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EGO-DOCUMENTS – SOME REMARKS ABOUT POLISH AND EUROPEAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

The term “ego-documents” was defined in 1958 by the Dutch historian Jacob Presser. He argued that different historical sources in which the author is also the subject of the story cannot be classified as autobiographical writings, and he called these sources, which include information about interests, fears, joy and worries, ego-documents¹. In German historiography the term “Selbstzeugnis” (see e.g. Winfried Schulze)² is very common and can be treated as synonymous with “ego-document”. These autobiographical writings have recently become popular among European researchers, connected as they are with a new, anthropological orientation in history. Consequently it is to be hoped that

¹ J. Presser, *Memoires als geschiedbron*, in: *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie*, 8 (1958). New edition: *Uit het werk van J. Presser*, (1969), p. 277–282.

² Compare W. Schulze, *Ego-dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte?*, in: *Von Aufbruch und Utopie. Perspektiven einer neuen Gesellschaftsgeschichte des Mittelalters*, ed. B. Lundt, H. Reinmoller, (1992), p. 417–450.

results attained by historians will be widely used by anthropologists, historians and theorists of literature and psychologists.

Microhistorical research, concentrating on understanding human activity, an individual perspective and evaluation of the world in early modern times, was impossible as long as macro-historical methods of research were used. Focusing on the individualized issues will enable historians to answer the questions posed by historical anthropology.

Thanks to the publications by Ph. Lejeune³, J. Amelang⁴, J.P. Bardet, F.J. Ruggiu⁵, R. Houlbrooke⁶, W. Schulze, R. Mordenti⁷, K. von Greyerz⁸, research on ego-documents was initiated and research teams were appointed in Italy (R. Mordenti), France (F.J. Ruggiu, Sylvie Mouysset⁹), Switzerland (K. von Greyerz), Germany¹⁰ and Austria (W. Tersch¹¹).

³ Ph. Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, (1975).

⁴ J. Amelang, *The flight of Icarus. Artisan autobiography in early modern Europe*, (1998).

⁵ *Au plus près du secret des coeurs? Nouvelles lectures historiques des écrits du for privé en Europe du XVI au XVIII siècle*, ed. J.P. Bardet i F.J. Ruggiu, (2005); *Les écrits du for privé. Objet materiel, objet edité*, ed. M. Cassan, J.P. Bardet, F.J. Ruggiu, (2007).

⁶ R. Houlbrook, *The English family 1450–1700*, (1984).

⁷ R. Mordenti, *I libri di famiglia in Italia. Geografia e storia*, (2001).

⁸ K. Greyerz, *Deutschschweizerische Selbstzeugnisse (1500–1800) als Quellen der Mentalitätsgeschichte. Bericht über ein Forschungsprojekt*, in: *Das dargestellte Ich. Studien zu Selbstzeugnissen des späteren Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. K. Arnold, S. Schmolinsky, U.-M. Zahnd, (1999), p. 147–163.

⁹ S. Mouysset, *Papier de famille. Introduction à l'étude des livres de raison (France, XV–XIX siècle)*, (2007).

¹⁰ See: *Das dargestellte Ich*, passim.

¹¹ H. Tersch, *Österreichische Selbstzeugnisse des Spätmittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (1400–1650). Eine Darstellung in Einzelbeiträgen*, (1998).

The development of research has changed the concept of ‘ego-document’. This category now includes other sources. This can be represented by the following scheme:

1) Jacob Presser (1958)

Ego-document – “different historical sources in which the author is also a subject of the story” = not only autobiographies as a genre of literature

2) Followers

Ego-document – “sources where authors describe themselves or are fully described in the descriptive document”

New category of sources = not only first-person writings (probate inventories, testaments, testimonies of witnesses, statements or pledges by accused and sentenced persons during litigations, court cases, as well as notes made in the margins of books and private drawings, and private collections of different texts such as miscellanea and *silva rerum*).

3) New approach

Self-description or description = self-determination

Author = or ≠ narrator = or ≠ actor (a hero or a hidden hero).

It is necessary to highlight the fact, that in Poland the whole discussion concerned with ego-documents was almost non-existent until recently and private writings have been treated by historians as inferior to other sources, especially political ones, and by historians of literature as inferior sources from an artistic point of view in comparison to high literary achievements. Of course, there were some exceptions, like the research developed by K. Matwijowski, B. Rok and J. Wojtowicz but they were very rare¹².

¹² From the most interesting attempts we should mention e.g.: E. Kizik, *Kronika Henryka Donnera. XVIII-wieczne źródło do dziejów mennonitów żuławskich* [*The Henry Donner Chronicle as an 18th-century source of the Żuławy Mennonites history*], “Zeszyty Naukowe Wydziału Humanistycznego

THE POLISH PROJECT: “EGO-DOCUMENTS
IN THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH
(16th–18th CENTURIES)”

The Polish project presented here is going to be a part of a European web created by national teams from Italy, Great Britain, Switzerland, Germany, France and other countries. This work was encouraged by F.J. Ruggiu and his French team during meeting under the title *Les Ecrits du for privé*. Several years' continuous cooperation between national teams and the supervisors of projects gives a perfect opportunity to exchange experiences and results of their research, and what is even more important, to introduce Polish results into the European area in the future. The project derives from research in archives and libraries in Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine (the sources for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).

In accordance with the definition of “ego-documents”, sources such as the following will be carefully analysed: diaries, autobiographies, private and family correspondence, as well as notes made in margins and private drawings, and private collections of different texts such as manuscript books and *silva rerum*.

There are three planned stages of this project. The first one, using the wide definition of ego-document, will reveal the number and specificity of such sources, and will enable the building of a bio-bibliographical database.

The second stage involves building a database in which the user will find information about the author of the source, the place

Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego. Historia”, 15 (1985); *Rozprawy z dziejów XVIII wieku. Z dziejów komunikacji socjalnej epoki nowożytnej* [*Studies in the history of the 18th century. Social communication in the modern period*], ed. J. Wojtowicz, (1993); *Staropolski ogląd świata. Materiały z konferencji* [*Old Polish perception of the world. Conference materials*], ed. B. Rok, F. Wolański, (2004).

of its storage, its current state, and previous editions of the whole text or part of it. Fragments of the source will be also available in order to prove its autobiographical character. The database will be accessible via the portal *Historicus* managed by the Nicolaus Copernicus University. Thanks to its bilingual nature (Polish, English) it will be accessible and popular across Europe.

In the third stage of the project – articles connected with particular problems known in the European field of research into ego-documents, such as: social and cultural practice revealed in ego-documents; personal and group identity and identification; time, place and ways of functioning in ego-documents; memory and time perspective; human life stages reflected in first-person writings. Before these articles will be written and published, wide discussion will take place. The articles will certainly touch on issues crucial for other European research teams (proposed during the International Meeting in Bordeaux, 21–25 May 2008)¹³, and they will enable a wide analysis of mental changes taking place in Europe, perceived from the individual point of view. That is why these articles will be written in English and made accessible via the *Historicus* portal (and other European portals as well).

The meaning of the project can be summarised in two dimensions:

- 1) Its national value lies in a projected database, which will help to list precisely and evaluate sources connected with private writings. The articles will provide the beginning of the discussion which will be undertaken by historians of literature and mentality and by historians of culture in the widest sense.

¹³ European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop on *Ego-documents in European Context. First-person writings in Europe from the end of the Middle Ages to the beginning of the twentieth century*. This workshop was led by François Joseph Ruggiu and organized at the University of Bordeaux 3 – Michel Montaigne.

2) In the international context the project will permit the inclusion (thanks to the database) of Polish results into European and world research connected with private writings. In such a way it will help to find some answers to questions about the European social and cultural identity in the early modern period. Polish researchers will use the experience of western colleagues and at the same time will provide them with Polish results.

That is why this project constitutes a Polish contribution into European discussion over social and cultural identity in the early modern period, presented from the point of view of ego-documents.

EXAMPLES OF POLISH PRIVATE WRITINGS

Private writings from the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth are of course represented by genres which are typical of autobiographical literature. There are diaries, chronicles, memoirs, collections of letters, written by nobles or burghers, and writings belonging to the intellectual elite. These texts were and still are very well known and have been analyzed as examples of the so called Sarmatian culture, the texts which reflected the self-consciousness of their authors.

As an example of changes in the approach to research, we can provide an analysis of correspondence collections. Personal letters reflect not only the attitude toward political events. They testify to the internal dilemmas and thoughts of the individual. The great heroes of the world of politics and culture are just normal people who have to deal with common problems. By analyzing such ego-documents we get access to the inner world of these characters. A great example of the private speech that reveals the private thoughts and feelings of the hero is a letter of a Bishop of Kraków

Andrzej Stanisław Załuski to a Bishop of Smolensk Jerzy Mikołaj Hylzen¹⁴:

Ja inter tot et tantos nie mogę znaleźć człowieka, żebym miał adjutorium ad regendam Dioecesim, a sam cale już deficiis i po ostatniej chorobie pamięć straciłem i zmysły czuje w sobie cale osłabione, ciało ociężałe, że się sam z sobą nie poznaję, il faudra serieusement penser à ma retraite et à la vie toute tranquile pour avoir une intervalle entre la vie et la mort. Co in confidentia JW Panu zwierzam et extremis laboro oczy, że i przy okularach ciężko czytać i nogi, które mi dużo puchną, pierwsze ex continuo exercitio, drugie ex non exercitio i ze zbytnej nad stolikiem sedentaryi. [I can't find anywhere a person who could help me to govern the diocese. I am completely weak. After the last illness I have lost my memory, my senses are weak and my body is so heavy that I can't recognize myself. I have to think seriously about retirement and a peaceful life in order to manage the interval between life and death. I want to confess that my eyes hurt me, reading is hard even with glasses, and my legs swell. The first are getting hurt because of too much work and the other due to lack of work and because of continuous sitting at a desk].

There are also manuscripts kept in archives and libraries, which were neglected for a long time by traditional historiography, but which are useful for research into everyday life and private life history – probate inventories, testaments, sayings of witnesses, statements or pledges of participants during litigations (legal procedures in court).

¹⁴ Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, Geheimes Kabinett Polen, Abschriften vermischter aufgefangener Correspondenz, loc. 3581, p. 39: the letter of A.S. Załuski to J.M. Hylzen, 31 March [1754?].

One of this private literature genre is a collection of varied texts – *silva rerum* (Latin: forest of things). They contained political texts (excerpts of Sejm and sejmik diaries, correspondence, speeches), literary texts (verses, poetry, memoirs, sayings) and private notes – information concerning travelling, probate inventories, economic budget, housekeeping accounts, dates of descendants or family members – births, weddings and funerals.

The term *silva rerum* has been interpreted so many times that the same designation: hand-written book, was applied in many different ways. The reasons for this situation can be found in the purpose of the research itself. The Latin expression *silva rerum*, used by the creators of old Polish codices, meant in Polish “forest of things” and thus introduced varieties of structure and meaning. Stefania Skwarczyńska, the author of the unique (at least so far) analysis of the generic forms of *silva*-shows “varietas” as the basic factor, making the book’s structure special and different¹⁵. According to her, the following elements of the books were crucial: the number of pieces included, the variety of text and form of these pieces, and the richness of the problems presented.

This variety of definitions of *silva* is a result of the different methodological attitudes of workers in different disciplines. In the humanities the meaning of these handwritten texts and their significance was noticed first by literary historians and political history specialists. This was a consequence of the richness of manuscript sources connected with literature, registering current events from everyday life: political and private. As the interest in the history of habits was deepening, so *silva* (which demonstrated the traditional rhythm of their authors’ life, agreeing with

¹⁵ S. Skwarczyńska, *Kariera literacka form rodzajowych bloku silva* [The literary career of forms like silva], in: idem, *Wokół teatru i literatury. Studia i szkice*, (1970), p. 185.

both the natural and liturgical calendar) became a real mine of examples derived from the noble families, essential when characterising a human being in the baroque and enlightenment eras. In recent years these manuscript volumes have been analysed from the anthropological point of view, as they contain some folklore texts.

The controversy concerning the rules relating to the inclusion of these handwritten manuscripts in archive collections proved to be the third factor responsible for terminological problems. One of the essential elements of this argument between librarians and archivists was the definition of *silva*. Helena Więckowska, concerned about the completeness of collections, suggested the inclusion of officers', soldiers' and politicians' writings in archives, whilst writings belonging to scientists, musicians and writers should become part of a library¹⁶. This solution, based on the rule that anything connected to officials should be located in archives, while private collections should be in libraries, turned out to be ineffective in the case of the *silva*-type manuscripts. In many cases it is impossible to separate the private and official functions of the author of such and such a manuscript (e.g., writings by Adam Kępski and Ignacy Przyjemski are private in their character, as well as public).

The real "career" of these handwritten texts began at the end of the 16th century and lasted to the end of the Noble Republic of Poland. It was linked with Sarmatism and unexpectedly brought a large number of formal solutions and text variety. Because there were no established rules for the production of a handwritten book, there was a range and variety of these texts. Poetics and

¹⁶ H. Więckowska, *Archiwum a biblioteka. Odmienność materiału i metod pracy* [Archive and library. Differences in material and methods of work], "Przegląd Biblioteczny", 1 (1929), p. 14–27.

rhetoric manuals defined *silva* only as a literary piece concerned with many subjects. A Jesuit poet, Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, described *silva* in this way. The nobility introduced Latin names into the title of their writings because “lingua Latina” was attractive. The ideas were found in popular rhetoric manuals. The first pages often contained words and expressions such as “miscellanea, nihil et omnia, penum synopticum, varia, vorago rerum, otia publica, otia domestica”¹⁷.

Manuscript books of *silva rerum* were ignored for a long time by traditional historians of politics who were looking for sources of political texts. At the same time they were treated as a unique example of Sarmatian culture, not existing in other countries.

It emerged, following detailed comparative research, that this phenomenon of manuscript private writings, under different names, existed all over early modern Europe – “les livres de raison”, “notizie della famiglia”, “commonplace books”, “Wirtschaftsbücher”.

In my opinion we can talk about the specificity of *silva rerum* as an example of Sarmatian culture not because of its form (we can find similar manuscripts in Italy or in England). The specificity relies on a function which is fulfilled by these books. *Silva*, which collected historical and political *exempla*, and brought together many occasional speeches – from congratulation on the occasion of a childbirth up to Parliamentary speeches – reflected a certain type of a nobleman’s private interests and needs. In the

¹⁷ Compare: M. Zachara, *Sylwy – dokument szlacheckiej kultury umysłowej w XVII w.* [*Silva – a document of noble intellectual culture in the 17th century*], in: *Z dziejów życia literackiego w Polsce XVI i XVII wieku*, ed. H. Dziechcińska, (1980), p. 197; S. Roszak, *Archiwa sarmackiej pamięci. Funkcje i znaczenie rękopiśmiennych ksiąg silva rerum w kulturze Rzeczypospolitej XVIII wieku* [*Archives of the Sarmatian memory. Functions and a meaning of the handwritten books silva rerum in Polish culture of the 18th century*], (2004), p. 47–50.

face of a constant lack of compendiums and printed hand-books, *silva* collected the knowledge and current experiences of the nobleman, author and possessor of the book. They became books of noble wisdom, written on the one hand “ad subsidium memoriae” (for the author), on the other hand “ad posteritatem” (for the author’s descendants).

To conclude our explanation of the Polish experience with the historiography of first-person writings, we can mention an example of memorizing tradition by a noble family in the Early Modern period. It is an example of the activity of the Działowski family from the Royal Prussia region¹⁸.

The Działowski, living in Chełmno Land until the 20th century, belonged to the szlachta (nobility) and the landed gentry who attached significance to learning about, constructing and maintaining the memory of members of their family. In the first half of the 18th century Wawrzyniec Działowski created the so-called black book of the Działowskis on the basis of preliminary research in the court and private archives of Royal Prussia. It is a lost manuscript including extracts from documents and memoirs from the 16th to the 18th centuries, concerning the family and families related to them. Wawrzyniec was motivated not only by his private curiosity, but also by the desire to strengthen the prestige and the social position of his family. That is why, when in 1738 in the second volume of the armorial by Kacper Niesiecki (*Korona polska*) only there appeared a very laconic comment about the Działowski family, Wawrzyniec asked Józef Andrzej Załuski (one of the greatest historians and intellectuals, who formed the first National Library) for help, and sent a summary of the work

¹⁸ See: S. Roszak, M. Targowski, *Pamięć rodu Działowskich w świetle XVI-II i XIX-wiecznych zapisów rodzinnych* [*Memory of the Działowski family in the light of the 18th and 19th-century family notes*], “Folia Toruniensia”, (2011), p. 35–44.

about the Działowskis to the author of the armorial, Niesiecki, who included it in the supplement to the 4th volume. It shows that since the 18th century the representatives of the family had spread the untrue legend about their origin from the medieval knight Mikołaj Działowski, known for supporting Poland during the Thirteen Years War.

Hand-written notes in the above-mentioned copy of the volume *Korona polska* kept in the collection of the Copernicus Library in Toruń and belonging to Wawrzyniec's descendants until the end of the 19th century show that the Działowskis treasured the memory of their family. Wawrzyniec's son, Teodor, recorded births, weddings and deaths of his family's members on the end pages of the book in the years 1763–1778, thereby creating a form of chronicle of the Działowski family residing in Turzno. The records, which came from the manuscript traditions of *silva rerum*, were later completed by Teodor's brother, Dionizy, Wawrzyniec's great-grandchild, Ksawery, and the unidentified person who continued writing the chronicle until the genealogical line of the family died out in 1899. In this way the unique source of information about the genealogy of the Działowskis family, and their desire to maintain a memorial about their family, was created.

EGODOKUMENTY – KILKA UWAG O POLSKICH I EUROPEJSKICH
DOŚWIADCZENIACH HISTORIOGRAFICZNYCH ORAZ
METODOLOGICZNYCH

(STRESZCZENIE)

Artykuł poświęcony jest zagadnieniu piśmiennictwa prywatnego w epoce nowożytnej. W historiografii różnych krajów europejskich problematyka ta od dawna występowała jako uzupełnienie badań nad historią polityczną i historią

literatury. Od lat 80. XX wieku badania rękopisu prywatnego wkroczyły w nowy etap. W rezultacie rozwoju antropologii kulturowej na książki rękopiśmienne zaczęto patrzeć inaczej niż dotychczas. Historycy dostrzegli w tych rękopisach odzwierciedlenie osobistych zainteresowań autorów oraz odbicie umysłowości epoki. W różnych krajach stosowano odmienne definicje piśmiennictwa prywatnego: piśmiennictwo przestrzeni prywatnej, samoświadectwa, piśmiennictwo w pierwszej osobie. Najbardziej popularne i przyjęte w większości krajów stało się określenie „egodokumenty”, zastosowane przez holenderskiego historyka i filologa Jacoba (Jacques) Pressera. W latach 90. powstały zespoły badawcze we Francji, Włoszech, Szwajcarii, które rozpoczęły analizę całych zespołów rękopisów archiwalnych i bibliotecznych. Dzięki wynikom ich prac udało się stworzyć nową koncepcję badania rękopisu prywatnego, ukazując świat przeżyć wewnętrznych oraz sposoby postrzegania świata zewnętrznego przez autorów rękopisów. W polskiej historiografii przykładem takich analiz rękopisu prywatnego są np. opracowania prywatnej korespondencji, testamentów oraz szlacheckich ksiąg typu *silva rerum* (łac. las rzeczy).

W pierwszej części artykułu autor opisuje doświadczenia badań egodokumentów w różnych krajach europejskich, wskazując na zmianę zakresu samego pojęcia egodokument. Następnie charakteryzuje polski projekt, którego celem jest stworzenia bazy danych piśmiennictwa przestrzeni prywatnej i włączenia jej w obieg europejski. Na zakończenie podaje przykłady konkretnych badań odnoszących się do analizy rękopisów szlacheckich, zachowanych w archiwach rodowych.

Opracowane przez Autora / Bearbeitet von dem Verfasser /
Prepared by the Author

EGO-DOKUMENTE – EINIGE BEMERKUNGEN ÜBER POLNISCHE UND EUROPÄISCHE HISTORIOGRAPHISCHE UND METHODOLOGISCHE ERFAHRUNGEN

(ZUSAMMENFASSUNG)

Der Artikel ist dem Problem des privaten Schrifttums in der Neuzeit gewidmet. In der Historiographie der verschiedenen europäischen Länder steht diese Problematik schon lange flankierend zu den Forschungen über politische Geschichte oder etwa der Geschichte der Literatur. Seit den 80er Jahren des 20.

Jahrhunderts sind die Forschungen zu Manuskripten privaten Inhalts in eine neue Phase getreten. Als Folge der Entwicklung der Kulturanthropologie wurden solche Handschriften neu bewertet. Historiker haben diese Quellen als ein Spiegelbild der persönlichen Interessen der Autoren sowie der Geisteshaltung einer gesamten Epoche wahrgenommen. In verschiedenen Ländern wurden unterschiedliche Definitionen für das private Schrifttum verwendet: das Schrifttum des privaten Raumes, die Selbstzeugnisse, das Schrifttum in der ersten Person. Der Begriff „Ego-Dokumente“, der erstmals durch den holländischen Historiker und Philologen Jacob (Jacques) Presser verwendet worden war, ist sehr populär geworden und wurde in den meisten Ländern übernommen. In den 90er Jahren entstanden Forschergruppen in Frankreich, Italien und in der Schweiz, welche eine systematische Analyse der einschlägigen Gruppen von Archiv- und Bibliothekshandschriften begannen. Dank den Ergebnissen ihrer Arbeit konnte ein neues Konzept für die Erforschung privater Manuskripte geschaffen werden, welches nun die Welt der subjektiven Innerlichkeit und die individuelle Weltwahrnehmung der Autoren zeigen können. In der polnischen Geschichtsschreibung gibt es Beispiele solcher Analysen der privaten Handschriften, wie etwa die Bearbeitungen der privaten Korrespondenzen, Testamente und der Bücher von Adeligen wie *silva rerum* (lateinisch ein Wald der Sachen).

Im ersten Teil des Artikels beschreibt der Autor die Erfahrungen der Ego-Dokumente-Forschungen in verschiedenen europäischen Ländern und weist auf die Veränderungen des Umfangs des Begriffs „Ego-Dokument“ hin. Weiterhin charakterisiert er ein polnisches Projekt, dessen Ziel es ist, eine Datenbank des Schrifttums des privaten Raumes zu schaffen. Diese Erschließung soll einen Beitrag für einen gesamteuropäischen Wissenschaftsansatz leisten. Zum Schluss stellt er Beispiele der konkreten Forschungen dar, die sich auf die Analyse der in Familienarchiven erhaltenen Handschriften beziehen.

Tłumaczenie / Übersetzt von / Translated
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SŁOWA KLUCZOWE / SCHLAGWORTE / KEYWORDS

- egodokumenty; rękopisy; pamięć; kultura nowożytna
- Ego-Dokumente; Handschriften; Gedächtnis; frühneuzeitliche Kultur
- Egodocuments; manuscripts; memory; early modern culture

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