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The History of the Scientist's Life and the Scientific Community

Stefan Kieniewicz, *Pamiętniki* [Memoirs].

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May 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of the death of Stefan Kieniewicz, a great historian, scholar, and distinguished organizer of and participant in scientific life in Poland in the early post-war years and the second half of the 20th century. The life of this scholar was written down and described in *Pamiętniki* [Memoirs], published by his son, Jan Kieniewicz, also a professor.¹ At the very beginning of our considerations, it is worth mentioning two matters related to the publication and value of this egodocument. On May 7, 2022, the Polityka History Awards for 2021 were granted. In the “Memoirs and Recollections” category, the award went to Professor Jan Kieniewicz for his edition of Stefan Kieniewicz’s *Memoirs*.² Moreover, the content of *Memoirs* is connected with the

1 Jan Kieniewicz – born in 1938, historian and diplomat

2 “NagrodyHistorycznePolityki2022–laureaci,” wydawca.com.pl, 18.05.2022, <https://wydawca.com.pl/2022/05/18/nagrody-historyczne-polityki-2022-laureaci/> [access: 25.07.2022]



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Recenzje

Reviews

letters between Stefan Kieniewicz and Henryk Wereszycki that were published by Elżbieta Orman in 2013 under the title *Stefan Kieniewicz – Henryk Wereszycki. Korespondencja z lat 1947–1990* [Stefan Kieniewicz–Henryk Wereszycki: Letters from 1947–1990].³

Who was the author of the memoirs? Let us present some facts from his life. Stefan Kieniewicz (Rawicz coat-of-arms) was born in 1907 in Dereszewicze (now in the territory of Belarus). He studied history at the University of Poznań from 1925 to 1930; then he studied at the University of Warsaw from 1932 to 1934 and did supplementary studies in Vienna and Paris. In 1934, he obtained a doctoral degree at the University of Warsaw for his thesis entitled *Spółczesność polskie w powstaniu poznańskim 1848 roku* [Polish Society in the Poznań Uprising of 1848], written under the supervision of Marceli Handelsman. Initially, he was professionally attached to the Treasury Archive in Warsaw (1937–1944). During the war, he was active in the Office of Information and Propaganda of the Home Army Headquarters. Wounded in the Warsaw Uprising, he was sent to concentration camps in Baden and Württemberg. After the war, he worked at the University of Warsaw and the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). He held numerous positions at these institutions, including director of the Department of Modern Polish History (1946–1953),⁴ dean of the Faculty of History (1953–1955), and deputy director of the Institute of History of PAN (1953–1968) (Śródka 1995: 191–192). He was also an editor of *Historical Quarterly* (1952–1992) and the chairman of the Committee of Historical Sciences of PAN (1968–1984). Kieniewicz educated a lot of great students and outstanding researchers of the past. His students included prominent historians such as Ryszard Bender, Jerzy Skowronek, Wiktoria Śliwkowska, and Daniel Olszewski (Śródka 1995: 192).

Andrzej Śródka distinguished the following aspects of Kieniewicz's research: the modern political history of Poland, the modern history of Polish cities, historical editing, and the history of culture (Śródka 1995: 192). We should add to this list historical

3 Rafał Stobiecki published an enthusiastic review of this publication in *Historical Quarterly*, see the Bibliography.

4 The names of the departments he managed changed in later years.

biography—monographs and biographies which Kieniewicz published in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* [Polish Biographical Dictionary]. An important part of his publishing work was editing sources.⁵

In this brief description, it is impossible to discuss all his many works in detail,⁶ so I will only emphasize one of his texts on ethics in historical research. Kieniewicz stated that the main principle that should guide the historian is truth. He wrote that “a historian should, in his research, seek the truth, but he is still at risk of distorting this truth: whether under the influence of his own beliefs and superstitions or under the influence of external influences” (Kieniewicz 1972: 520). The search for truth in the research on the past is a difficult duty of the historian, because, according to Kieniewicz, “the historian has his own main duty: to do justice to the past world. He has a sense of his own fallibility. He knows that everything he learns about the distant and more recent past is just an extract of the reality of the time, viewed in a distorted mirror of our own and our entire generation’s prejudices. But we are firmly convinced that we know how – that we should know how – to reduce the degree of this distortion; in other words, to get closer to the truth” (Kieniewicz 1972: 526).

Turning to a brief discussion of *Memoirs*, which is 748 pages long, it should be said that Kieniewicz recounts his life with unusual conscientiousness and openness, beginning with his childhood and continuing through the successive stages of his life, which sometimes took place in difficult political realities.⁷ In this story, the reader will learn about his scientific path, the ethical principles he applied in life and science, and his cooperation with the scientific community. Kieniewicz also tells us how he combined scientific research with teaching and organizational/scientific activity, both in the inter-war

5 The first publication by this author which I read while dealing with the history of education in Galicia was a selection of texts called *Galicja w dobie autonomicznej (1850–1914)* [Galicia in the Time of Autonomy (1850–1914)]. I have to admit that it was a great book that introduced me to the history of Galicia.

6 The meaning of Kieniewicz’s output was discussed in Szwarc (2010).

7 *Memoirs* includes 748 pages and consists of six parts: (I) Memoirs of Late Adolescence, (II) Memoirs from the Years of Late Adolescence, (III) Continuation – Memoirs from the Years of Late Adolescence, (IV) Memoirs from 1939–1945, (V) Memoirs from 1945–1955: Kraków–Milanówek, and (VI) Missing Link: 1955–1961.

years and after the war. All in all, in the contents of *Memoirs* we can find descriptions of important scientific events in his life and the functions he performed in various scientific institutions. Apart from his scientific life, there are also quite a few references to his family life, i.e., his parents, his wife Zofia, his children, and other members of the Kieniewicz and Sobański families.⁸ The sections of *Memoirs* that describe the Warsaw Uprising and his time in the concentration camps (Kieniewicz 2021: 357–424) are very sad. The kind of man he was, despite such traumatic experiences during the war, is confirmed when he writes about

my seven-month captivity, which I experienced like a nightmare, but which I must judge as lighter in comparison with the fate of many, many thousands of prisoners, even those who survived. Behind the wires I also experienced numerous proofs of God's care, and signs of human kindness... After the war, I never thought of making a profit with my 'martyrdom'; I did not, for example, join ZBoWiD [the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, controlled by the communist party]. (Kieniewicz 2021: 423–424)

With regard to Kieniewicz's academic path, it is worth describing his studies at the University of Poznań, where he listened to lectures or participated in seminars by Bronisław Dembiński, Adam Skałkowski, Józef Paczkowski, Leon Białkowski, Zygmunt Zakrzewski, and others, and where he met many younger students of science who later became distinguished professors, such as Zdzisław Grot (Kieniewicz 2021: 131–163). The period during which he wrote his master's thesis at Skałkowski's seminar was exceptionally memorable. All in all, it can be said that he recorded a great deal of interesting information about the scientific circles of the University of Poznań. He recalled those times not only from the perspective of didactic activities, but also from the perspective of the pros and cons of student life. It should be added that the Fourth General Congress of Polish Historians was held in Poznań at that time, which Kieniewicz was also able to attend; he appreciated listening to the lectures and discussions of scholars (Kieniewicz 2021: 139). Another important event was his habilitation at the Jagiellonian University in 1946 (Kieniewicz 2021: 361–463). According to his notes,

8 The family of his wife, Zofia

it was attended by such well-known scholars as Roman Grodecki, Władysław Konopczyński, Henryk Mościcki, Józef Feldman, Jan Dąbrowski, and Franciszek Bujak. The next stage of his scientific path included trying to become a professor. Kieniewicz's recollection of the event is worth quoting:

The thing passed through the faculty and the Senate, but was obviously analyzed at the meetings of the party. Someone probably raised an objection—Kieniewicz writes for the Catholic press—to which Arnold⁹ stepped forward in my defense: 'It is not important for whom Kieniewicz writes, but what he writes.' Repeating this exchange to me, Mantuffel advised me to stop appearing in the designated weeklies until my appointment" (Kieniewicz 2021: 520)

The description of this historian's successive academic promotions shows that their attainment did not guarantee, as is sometimes the case today, the attainment of a university chair or even academic stability (Kieniewicz 2021: 464–468). The portrayal of Kieniewicz's adventures in the search for stability may be important for the contemporary reader in terms of overcoming the hardships of academic development.

His further scientific maturation also included participation in scientific conventions, which, according to his notes, he attended with unusual focus and interest, getting to know the historians. In the post-war period, these included congresses in Wrocław and Krakow (he participated in the latter).¹⁰ A lot of information about the circle of historians is described in the 8th Congress of History in Krakow, which he helped organize and during which he delivered a lecture (Kieniewicz 2021: 679–683). Importantly, he also took foreign scientific trips (to Rome, Palermo, Prague, Berlin, and Oxford), the circumstances and course of which he sometimes reconstructed in detail. No less important in Kieniewicz's scientific life was his cooperation with the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU) (Historical Commission), the Polish Biographical Dictionary, and the Polish Historical Society (PTH). It was the PAU and the PTH that supervised and supported many events and historical research

9 Stanisław Arnold (1895–1973) – historian and professor of the University of Warsaw

10 This refers to the 7th Congress in Wrocław on 19–22 September 1948, and the 8th Congress in Krakow, held 14–17 September 1958.

projects. Kieniewicz admits the importance of the annual conventions of the PTH, which were held in various Polish cities. The stories about scientific events, with simultaneous presentation of their participants, show the scientists not only scientifically, but also with a humorous view of their attitudes or statements. In essence, they show them in life and science. Let two brief recollections of PTH conventions serve as examples. Kieniewicz recalls that in 1949, during the convention at the Paulinum Palace in Jelenia Góra, Professor Celina Bobińska¹¹ tried to encourage Fr. Mieczysław Żywczyński to convert to Marxism. During the next convention in Łagów Castle in 1950, Aleksander Gieysztor¹² recited a sample of socialist realist poetry:

Już buja motyl, pachnie kwiat	The butterfly flies and flower blooms
I słowik wygrywa trele.	and the nightingale is singing his songs
Ach, jak piękny jest ten świat –	oh what beautiful this world is
Ze związkiem Radzieckim na czele.	with the Soviet Union in the lead.

(Kieniewicz 2021: 547)

A particularly busy period in Kieniewicz's life was the years in which he worked at both the University of Warsaw and the Institute of History of the PAN. His account of scientific and organizational work was combined with a description of his teaching work. He recalls his seminars with emotion, writing as follows about his doctoral seminar: "I enjoyed my Monday doctoral seminars, which were dominated by volunteers who were not affiliated with either the University nor the Academy, but they were almost hobbyists of historical science" (Kieniewicz 2021: 644). Further on, in his descriptions of his life, Kieniewicz gives their names, indicating those who later contributed to the field of history. In addition to these duties, Kieniewicz was also an editor of *Przegląd Historyczny* [Historical

11 Celina Bobińska (1913–1997) – historian and communist activist

12 Aleksander Gieysztor (1916–1999) – medieval historian, professor at University of Warsaw, and member of PAN

Review] for 40 years, as already mentioned, and he participated in the meetings of the Central Qualification Commission for Science Employees.¹³ Kieniewicz wrote as follows about his work as editor of *Przegląd Historyczny*:

I had a difficult and unpleasant affair connected with the editing of the Review.... I was worrying and sleeping badly. The fact that for nearly forty years I managed to maintain peace in the editorial board of the *Historical Review* was one of my more serious achievements in life. (Kieniewicz 2021: 654)

The meetings of the Central Qualification Commission, on the other hand, were, in his opinion, even more difficult, not only because of the long meetings held twice a month, but because of the style of work and the multitude of complicated (usually more than 90) cases at each meeting. Regarding the subject of the body's work, he writes that

there was a dispute at the time about the academic titles of persons not connected with universities (museums, libraries, archives, scientific institutes, etc.). I was joking that, in institutes, the lowest-ranking employee will be given the title of *'szperacz'* [explorer], the medium-ranking employee *'badacz'* [researcher], and the highest-ranking employee *'ustawiacz'* [setter]. (Kieniewicz 2021: 655)

In his diary entries, he also noted the work on the creation of his subsequent academic publications. He devoted a lot of space in his *Memoirs* to the story behind a comprehensive book entitled *Adam Sapieha (1828–1903)* (Kieniewicz 1938).

Kieniewicz's notes concerning the rebuilding of university life, the institutionalization of science, and the practice of history are particularly valuable, not only for the reconstruction of his own biography, but also for documenting the revival of universities and university life after World War II. The discussions recorded in *Memoirs* during scientific conventions—exchanges between scholars on scientific issues during meetings at scientific institutions where he worked, or even during promotion meetings such as habilitation colloquia—present

13 The body was created in 1951. For more on its tasks and further formulas of functioning in national bodies, such as the Central Commission in charge of Degrees and Titles, which was well-known and functioning from 1990 to 2020, see Izdebski (2020).

a picture of post-war science in the political realities of the time. Descriptions of these events, as well as of workplaces and cooperation, led to scholars, in particular from the University of Poznań (since 1955, called Adam Mickiewicz University), Warsaw University, Jagiellonian University, and the Institute of History of the PAN, being recorded in the pages of *Memoirs*. With an excellent culture of expression, Kieniewicz presented the relations among the scholars of these universities and the Institute of History of PAN, as well as the editors of *Przegląd Historyczny*.

Kieniewicz's *Memoirs* is a unique document which portrays the story of not only one scholar, but also of various circles. His rich life story and links with many scientific institutions resulted in the fact that the scholars who made up the post-war scientific, mainly historical, community were recorded in his *Memoirs*. Even a cursory glance at the index of names in the book (pp. 719–744) testifies to the size of the group with which Kieniewicz associated. Kieniewicz illustrates the difficult periods of his life and exemplifies the lives of scholars during the war and occupation, and in the Stalinist period. Those were the times when, as a scholar, he had to make choices. His notes show that he distanced himself from many events, and, as a historian, he encouraged the search for the truth about the past, in line with his principles. Reading Kieniewicz's *Memoirs* allows the reader to encounter the unique and bygone world of the intelligentsia of the inter-war years, the Second World War, and the post-war period, whose achievements we enjoy today. And it is worth being aware of this and remembering it.

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