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SYNTHESES IN THE ACADEMIC OUTPUT OF MARIA BOGUCKA

Abstract

Maria Bogucka was the author of several synthetic studies, which included topics such as the history of Poland until 1864, the history of the Netherlands, the history of Polish towns and the burgher classes in the early modern era, as well as the history of Polish culture up until 1989. This article discusses these particular syntheses; and the critical assessments they gave rise to following their publication.

Keywords: Maria Bogucka, history of Poland, history of the Netherlands, the Middle Ages, early modern times, history of Polish culture, cities and burghers in the 16th–18th centuries, scientific criticism

The scholarly achievements of the Polish historian Maria Bogucka (1929–2020) cannot be overstated.¹ Her body of work includes a variety of historical writings, from articles, essays, sketches, monographs, reviews, and popular science works, to synthetic studies. In this article, I will look to assess Bogucka's syntheses on the history of Poland and the history of the Netherlands, the histories of the Polish cities and townspeople in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and her synthesis on the history of Polish culture; but I shall omit her syntheses about the history of Gdańsk, Polish culture and the history of women, which have been discussed in this volume by other authors.

¹ *Bibliografia prac profesor Marii Boguckiej za lata 1949–2003*, compiled by Andrzej Karpiński, Edward Opaliński, and Tomasz Wiślicz (Warszawa, 2004), encompassing 1,154 positions; and 'Bibliografia prac profesor Marii Boguckiej za lata 1997–2009', compiled by Andrzej Karpiński, in Andrzej Karpiński, Edward Opaliński, and Tomasz Wiślicz (eds), *Gospodarka, społeczeństwo, kultura w dziejach nowożytnych. Studia ofiarowane Pani Profesor Marii Boguckiej* (Warszawa, 2010), XI–XXVII, encompassing 233 positions. And we may also add 35 positions from the years 2010–16.

Chronologically, Bogucka's first historical synthesis was the popularising *Dzieje Polski do 1795* [A History of Poland to 1795], which she began writing in 1961, and published in 1964 as a part of the series 'Biblioteka Wiedzy Historycznej' [The Library of Historical Knowledge],² with the publishing house Wiedza Powszechna. Bogucka was 35 years old then, which was and still is not very common for publishing such synthetic works. It should be noted, however, that Bogucka had already secured a postdoctoral degree ('habilitation', in 1961), and thus had been acclaimed as a full-fledged scholar. The book is divided not into chapters but into five parts; two of them titled 'Dorobek wczesnych stuleci' [The Achievements of the Early Centuries] and 'Na rozdrożu' [At the Crossroads] concerned the Middle Ages; whereas the other three parts related to the early modern period are: 'Rzeczpospolita szlachecka' [The Noble Republic], 'Pod władzą magnatów' [Under the Rule of the Magnates] and 'Oświecona epoka' [The Enlightened Epoch]. The work did not contain a bibliography, whereas the number of footnotes was minimal. Supplemented with seven maps, the book also contained as many as 146 illustrations, although, unfortunately, their quality left much to be desired. The book would have a print run of 30,000 copies.

In the 'Introduction' to the work, Maria Bogucka so wrote:

History has played a key role in the Polish mentality over the past two centuries, undoubtedly greater than in other countries. The period of the partitions, when the teaching of Poland's native history took place in secret, was an important element for strengthening a national consciousness and placed the authority of history on a very high pedestal. However, this also led to a certain neglect to obtain objective historical truth. History written to comfort hearts, history treated only as a "teacher of life" often lost its true character: a scholarly undertaking to explain the course of history, showing the relationships between different aspects of life, and analysing social existence in all its manifestations. This explains the great number of legends that still occupy the consciousness of our society, even though the results of research conducted in the laboratories of scholars have refuted them long ago.³

Therefore, the author's goal when writing this popularising version of the history of Poland until the end of the eighteenth century was to "reconstruct the history of old Poland based on the scholarly

² Maria Bogucka, *Dzieje Polski do 1795 r.* (Warszawa, 1964), 320.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

achievements existing in this field, which had been enriched significantly, especially over the previous dozen or so years".⁴

This was the first popular synthesis of the history of pre-partition Poland written after the Second World War. And in the specific political reality, it achieved critical prominence beyond Poland's borders and was widely reviewed. One such review appeared in a German history journal. Its author, Herbert Joseph Langer (1927–2013), drew attention to its reliable presentation of Polish-German relations; the work's only perceived shortfall was its excessive emphasis on political issues at the expense of the economic processes underpinning them.⁵

Of course, the response from Polish reviewers was more numerous. Antoni Mączak (1928–2003) generally praised the work: "We have here a work showing the latest state of knowledge in the field as indicated by the title".⁶ He added that the book "has no polemical agenda, it speaks with positive theses, states what it was like always wanting to replace distorted images with real ones. No easy task. In general, it has been easier to glorify the past and glorify the bravery and war-time feats of our ancestors".⁷ However, he asked whether the explanations contained in the book were sufficient and whether the work made it easier for an inquisitive reader to glean further, in-depth knowledge. It must be stressed, though, that he himself did not answer this question. On the other hand, he suggested that "Polish relations should be presented against a broader background, juxtaposing the noble democracy and the oligarchy of the magnates with the absolutism of the European powers, and the grain monoculture, the manor farm and the demise of cities with the development of capitalism in the West".⁸

This suggestion was probably caused by such a statement that Mączak had found in the book:

Poland was an anachronistic entity among the more powerful, resiliently managed states, and its situation only became more grievous. The one-sided

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

⁵ Herbert Langer, [Review], *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, xiv, 7 (1966), 1214–16.

⁶ Antoni Mączak, 'Popularna synteza dziejów Polski do 1795 r.', *Nowe Drogi. Organ teoretyczny i polityczny Komitetu Centralnego Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej*, xviii, 11 (1964), 140–3, here 140.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

development of the farm and serfdom negatively affected various aspects of life. The links between town and village were sundered, even though this link had flourished throughout the fifteenth century and at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The impoverishment of the village and the exchange of rent for serfdom resulted in the disappearance of the rural recipient from the internal market. The serfs had to neglect their own farms to work on their overlord's estate – and already in the sixteenth century, they had to work at the estates for four or even five days a week – thus, had no money to buy handicraft products.⁹

At the end of his review, Antoni Mączak stated that he had presented his comments in the form of postulates, “because the book in question, professionally, interesting and impactful, will surely see numerous reprints, and deservedly so”.¹⁰

Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa (1891–1966) was not a historian, but a literary critic, a columnist with the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, who proposed a progressive Catholic outlook. She was an avid reader who took a great interest in history. Reluctantly, as she emphasised, she had picked up Maria Bogucka's book, but after having read it, she considered the decision to be fortuitous. Indeed, it turned out that:

This Polish history presented here was completely different from the one I had studied in my youth and which had shaped my historical imagination. Needless to say, this was the history that Matejko had painted. For what I had learned from my textbooks were, in the first place, magnificent and dazzling events: battles, victories – sometimes my heart was broken by the defeats I had read about. There were great leaders, statesmen, full of love for their homeland and hideous traitors. There were stories of wars, systems, knights, and art patrons. Then I knew that it had been presented from one side, a bit like the way we only ever look at one side of the moon. The rest of this story, the social relations, economic and economic affairs, had remained – at least for laymen – in the shadows.¹¹

Starowieyska-Morstinowa added that:

Maria Bogucka undoubtedly writes history from a Marxist viewpoint. But she writes it dispassionately, without aggression, evidently trying to maintain

⁹ Bogucka, *Dzieje Polski*, 196.

¹⁰ Mączak, ‘Popularna synteza dziejów Polski’, 143.

¹¹ Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa, ‘W stronę historii. Z notatnika recenzenta’, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, xix, 4 (24 Jan. 1965), 5–6, here 6.

the impartiality that is obligatory for both historians and scholars. The novelty that she introduces to our old view, to the colourful history with hussar wings and glittering with victories, is the emphasis it places on the social relations in our country, on social harm and injustice, endeavouring to show that in them lay some of the causes of our political failures and disasters. She is undoubtedly right in this depiction of the fate of the peasants, townspeople and, in general, the 'untitled' people.¹²

The reviewer accused the author of disliking the Roman Catholic Church, the clergy and the Vatican (papacy) in her work, "albeit [Bogucka] does not look to be offensive in these matters". In her conclusion, the reviewer stated that despite some failings in the book and a certain lack of objectivity, "Maria Bogucka's book seemed to me not only interesting, but also valuable, and the speed with which it is flying off the bookshelves is the best evidence for the need for this kind of book".¹³

Maria Bogucka was certainly not a Marxist, although, like many historians of her generation, she did make recourse to Marxist theory.¹⁴ The fact that economic and social issues were strongly emphasised in her syntheses resulted not only from the fact that Marxism actually favoured the hitherto neglected economic history in Polish historiography (political history had been omnipotent until the Second World War) and the role of the masses in history. It should be noted that before the Second World War, a strong centre of economic history had been established in Lwów/Lviv, headed by Franciszek Bujak (1875–1953) and Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949). At the same time, social history had also aroused interest. During and shortly after the Second

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ We do not find her name (it does not appear at all in this work) in this context, for example in the work of Tadeusz Paweł Rutkowski, *Nauki historyczne w Polsce 1944–1970. Zagadnienia polityczne i organizacyjne* (Warszawa, 2007). Information about the fact that she was an activist and chairwoman of the Polish Youth Association at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1955–6, included in the work of Tomasz Siewierski, *Marian Małowist i krąg jego uczniów. Z dziejów historii gospodarczej w Polsce* (Warszawa, 2016), 165, does not correspond with the reality. She never belonged to Polish United Workers' Party [Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR], in spite of the pressures placed on her to do so. Cf. Patryk Pleskot, *Intelektualni sąsiedzi. Kontakty polskich historyków ze środowiskiem 'Annales' 1945–1989* (Warszawa, 2010), 558.

World War, Polish historians, and not only Marxists, began to criticise the current vision of the Polish past based only on political history and the biographies of outstanding individuals. In the opinion of Rafał Stobiecki, a historian of historiography, the Marxist methodology had yielded scholarly benefits after 1945, as it had made historians sensitive to both economic and social history.¹⁵ The economic and social approach to the study of the past was a source of inspiration for historians and was conducive to both syntheses and integral history. That is why historians like Bogucka looked to Marxist methodology whilst not being Marxists. It can be added that also in the United Kingdom after the Second World War, Marxist methodology played a significant role in forming the so-called new social history.¹⁶

Jarema Maciszewski (1930–2006) also noted the departure from the over-abundance of political history in Maria Bogucka's work in favour of economic and social history, stating in the review that Bogucka possessed an "ability to present economic and social phenomena and their impact on other areas of life in an interesting way".¹⁷ However, he also took issue with a number of aspects of the book, as he considered that:

The period up to and including the fifteenth century has been described more fully and precisely than the sixteenth, seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century. Suffice it to say that the Reformation in Poland is summed up with a dozen or so references (provoking a more specialised discussion); there is no clear subsection on this topic [...] The second imbalance is the predominance of economic and social issues over the political, which extends, and perhaps more importantly, to aspects of governance.¹⁸

In his opinion, this led to numerous simplifications. Finally, according to Maciszewski, in Bogucka's terms, the history of Poland was too removed from what could be described as general history. This criticism was unfounded, however, as the work contains numerous references to international contexts.

¹⁵ See Rafał Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem. Spory o nowy model historii w Polsce (II połowa lat czterdziestych – początek lat pięćdziesiątych)* (Łódź, 1993), 92.

¹⁶ Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, *Historia zwykłych ludzi. Współczesna angielska historiografia dziejów społecznych* (Kraków, 2003), 37–68.

¹⁷ Jarema Maciszewski, 'Książka dawno oczekiwana', *Polityka*, viii, 46 (14 Nov. 1964), 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Henryk Samsonowicz (1930–2021), in turn, stated that the book was “the first, modern, popular synthesis of the history of Poland, encompassing the Third Partition”, which had been published. He added that Bogucka “takes a keen interest in political events, which are later bound by economic and cultural relations – this is how a fairly harmonious whole was created, covering a wide range of historical issues”.¹⁹ The reader finds a book which, according to him, does not overwhelm by way of an excess of footnotes and hermetic language. According to Samsonowicz, Maria Bogucka had created her own vision of history, encouraging discussion on numerous issues.²⁰

Contrary to the optimistic predictions of the reviewers, the next edition of the book was published a full nine years later, in 1973, and it is actually difficult to describe it as a second edition, as it appeared under a different title: *Dawna Polska. Narodziny, rozkwit, upadek* [Old Poland. The Birth, Flourishing and Fall]; and it was more scholarly in nature. In the ‘Introduction’, M. Bogucka wrote: “This book is a new, extended and reworked version of the *History of Poland* published in 1964 [...]. Since then, historical scholarship has made great progress; numerous detailed monographs have been written, explaining certain issues, or presenting them differently, some debates have been closed, whereas others have flared up with renewed vigour”.²¹ The author, of course, had corrected the minor substantive errors pointed out to her, and added subsections on the Reformation ‘Polskie oblicze reformacji’ [The Polish Face of the Reformation] and ‘Rzecz pogańska panować nad swoim bratem’ [The Pagan Goal – to Reign over Your Brother; 195–204], a chapter which had been suggested by one of the reviewers. Due to the additions, unlike the 1964 edition, the work was no longer composed of five, but six parts. It was also provided with a much greater number of footnotes (245) and expanded bibliographic entries.

The next edition, richly illustrated, was published in 1985,²² and the author used and incorporated into it findings from the literature on the subject, which had been proposed in the 1970s. As one of the

¹⁹ Henryk Samsonowicz, ‘Pierwsze dziewięć wieków’, *Kultura. Tygodnik społeczno-kulturalny*, ii, 48 (29 Nov. 1964), 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Maria Bogucka, *Dawna Polska. Narodziny, rozkwit, upadek* (Warszawa, 1973²), 440.

²² *Ead.*, *Dawna Polska* (Warszawa, 1985), 480.

subsequent reviewers, Winfried Irgang (b. 1942) wrote: “political developments, the colourful and multifaceted nature of Polish culture was revealed in terms of its spiritual and material development”.²³ The reviewer also noted that the German reader had received an abridged version of this book published by Urania-Verlag two years earlier.²⁴

After a dozen or so years, a chronologically extended version of this synthesis was published. The end date was this time not the third partition of Poland in 1795, but the year 1864, i.e. the fall of the January Uprising. Where did the change in the chronological framework come from? Maria Bogucka stated:

Taking up the task of rethinking the history of old Poland once again, it seemed to me the right way to end the story not with the catastrophe of the partitions but by showing how Poles managed to shake off the shock of losing their statehood and took up the fight for independence, and at the same time – working to the new shape of social relations and reconstruction economy so that the foundations for the development of modern society are laid. In this regard, the mid-nineteenth century is a turning point, opening up various perspectives for the twentieth century.²⁵

The second edition, corrected and supplemented, was published as an academic textbook subsidised by the Minister of Science and Higher Education in 2009.

Even though each time the author supplemented and corrected the usually minor errors and inaccuracies indicated by the reviewers, in the 2009 edition, there were some issues. For example, the project of secularisation of the state of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, Bogucka attributed in this work to the Grand Master Albrecht von Brandenburg-Ansbach (1490–1568) and to a group of friars who had advocated the conversion to Lutheranism and the dissolution of the order, stating that these “projects had been accepted by the Polish

²³ Winfried Irgang, [Review], *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 1989, xxxviii, 1, 118–19, here 118.

²⁴ Maria Bogucka, *Das alte Polen*, transl. Eduard Merian (Leipzig–Jena–Berlin, 1983), 248 pp., ills. Irgang pointed out that in this German edition the illustrations were (understandably, taking into account the technological differences of the printing at that time) of better quality than in the Polish one, but he had reservations about the quality of the translation itself, e.g. regarding place names and some technical terms.

²⁵ Maria Bogucka, *Historia Polski do 1864 roku* (Wrocław, 1999), 5.

side”.²⁶ In fact, this proposal was made by the Polish side, as Janusz Małek wrote in 1987.²⁷ Moreover, Maria Bogucka believed that the provisions of the Treaty of Cracow of 1525 were beneficial for Poland at the time, although she herself drew attention to the fact that “The difficult situation in which Albrecht found himself, military defeats, and the turmoil among his subjects, meant that more drastic steps were expected from the Polish side, even the incorporation of the monastic lands within the borders of the Polish state”.²⁸

The contentions of Maria Bogucka that in the Polish-Lithuanian state between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, during the witch hunts, “simple peasants rarely fell victim to this type of suspicion”²⁹ did not correspond with the reality. In fact, villagers were burned at the stake in large numbers as alleged witches not only in the seventeenth century, but in the following century also.³⁰

Maria Bogucka also regurgitated in her work one of the Polish myths that the attack by the Swedes on the monastery at Jasna Góra near Częstochowa at the end of 1655, during the Polish-Swedish war, touched the religious feelings of Catholic Poles.³¹ While this statement could be accepted in 1964, it was not the case in 2008. In 1975, Adam Kersten (1930–83) published a monograph in which he clearly stated that it could not be documented from sources that the attempt to conquer Jasna Góra by Polish-Swedish troops resulted in a change in attitudes of Polish society towards the Swedes; and it cannot be argued that there was an extensive emotional engagement in the siege itself. It was only after 1658 that the siege of the monastery was used to consolidate the views of Roman Catholics against non-adherents.³²

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 118. She suggested something similar in *Hołd Pruski* (Warszawa, 1985), 89.

²⁷ Janusz Małek, ‘Hołd pruski 1525 roku. Ostateczna likwidacja zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach’, in *id.*, *Dwie części Prus. Studia z dziejów Prus Książęcych i Prus Królewskich w XVI i XVII wieku* (Olsztyn, 1987), 31–8, here 35.

²⁸ Bogucka, *Historia Polski*, 119. Erroneously written (127–8), that in the sixteenth century, the Order of the Knights of the Sword was to be found in Livonia, which in fact was incorporated into the Teutonic Order already in 1237.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁰ Jacek Wijaczka, ‘Procesy o czary w Polsce w dobie Oświecenia. Zarys problematyki’, *Klio. Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym*, 7 (2005), 17–62.

³¹ Bogucka, *Historia Polski*, 171.

³² Adam Kersten, *Szwedzi pod Jasną Górą 1655* (Warszawa, 1975), 319.

However, the myth of the siege's contemporary importance persists in Polish historical consciousness and historiography.³³

Another synthesis in Maria Bogucka's oeuvre was the history of the Netherlands.³⁴ It was also the first synthesis of the history of this country in Polish historiography. The co-author of the book was Jan Balicki (1909–90), a lawyer and diplomat, who in 1957–65 was an emissary and ambassador to the Netherlands. Before writing this synthesis, Maria Bogucka had published several articles on the history of the Netherlands in the early modern era,³⁵ and had also penned a popular work on the Dutch-Spanish conflict in the sixteenth century.³⁶

Maria Bogucka was the author of the first part of the synthesis, covering the history of the Netherlands until 1609, when Spain officially recognised the independence of the Republic of the United Provinces, concluding a twelve-year truce. The part Bogucka wrote was about 150 pages, while the second part, by Jan Balicki, was much more extensive, running to 280 pages. In five chapters, Bogucka discussed: the early history of the Netherlands until 1385; the reign of the dukes of Burgundy (1385–1482); the history of the Netherlands under the rule of the Habsburgs (1482–1566) and the two phases of the war for independence (1566–79 and 1579–1609).³⁷ In line with her scientific interests, she devoted a lot of space to social, economic and cultural phenomena, which was all the more justified that: "In these areas of life, this country has been at the forefront in Europe for centuries".³⁸

³³ Jacek Wijaczka, 'Potop szwedzki w świadomości historycznej Polaków', *Czaszy Nowożytne*, 23 (2010), 29–45.

³⁴ Jan Balicki and Maria Bogucka, *Historia Holandii* (Wrocław, 1976), 465 pp., illustrated; amended and expanded edition (Wrocław, 1989²), 467 pp., 80 ills, 9 maps.

³⁵ See Maria Bogucka, 'Z problematyki gospodarczo-społecznej Niderlandów w XVI i XVII w.', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxi, 1 (1964), 119–36; see also, *ead.*, 'Handel niderlandzko-gdański w latach 1597–1651 w świetle amsterdamskich kontraktów frachtowych', *Zapiski Historyczne*, xxxiii, 3 (1968), 171–92; and, 'Ostatnie badania nad okresem rewolucji w Niderlandach', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxviii, 2 (1971), 366–9.

³⁶ Maria Bogucka, *Żelazny książę i żebracy. Z dziejów rewolucji w Niderlandach* (Warszawa, 1961).

³⁷ Stanisław Grzybowski in a review published in *Acta Poloniae Historica* (37 [1978], 223–6, here 223) stated that such a division made Maria Bogucka bring closer the process of the emergence of the Dutch state and nation, and Jan Balicki described how state and nation functioned.

³⁸ Balicki and Bogucka, *Historia Holandii* (edn 1989), 6.

This synthesis was widely reviewed in scholarly journals. Gerard Labuda (1916–2010) judged that it had enriched the poor knowledge of Poles concerning the “homeland of tulips”. He only felt that the authors had paid too little attention to Dutch-Polish contacts.³⁹ Jerzy Wojtowicz (1924–96) offered the same demurrer but more emphatically. He stated that:

The Polish reader will surely not be satisfied with the laconic paragraph of the first chapter of the second part, with only 32 lines, entitled: ‘Kontakty z Polską’ [Contacts with Poland] [...]. Two sentences summed up the diverse and centuries-long relations between Gdańsk and the Netherlands, well known to specialists in the field of economic history and art history but much less known to a wide circle of readers, who will surely find this book a most valuable read.⁴⁰

In fairness, it must be said that this was not a criticism directed against Bogucka, but rather Balicki, the author of the second part. However, the fragment was not extended in the second edition, which was published in 1989.⁴¹ Maria Bogucka, on the other hand, expanded slightly the fragments of the chapters devoted to the history of the Netherlands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which was possible thanks to her two academic sojourns, which took place after the publication of the first edition and saw her residing in Paris and in Wassenaar (the Netherlands). It should be noted that this synthesis has yet to be replaced in Polish historiography.

From the beginning of her scholarly activity, Maria Bogucka dealt with the history of cities,⁴² especially Gdańsk, the doctoral dissertation subject.⁴³ Interest in this issue not only resulted in numerous publications on this subject but was also crowned with the writing,

³⁹ Gerard Labuda, [Review], *Roczniki Historyczne*, xlv (1978), 205–7, here 206.

⁴⁰ Jerzy Wojtowicz, [Review], *Zapiski Historyczne*, xliii, 2 (1978), 101–2, here 102.

⁴¹ Balicki and Bogucka, *Historia Holandii*, 223–4.

⁴² Maria Bogucka co-authored with Stanisław Arnold the chapter ‘Economic development of cities’ (chronologically related to the second half of the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth centuries) in the second edition of Polish history, prepared by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences; Henryk Łowmiański (ed.), *Historia Polski*, i, Part 2 (do 1764) (Warszawa, 1958²), 107–46; (Warszawa, 1960³), 107–46.

⁴³ Maria Bogucka, *Gdańskie rzemiosło tekstylne od XVI do połowy XVII wieku* (Warszawa, 1956).

together with Henryk Samsonowicz (1930–2021), of a synthesis devoted to the history of cities and townspeople in pre-partition Poland.⁴⁴ Maria Bogucka was the author of the second part of this book, concerning the history of towns and burghers in the early modern era. Over eleven chapters, the author discusses the political and social framework of urban development; a new stage of urbanisation (in the sixteenth century, when mainly private towns were founded); the typology of cities based on demographic criteria; the typology of towns based on the ownership and legal criterion and the function criterion; the economic foundations of city development; political, social and ethnic structures and group conflicts in cities; spatial and socio-topographic foundations of cities; changes in living conditions in cities; the Reformation in cities; urban culture from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century and attempts at urban reform in the era of the Enlightenment. It should be noted that in this book, Bogucka clearly indicated and proved that in the early modern times in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, aside from the noble culture, which some historians (led by Janusz Tazbir) considered as a national culture, there was also a burgher culture.

The work of the Polish historians was appreciated by Hugo Weczerka (1930–2021), who stated that they had written a factually rich book corresponding to modern studies of the history of cities. This study could, in his opinion, be helpful to German historians for comparative purposes, but there is a language barrier,⁴⁵ which in this case entailed a poor knowledge of the Polish language among German historians.⁴⁶

In turn, Jerzy Topolski (1928–98) published a review of the synthesis mentioned above in one of the then-popular and opinion-forming Polish socio-cultural magazines. Referring to the part written by Maria Bogucka, he stated, among other things, that the author “managed to bring out both the process of urban development in early modern

⁴⁴ Maria Bogucka and Henryk Samsonowicz, *Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce przedrozbiorowej* (Wrocław, 1986), 673.

⁴⁵ Hugo Weczerka, [Review], *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, cvii (1989), 213–15, here 215.

⁴⁶ On the knowledge of the Polish language among German historians, recently: Stanisław Salmonowicz, ‘Czy nadal *Polonica non leguntur?*’, in Stanisław Grodziski *et al.* (eds), *Vetera Novis Agere. Studia i prace dedykowane Profesorowi Waclawowi Uruszczakowi*, ii (Kraków, 2010), 883–7.

times and the difficulties of their development, i.e. to show in the most recent literature the full underdevelopment, which is its own kind of a drama of our history. In connection with the fact of the partitions of Poland, this underdevelopment of the city and the bourgeoisie had the longest lasting effects".⁴⁷ He concluded that the work of Bogucka and Samsonowicz, "being the history of Polish cities and the Polish townspeople, is at the same time the history of our great and difficult past. When reading this clearly written text, we are also reading – through the prism of a certain issue – a work about the entire history of Poland".⁴⁸ He only shared a reservation about the overly brief descriptions of the histories of cities in the eighteenth century.

A critical review was written by Tomasz Polański (b. 1956). In his opinion, although the authors had written a synthesis based on the latest research and accurately identified several significant problems concerning cities and their inhabitants, they had failed to cover all aspects of urban life. As a result, the book had, in his opinion, shortcomings that significantly detracted from its value.⁴⁹ The main drawback for Polański was the underestimation of the role of the Jewish population in the history of cities located in the Polish-Lithuanian state, the more so as in 1791 Jews constituted 9 per cent of the 11,000,000 inhabitants, and "of these, 9 per cent lived in cities" and took an active part in their spatial, architectural, economic and cultural development.⁵⁰ He also accused Samsonowicz and Bogucka of not using the literature on the subject concerning the Jewish population. He did not complain about the lack of literature in Hebrew but in Polish and in congress languages. Thus, the failure to take into account the role of this population made the picture of the history of cities in the Polish-Lithuanian state in the Middle Ages and early modern times "unfortunately incomplete".⁵¹

Tomasz Polański's criticisms were indeed off the mark. For Maria Bogucka, in her part of the synthesis, devoted a dozen or so pages

⁴⁷ Jerzy Topolski, 'Miasta w Polsce przedrozbiorowej', *Kultura*, iii, 21 (27 May 1987), 14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Tomasz Polański, 'History of Towns and Burghers in Pre-partition Poland', in Anthony Polonsky (ed.), *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry, v: New Research, New Views* (Oxford, 1990), 366–71, here 366.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 369.

to ethnic, national, and religious structures, writing most extensively about the Jewish population.⁵² She stressed that most of the Jews lived in the cities, creating a ‘second city estate’ as they could not make recourse to city law. Of course, it was possible, even on the basis of the state of research at that time, to write much more about the role and significance of the Jewish population in the life of cities, but the established scope of the synthesis limited the authors. It should also be noted that we are still waiting for a modern synthesis of the history of Jews, which would show their role and importance not only in the life of cities but also in the Polish-Lithuanian state in early modern times.⁵³

From the beginning of her academic career, Maria Bogucka attached great importance to researching and writing about the history of culture. We can find, for example, an extensive chapter on the culture of Eastern Pomerania in the Renaissance and Baroque periods published in a collected synthesis devoted to its history.⁵⁴ This interest in and appreciation of the role of culture in social life resulted in the publication in 1987 of another synthesis in Maria Bogucka’s output, this time devoted to the history of Polish culture until 1918.⁵⁵

It should be mentioned that the first synthesis of the history of Polish culture was published in the early 1930s, and its author was Aleksander Brückner (1856–1939).⁵⁶ Another was published fifty years later, penned by Bogdan Suchodolski (1903–92).⁵⁷ While Brückner, in the introduction to his work, did not inform the reader

⁵² Bogucka and Samsonowicz, *Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa*, 466–76.

⁵³ Jacek Wijaczka, ‘The Role and Significance of the Jews in the Economy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: The State of Research and Research Directions’, in Antony Polonsky, Hanna Węgrzynek, and Andrzej Żbikowski (eds), *New Directions in the History of the Jews in the Polish Lands* (Boston, 2018), 231–54.

⁵⁴ Maria Bogucka, ‘Kultura Pomorza Wschodniego w dobie renesansu i baroku’, in Gerard Labuda (ed.), *Historia Pomorza*, ii: *Do roku 1815*, Part 1: (1464/66–1648/57) (Poznań, 1976), 526–642.

⁵⁵ Maria Bogucka, *Dzieje kultury polskiej do 1918 roku* (Wrocław, 1987), 436 pp., 214 ills, 2nd edition, amended (Wrocław, 1991²).

⁵⁶ Aleksander Brückner, *Dzieje kultury*, i–iii (Kraków, 1930–1931). The fourth volume of this synthesis was published in Warsaw in 1946, after its author’s death.

⁵⁷ Bogdan Suchodolski, *Dzieje kultury polskiej* (Warszawa, 1980; print: 1981); 2nd edition, amended and expanded, Warszawa 1986 (print: 1987); English-language edition: *A History of Polish Culture*, transl. E[dward] J[ózef] Czerwiński (Warsaw, 1986; print: 1987); German edition: *Geschichte der polnischen Kultur*, übertr. von Kordula

what he meant by the concept of culture and the history of culture.⁵⁸ Suchodolski saw cultural history as being the history of social identity, expressed “in a multifaceted language of events and processes, institutions and organisations, intellectual and artistic creativity; manifests itself as a special internal reality, homogeneous, although full of internal contradictions, permanent, although always changing in development”.⁵⁹ Although Suchodolski's work was undoubtedly an original attempt to synthesise Poles' social and national identity, because of its methodology, factual errors, selection of facts and ideological burdens, the book ended up mainly panned by reviewers.⁶⁰

Maria Bogucka, on the other hand, understood the concept of ‘culture’ as “a set of material and non-material human creations, as well as socially recognised ways of being, coupled with value systems typical for a given era and the studied land”.⁶¹ Therefore, in the work, Bogucka placed particular emphasis on showing various aspects of the life and achievements of people living in the territory of the Polish (Polish-Lithuanian) state from the dawn of history to the end of the First World War. She distinguished three stages of shaping Polish culture and outlined the mechanisms that dominate them. The first stage chronologically brought readers to the end of the Middle Ages, the second covered the early modern period, and the third took us from the turn of the nineteenth century until the regaining of independence in 1918. The first stage, until the end of the fifteenth century, was comparable to the development of culture in other European countries. The second stage, covering the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, was the domination of noble culture in the Polish-Lithuanian state, resulting in a different cultural development compared to Western European countries. In turn, the loss of statehood at the end of the eighteenth century meant that until 1918 the

Zubrzycka *et al.* (Warschau, 1986, print: 1987); 3rd edition, amended and expanded (Warszawa, 1997); chapter ‘Polska po roku 1945’ written by Jerzy Adamski.

⁵⁸ Janina Kulczycka-Saloni, ‘Brückner jako historyk kultury polskiej’, *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, xxxiv, 5/6 (1989), 1–7, here 3.

⁵⁹ Suchodolski, *Dzieje kultury polskiej*, 5.

⁶⁰ See Tadeusz Oracki, ‘Bogdana Suchodolskiego wizja kultury narodowej’, *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 3–4 (1988), 403–15. This reviewer even stated that the comparison of Suchodolski's synthesis with Brückner's favoured of the older author.

⁶¹ Bogucka, *Dzieje kultury polskiej do 1918 roku*, 6.

main idea in Polish society was to glorify the past and the feeling of personal and social freedom.

Bogucka's synthesis had a chronological order and consisted of eighteen chapters in which the author presented issues related to shaping social relations, customs and education. Written in the 1980s, so still in the times of socialism, the work did have some limitations. This was pointed out by Hugo Weczerka, who stated that the book shows restraint in describing the achievements of Polish culture in Lithuania and Ruthenia, especially Lwów and Wilno/Vilnius.⁶²

Contrary to Bogdan Suchodolski's synthesis, reviewers received Maria Bogucka's work much more favourably.⁶³ One of them, Czesław Hernas (1928–2003), stated:

So we have a synthesis of the thousand-year history of culture. It is not a collective synthesis, written for various voices, but an author's synthesis, created with one pen, searching for a humanistic synthesis over specialist areas of research and continuity in the changing picture of the epochs, consistent in its conception and broadly delineated narrative – in the precise definition of the term – but somehow internally hierarchical, in line with a personal perception, which is the natural right for an author's synthesis.⁶⁴

Hernas positively assessed the “saturation of concrete facts – data, names, dates, which sometimes seemed seemingly distant from the focus of the study” announced in the ‘Introduction’; and, in his opinion, realised in the narrative. Indeed, for Hernas, it was one of the book's strong suits.⁶⁵ It should be noted that Maria Bogucka's synthesis aroused great interest among readers. Published in a print run of 30,000 copies, it quickly disappeared from the bookstores.

After 1989, which meant after the transformation, Bogucka returned to the synthesis of the history of Polish culture, looking to “present the birth and sketch the main elements of the evolution of Polish

⁶² Weczerka, [Review], 215.

⁶³ Reviews were written by Andrzej Wyczański, ‘Historyk widzi inaczej’, *Polityka*, xxxii, 38 (17 Sept. 1988), 10; Isabel Röskau-Rydel, ‘Geschichte der polnischen Kultur von ihren Anfängen bis 1918’, *Österreichische Osthefte*, xxx, 4 (1988), 553–5; Jiří Pešek, [Review], *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis*, xxix, 1 (1989), 150–2; Lech Mokrzejcki, [Review], *Rocznik Gdański*, 1, 1 (1990), 283–5.

⁶⁴ Czesław Hernas, ‘Synteza kultury polskiej’, *Literatura Ludowa. Dwumiesięcznik Naukowo-Literacki*, 4–6 (1989), 125–30, here 126.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

culture until 1989, based on an analysis of the development of its collective makeup – Polish society living on Polish lands”.⁶⁶ Therefore, the main subject of the synthesis became the entire life of Polish society, “in all its most important manifestations”.⁶⁷ The time intervals adopted by Bogucka: 1795, 1918, 1939, 1945 and 1989, fulfilled “only a conventional, ordering function, because the history of culture is woven together from long-term processes, from entire chains of events that overlap and create threads that travel through the centuries”.⁶⁸ The author noted that her study on the history of Polish culture “in a sense” made recourse to the syntheses of Aleksander Brückner,⁶⁹ Bogdan Suchodolski, and her own book from 1987.⁷⁰ She noted, however, that the new synthesis differed from the previous ones in that it was not about a statement of facts and a recreation of processes, but rather an attempt “to explore the deeper meaning of the functioning of culture in the history of Poland”.⁷¹ Maria Bogucka emphasised the importance of culture in the history of the Polish nation in the last sentence of the introduction: “If, being on the threshold of the twenty-first century, despite the dramatic historical turmoil, we still exist on the map of Europe, it is only because Polish culture survived the most severe trials of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: saving our national identity, and thus saving us all”.⁷²

In her conclusion, Maria Bogucka did not fail to emphasise her reflection on “the heterogeneity of the development of Polish culture”. While until the end of the Middle Ages, it had developed analogously to the processes taking place in other European countries, the situation changed entirely in early modern times. In the Middle Ages, all

⁶⁶ Maria Bogucka, *Kultura. Naród. Trwanie. Dzieje kultury polskiej od zarania do 1989 roku* (Warszawa, 2008), 746, here 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ It is worth noting that in 1991 Aleksander Brückner's synthesis was reedited, *Dzieje kultury polskiej*, i–iv (Warszawa, 1991). It was a reprint of the Cracow edition (Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza) from the years 1930–1. The idea for the new edition was supported by, for example, Janusz Tazbir, ‘Brücknerowska synteza dziejów kultury po latach’, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, xxvi, 2 (1992), 3–17, who only in passing (half a sentence) mentioned the synthesis published by Maria Bogucka.

⁷⁰ Maria Bogucka, *Dzieje kultury polskiej do 1918 r.* (Wrocław, 1987); (Wrocław, 1991²).

⁷¹ *Ead.*, *Kultura. Naród. Trwanie*, 8–9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 9.

social groups and strata (including peasants and townspeople) had an influence and participation in the development of culture, while in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, as a result of the breakdown of social balance, culture ended up being dominated by the nobility (about 5–6 per cent of the population). As a result, as Bogucka concluded: “The ‘one-directional’ culture, created by one group and imposed by that group on the whole of society as a national culture, had to be a one-sided, limited and to some extent an incomplete creation”.⁷³ This resulted in a different cultural development compared to Western European countries. Contrary to hopes, the situation did not change in the tragic nineteenth century. After the final collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian state in 1795, Polish culture was subordinated to the idea of regaining independence, which still resulted in it being different from European culture and remaining as a construct of the Polish nobility.

Stanisław Salmonowicz (1931–2022), an outstanding historian of law known for his sharp assessments of the achievements of Polish historiography, when reviewing Maria Bogucka’s work, this time around concluded:

We are dealing with a much-needed work of great scope. It is not a history of culture written (as it used to be the case) by a historian of Polish literature, which allowed the author to balance economic, social and moral-civilisational issues on the one hand and the achievements of the so-called expressive culture in various fields on the other. All in all, as a synthesis or a textbook, in the best sense of the word, it warrants careful reading. The work is written in an interesting and accessible way, which makes it ideal not only for students and specialists but also for a wider circle of readers.⁷⁴

The syntheses proposed by Maria Bogucka had one common denominator: they were all written at a very high professional level. This is evidenced by even the very small number of substantive errors mentioned in the reviews. In this regard, it is enough to compare the reviews of the history of Polish culture written by Suchodolski and Bogucka.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 708.

⁷⁴ Stanisław Salmonowicz, ‘Kultury narodowej obraz piórem historyka’, *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, liv, 1 (2010), 3–20, here 19–20.

The syntheses were objective, as Maria Bogucka avoided the making of extreme judgments, which met with the approval of reviewers. Kazimierz Maliszewski, referring to the chapters on Polish culture in the years 1945–89 in her synthesis from 2008, stated: “The author revealed the ‘light and shade’ of this complex and difficult era, endeavouring to maintain objectivity, avoiding simplifications and the ideological jam that we often encounter in the works of many contemporary historians, who, because of their age, do not know the reality of that time, its complexities, as well as the contradictory, often completely incomprehensible attitudes and actions of people living in those times”.⁷⁵

All her works, including the discussed syntheses, were written on the basis of extensive source materials and insightful knowledge of the literature on the subject, thanks to which she could convincingly substantiate “her own various statements and opinions”.⁷⁶ Maria Bogucka had quite consistent views on the history of Poland. This was confirmed by the same criticism which appeared several decades apart and raised by two different reviewers: that she did not appreciate the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the Polish state’s history. In 1965 such an accusation was made by Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa, and in 2009 by Kazimierz Maliszewski. Their criticisms, however, failed to understand Maria Bogucka’s objectivity and non-adherence to religious affiliation.

Maria Bogucka’s syntheses on the history of Poland, the history of Polish culture, the history of Polish cities and the townspeople in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and the history of the Netherlands clearly confirm that she was one of the most outstanding Polish historians of the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; having brought to bear on her own work the historian’s craft, fluency in several foreign languages, and a dedication to the mountainous tasks she had set herself. She freely moved between the Middle Ages and the early modern era, whilst elucidating the history of Polish culture also in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her synthesis of the history of the Netherlands in the Middle Ages and the early modern era, would also prove to be a ground-breaking work,

⁷⁵ Kazimierz Maliszewski, ‘Uwagi i refleksje na marginesie lektury najnowszej syntezy dziejów kultury polskiej’, *Czasy Nowożytne*, xxiii (2010), 259–71, here 267.

⁷⁶ Mokrzecki, [Review], 285.

distinguishing her clearly from among the historians (one can also mention Antoni Mączak) of her generation.

trans. Barry Keane

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