

SERVING THE HOMELAND: THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROVINCE OF POSEN

ELISABETH ANNA KRÜGER

Abstract

The aim of this article is to briefly introduce not only the history of the Historical Society of the Province of Posen (Provincija Poznańska; Historische Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen), and to show its historical context, but also to clarify the question whether its foundation was not only for purely historical interest in the past of Greater Poland, but also whether the anti-Slavic feeling at that time formed the intention to participate in current events. It looks at the extent to which this organisation was another factor that contributed to the Germanisation of the country. The Greater Poland area is particularly appropriate for the study, since German and Polish residents here were anchored in the past, the region has roots and decided independently to pursue a scholarly review of its history. At first, however, the rival parties were dominated by Poles: in 1857, a Polish organisation was founded called the Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk Poznańskiego (Poznań Society of Friends of Science, TPNP), along with a small museum. But the German residents in Greater Poland became more and more interested in archaeological discoveries in the province of Posen, too. The opening of a permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Society of Friends of Science led German circles to establish a similar institution, whose main founders were Rodgero Prümers and Adolf Warschauer, employees of the Poznań State Archives. On 5 March 1885, the Historische Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen came into existence. Among their most important tasks was the investigation of German history in the province, studying culture and history, publishing scholarly papers, and also the preservation of monuments and the collection of antiquities. The ultimate goal was a museum of their own in the province of Posen. In 1894, the Provinzialmuseum opened. The Provincial Museum of Historische Gesellschaft formed the basis for the later Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, and for today's Archaeological Museum in Poznań, and is therefore irrevocably linked to the professionalisation and institutionalisation of German and Polish archaeology. It would be unthinkable to offer an archaeological scene in Poznań without the Historische Gesellschaft, as long as Poland was divided and occupied by the Germans. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance, from a historical research perspective, that the history, political activity and collection are processed and presented, in order not to lose this chapter of German history of research in the oblivion of contemporary Poland.

Key words: nationalism in archaeology, political archaeology, Greater Poland, Historische Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk Poznańskiego, collectors, museums.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/ab.v1i0.1142>

During the period of Romanticism, the emerging interest in the pagan past of their own people, the patriotism which it was hoped would be rediscovered in the glory of old times, and the desire for a homogenous national state, offered the necessary conditions for the formation of historical societies. There was a desire to explore the roots of their own people, probably because the reality was very different, and Europe looked rather like an ethnic patchwork at the time. The examination of history was initially a central point in philology, because language was seen, as has already been mentioned, as the most important feature of the 'individuality of the people' (Steinacher 2002, p.186). Although the Enlightenment had already recognised the archaeological find as historical evidence, the emphasised intellect and human universality did not allow people to see in these artefacts nostalgic witnesses of past glory, those mystic roots of their own people which needed to be examined. And since man owed his identity to his roots, which distinguished him from other people,

the nature and value lay in the uniqueness of individual communities and in their distinctions. Thus, the epoch of Romanticism was perfect for the burgeoning nationalism. There was a need to explore one's past, the origin of the country and its people. This need to explore the cultural identity dominated the thinking of those days. Thus, we have the notion of 'historic thinking' championed by Hegel, who saw 'the substantial purpose of a people' in 'being a state and to sustain yourself as such to get yourself' (Hegel cit. in Weber-Fas 2003 p.255). Therefore, the political association consisted of the connection by one's own free will of people who were emotionally connected by their roots, and nations should grow from this national spirit. Such a community was not only a purely cultural unit, but also a biological one. Because Poland had been divided into three parts since 1795, it was, according to Hegel, deprived of its history, and the people had lost their roots in the tradition of evolutionary and later Darwinian ideas that only the fittest could survive. Only

Herder could offer a glimmer of hope. Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'noble savage', he saw in the Slavs the new designers of Europe who had never aimed at the 'supremacy of the world', and hence it was time, after the Greeks, Romans and Germans, to put the future in the hands of the Slavs (Herder cit. in Brather 2001 p.9ff.).

In their search for their national identity, the Poles were confronted with the question whether one could even be a nation if the state did not exist any more. The common language served as a central feature of a people, especially after the discovery of the relationship between Indo-European languages. The idea of a national spirit fostered a feeling of solidarity that found fertile ground not only in Poland: national movements blossomed in many parts of Europe. Thus, the identification of earlier tribes with modern nations began even before archaeology had been institutionalised. In the former Polish lands, the private collections of rich noblemen served as starting points for archaeological exhibitions: thanks to the foundation of the first national museums, such as Pest (1807) and Prague (1823), the collections were made available to a wide audience. Because of the political circumstances in Europe, and the growing interest in archaeology, the search for an 'Urheimat' consequently grew more and more important on both sides. Polish excavations which disclosed early Medieval finds in Prussian territory followed, and the first historical societies were founded. During this time, a conflict arose in Central Europe that was to characterise a long argument in the history of European archaeology. Patriotic archaeology (*Altertumskunde*, non-professional archaeology), which was always looking for ancient roots, was now faced with the problem of ethnic identification, because every nation wanted to ascribe the salient artefacts to their own people; it was labelled, depending on the viewer, as Slavic or Germanic. In the 19th century, Greater Poland was characterised by clashes between Polish and German historical societies, which is the reason why it is the ideal region for the planned investigations. The result of this imbalance was that the Germans did not feel at home, and although they were the occupiers, they were exposed to permanent hostility. By using history and archaeological objects, they hoped to both strengthen their national identity, and at the same time to influence foreign politics. It offered the Poles especially an opportunity to deal with both their culture and their history, which were theirs despite the long division. Historical organisations at this time, as well as later historians and archaeologists, worked on the national memory of their peoples, including their own museums and monuments, even though this group of collectors was not the only important one.

The legacy of the historical and archaeological societies which developed into professional heritage conservation from the patriotic *Altertumskunde* is still important, because it marks the museum landscape of Central Europe even today. Among them is the Historische Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen (Historical Society of the Province of Posen, abbreviated to HG), which influenced mainly the institutionalisation of German heritage conservation and museum life in Greater Poland in the late 19th century. Despite the commendable work of the HG, the material is unprocessed in the magazines and archives of Posen, while this group of collectors was not only important for the formation of the first regional museums, but also a thoroughly political issue that actively influenced the Zeitgeist.

At this time, Greater Poland was connected as a province to Prussia, which meant that rules and regulations which were drawn up in Berlin applied in Poznań, too. At first, however, the rival parties were dominated by Poles: in 1857 a Polish organisation was founded called Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk Poznańskiego (Poznań Society of Friends of Science, TPNP), followed by a small museum. The TPNP was in close contact with the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory and Early History, which operated in Greater Poland from 1869 onwards. Their call for mapping the province of Posen was supported by the scholar W. Schwartz. Despite pressure from the HG, he left his collection to the Polish TPNP, even though his son Franz was active in the HG. Prussian sovereignty forbade local intellectuals to join the TPNP. Bismarck's Germanisation plans, and the everyday living conditions in the province of Posen, motivated German residents in Greater Poland to look for archaeological discoveries in the new homeland. Early German historical organisations began to develop. The first one was the German Science Association for the Province of Posen, which began to gather archaeological antiquities. It was followed by the Bromberg Historical Society, which was to thrive later in the HG. The initial tentative cooperation between German and Polish circles ended when a permanent exhibition opened at the Museum of the TPN, which looked mainly to a Polish audience. A short time later, historically interested Germans formed a similar institution, whose main founders were Bernhard Endrulat, and after his death Rodgero Prümers and Franz Schwartz, employees of the Posen State Archive. On 5 March 1885, the Historische Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen came into existence. One of their most important tasks was the exploration of German history in the province, studies on culture and history, and publishing scientific papers, as well as the preservation of monuments and the collection of

antiquities. The ultimate goal was a museum of their own in the province of Posen. The German minority had been interested in such a museum since the 1840s, but the political authorities in Berlin had blocked these ideas. Posen was just an important strategic military town to them, with a castle, and not a cultural centre. Another problem of the HG was to find new members with money and influence. It is therefore characteristic that an anonymous Prussian nobleman refused to join the HG, because '... the younger German history is known, the older one is of a Polish nature and therefore uninteresting ...' (Endrulat 1885, p.7). However, official funds from Berlin facilitated the creation of an HG library and the acquisition of antiquities, although it must be said that the HG did not hesitate to use mafia-like methods. They tried to enforce the handing over of various antiquities that were in private collections, even with the help of the police, in order to create an exhibition of their own. The awaited founding of the museum finally took place in 1894. The Historical Society transferred to the new building around 3,000 objects, including 2,000 archaeological antiquities. Franz Schwartz, the son of the mentioned Wilhelm Schwartz, became the director. The Provincial Museum of the HG formed the basis for the later Kaiser Friedrich Museum, where the famous Erich Blume worked until his death in 1912.

The goal of my work is not only to present the history of the Historical Society of the Province of Posen and to examine its historical context, but also to give prime consideration to whether it was not only founded due to a purely historical interest in Greater Poland's past, but also whether the anti-Slavic feeling of those times created a desire to participate in current events.

In addition, I want to clarify the extent to which the organisation was yet another factor that contributed to the Germanisation of the country. The history of the HG and its members is documented, and we will take a closer look at the Polish organisation the TPN of that period, because their foundations are closely related, and they originated from rivalry between each other. The TPNP will therefore also undergo extensive investigation, because it was especially important for the development of subsequent national ideas on both sides. The collection of the HG will occupy an important place in the planned dissertation, and will support the historical research by showing what was collected, in order to make certain statements, especially concerning the former colonisation of the land, and the legitimacy of its own people in Greater Poland.

Other sources, in addition to the *Zeitschrift der Historischen Gesellschaft*, will be a copy of the inventory list and the catalogue, as well as the correspondence between members of both organisations, which are currently in the Poznań Museum Archives. Working through these is important in order to gain an insight into the work of the institution, but also to learn more about their members, who were often important public figures. Membership lists and job titles can be found regularly in the magazine. Of great interest are the political activities and views of German and Jewish HG members, in terms of their position in relation to Polish collectors in Poznan. Their cooperation and rivalry will be examined in more detail by means of personal notes and letters. This material is in the archives of the Poznań Museum and the local State Archive. The local files from museum archives in Poznań and Berlin will be used to document the findings. The author will examine her source material to establish whether the German archaeology of this time paved the way for a nationalistic archaeology, in which history played a significant role as a weapon.

References

Literature

- BRATHER, S., 2004. *Ethnische Interpretationen in der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie. Geschichte, Grundlagen und Alternativen. In: Reallexikon Der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 42. Berlin, New York .
- ENDRULAT, B., 1885. Ueber die Aufgaben der Historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen. B. ENDRULAT (hrsg.). *Zeitschrift der Historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen*, (1), 5-13.
- KACZMAREK, J., 2007. Archaeology in the dispute over the national character of Great Poland (Wielkopolska) region in the 19th and early 20th century. *Archaeologia Polona*, vol. 42:2004, 129-154.
- WEBER-FAS, R., 2003. *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. Tübingen.

Received: 3 February 2015; Revised 8 April 2015;
 Accepted: 5 June 2015.

Elisabeth Anna Krüger
 Köpenicker Landstr. 118
 12437 Berlin, Germany
 E-mail: elisabethannakrueger@gmx.de

„TARNAUJANTIEJI TĖVYNEI“:
POSEN PROVINCIJOS
ISTORIJOS DRAUGIJA

ELISABETH ANNA KRÜGER

Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tikslas – ne tik trumpai pristatyti *Posen* provincijos (Poznanės provincija) Istorijos draugijos (*Historische Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen*) istoriją ir parodyti to meto istorinį kontekstą, bet ir paaiškinti kitas problemas: ar šios draugijos pagrindinis interesas buvo išimtinai Didžiosios Lenkijos istorinė praeitis, ar vis dėlto to meto antislaviškos emocijos buvo paskata dalyvauti šioje istorinėje draugijoje.

1857 m. lenkai įkūrė muziejų ir draugiją, pavadintą Poznanės mokslo bičiulių draugija (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk Poznańskiego*). Poznanės mokslo bičiulių draugija įkurtame muziejuje įrengė nuolatinę ekspoziciją. Didžiosios Lenkijos gyventojai vokiečiai taip pat vis labiau domėjosi archeologiniais tyrimais Poznanės provincijoje. Matyt, tai paskatino vokiečius 1885 m. įkurti panašią mokslo draugiją (*Historische Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen*), kurios pagrindiniai steigėjai buvo Poznanės valstybinio archyvo darbuotojai Rodgero Prümersas ir A. Warschaueris. Tarp šios draugijos uždavinių buvo provincijos vokiečių istorija, kultūriniai ir istoriniai tyrimai, mokslinių straipsnių publikavimas ir paminklų apsauga bei senienų rinkimas. Didžiausias šios draugijos tikslas buvo Poznanės provincijos muziejaus įkūrimas. Šios draugijos muziejus buvo įkurtas 1894 m., jo rinkiniai tapo vėlesnio Kaizerio Friedricho muziejaus pagrindu, pastarojo muziejaus rinkiniai šiandien saugomi Poznanės muziejuje. Neabejotinai šių draugijų ir muziejų veikla prisidėjo prie Vokietijos ir Lenkijos archeologijos profesionalėjimo. Todėl iš istorinių tyrimų perspektyvos labai svarbu, kad istorija, politinis aktyvumas ir muziejų rinkiniai yra tyrinėjami ir pristatomi, siekiant neprarasti vokiškos krašto istorijos tyrimų dalies šiuolaikinės Lenkijos atminties kontekste.

Vertė Audronė Bliujienė



ARCHIVAL
MATERIALS
IN THE
CONTEXTS OF
CONTEMPORARY
ARCHAEOLOGY