009.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Renata Radłowska, 'Arcydzieło w zagrożeniu', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Tygodnik Kraków (25 Oct. 2019), 4.

⁶⁶ Romanowski, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 18.

⁶⁷ DZID, 'Wrzuca zbiory w sieć. Rusza projekt iPSB', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Kraków (9 June 2005), 3. See also Andrzej Romanowski, 'Nasz krakowski PSB', *Kraków*, xliii, 5 (2008), 39.

Some enthusiastic press articles were published.⁶⁸ In the opinion of Wiesław Władyka, the iPSB has shown that historical science can be pursued in a modern manner whilst also satisfying the needs of those who do not tend to visit libraries.⁶⁹ Cooperation with TVP was always floundering and ended in a fiasco. An upgrade of the method of rendering the *PSB* available on the Web became imperative. On 16 December 2014, another presentation of iPSB took place in the Warsaw office of the Society of Authors ZAiKS in Warsaw, this time under the honorary patronage of President Bronisław Komorowski. The National Audiovisual Institute (NInA; since 2017, FINA) undertook to post the *PSB* entries on the Web. Between then and 2020, more than 8,500 biographies have been published at the website: ipsb.nina.gov.pl.

IX INFORMATION INTO INSPIRATION

In the time when historical-and-sociological research on mentality, daily life, micro-history, or post-colonialism are at their heyday, in parallel with new research orientations appearing (such as the ‘herstory’ concept), the *PSB* has been consistently sticking to its plan established eighty-five years ago. Its reliable records-based biographical articles contribute to the formation and enhancement of historical culture. The Dictionary is an indispensable aid in research work – all the more because most genealogical/heraldic publications break in the middle of the alphabet, whereas the *PSB* partly fills in the gap and paves the routes for genealogists; recently – to give an example – with its biographies of the families Tarnowski and Tetmajer.

Biographies sought in the Dictionary are most often those of second- or third-rank individuals appearing in political, economic, social, and cultural events. Frequently, some wholly forgotten persons regain their deserved place – as is the case, for example, with the Warsaw banker family Tepper-Fergusson (in a forthcoming fascicle). Although their role in historical events was usually far from crucial, their vicissitudes

⁶⁸ Tomasz Potkaj, ‘Słownik w cyberprzestrzeni’, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 25 (19 June 2005), 5. As we can read in this article, “For the project’s authors, this is an idea for promotion of the history of Poland at home and abroad. If collection of the funds proves successful, the entries will be translated into other languages”. Also, see ‘Posłuchaj Piłsudskiego’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 131 (2005).

⁶⁹ Wiesław Władyka, ‘Sieć na znakomitości’, *Polityka*, 35 (2005), 75–6.

quite tellingly recall and render the climate of the past, the sentiments and the changes occurring in the society.⁷⁰ It can be hoped that the availability of all the biographical notes of the hardcopy Dictionary version in the internet will open new perspectives for quantitative as well as qualitative research. (*PSB* has not ‘conquered’ the Web yet; when searching for ‘*PSB*’, the first hit is ‘Polskie Składy Budowlane’ [Polish Building Depots].)

The *PSB* is the only IH PAN publication that can be found in any important scientific library worldwide. Poet Adam Zagajewski came across a row of *PSB* volumes at the Houston University Library, and became immersed in reading for long hours.⁷¹ True, one can relish in biographies written like short historical essays. Some readers and enthusiasts consider the Dictionary the most exciting Polish novel in episodes. Indeed, a ‘self-portrait of the Polish people’, far from stereotypical, emerges before the reader. Sometimes, they can find a family member there: one such example is Marek Minakowski, who started his genealogical adventure with the Radzicki family portrayed in the *PSB*.⁷² The entries offer summaries, as it were, of unwritten biographical books,⁷³ scripts of never-made movies, the inspiration for articles or monographs – for instance, a history of seventeenth- to twentieth-century Poland, seen through the prism of one family.

Not only are *PSB* biographical notes a special sort of heuristic exercise but, for a truly devoted historian, work on them is an absorbing

⁷⁰ Irena Homola and Henryk Markiewicz, ‘Biografistyka w twórczości naukowej Stefana Kieniewiczza’, in Irena Homola-Skąpska, *Z dziejów Krakowa, Galicji i Śląska Cieszyńskiego. Wybór pism historycznych*, selected, edited and with an introduction by Grzegorz Nieć (Kraków–Warszawa, 2007), 554.

⁷¹ Cf. his poem *Polski Słownik Biograficzny w bibliotece w Houston*; see Adam Zagajewski, *Pragnienie* (Kraków, 1999), 75. The poem has been translated into English by Clare Cavanagh as ‘The Polish Biographical Dictionary in a Library in Houston’.

⁷² ‘Milion przodków w dwudziestym pokoleniu. Marek Jerzy Minakowski, genealog, autor książki *Elita Rzeczypospolitej*’ (interviewer: Robert Mazurek), *Rzeczpospolita* (8–9 Oct. 2011).

⁷³ Recently, such use of the *PSB* was commented on by the journalist and author Małgorzata Szejnert: “If we take a look into the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, we will be surprised to see how many characters worthy of an in-depth book-format biography are featured there. Many of them could become the subject for a reporter to tackle, because this Dictionary has already screened things for us. The data have been handed to [such future] authors on a plate”; see ‘Czego szukamy w biografach’, Małgorzata Szejnert talks to Marta Oziomek, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Kultura (6 March 2020), 18.

and exciting detective adventure. It happens every so often that a biographer, almost like Sherlock Holmes, enters – together with the persons he or she describes – into areas of history that have been neglected, under-described, or previously put in a different light. As for my own research, let me mention the case of Marian Swolkień,⁷⁴ who built and ran the counterintelligence services in interwar Poland: I incidentally discovered this figure while compiling the note on his father Bolesław Swolkień, an 1863 insurgent. History filtered through the biographies published in the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* inspires, in the attentive reader, reflection much broader than just biography-centred.

More episodes of the fascinating unfinished history of Poland, written in a biographical manner, are forthcoming!

trans. Tristan Korecki

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⁷⁴ Elżbieta Orman, 'Swolkień Marian (1883–1971)', *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, xli (Kraków–Warszawa, 2009–10), 163–4.

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