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‘THE FIRST PRIVATE MUSEUM’ IN COMMUNIST POLAND (60 YEARS OF THE REGIONAL MUSEUM IN BARLINEK, P. 1)

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Introduction

The title of the present paper is by no means accidental; neither does it stem from the aspiration of the Barlinek Museum to stand out as an extraordinary institution on the map of Western Pomerania museology. Instead, it was inspired by a press note published in 1963, first in the national press, and then reiterated by a regional periodical.¹ Still in 1967 and 1970, the Barlinek Museum was referred to as a private initiative.² The adoption of such an organizational model was not ordinary in post-WW II Poland, this confirmed by the Act on Obligatory Nationalization of All Museums adopted in 1950.³ As can be judged, a decade later the situation had not improved, however such museums were looked at more as a curiosity, possibly as the sign of the new times, but no longer as an ideological enemy. The Barlinek Museum was founded as a Memento Hall in December 1961 by the local social activist, regionalist, and local government official Czesław Paśnik.

The founder is an extremely intriguing personality, since in his biography we can find traces of the history of forced labourers, the first hosts of the so-called Regained Territories, and culture activists who with their own hands, practically without any support from regional authorities, built Polish historical heritage in Western Pomerania from scratch.

Born in Płońsk on 14 January 1919,⁴ also in Płońsk he finished primary school in 1935, following which he started

a 3-year-long vocational school, earning his living as a mechanical fitter. The outburst of WW II found him in Warsaw where he worked for the State Engineering Plant. As a result of a street round-up, in June 1940, he was arrested and sent to Pomerania as a forced labourer. There, he initially worked as a farmhand in Rzepnowo near Pyrzyce (German *Repenow*), however on his own request in 1942 he was transferred to Pyrzyce where he was employed in a repair workshop, travelling across the whole county as a fitter. When in winter 1945 the front was approaching Pomerania, Paśnik decided to cycle (!) into the Reich's interior (Mecklenburg) to escape the fights. It was there that he awaited 'the liberation' by the Red Army, and from there he returned to Pyrzyce.⁵ As of August 1945 he lived in Barlinek, where almost from the onset he presented himself as an animator of cultural life, committed to establishing scouting's structures as well as to working in the local government and tourism. From 1965 Paśnik acted as a social guardian of historic monuments, winning numerous awards, e.g., from the Szczecin Voivode for cultural and academic activity (26 April 1974), from the authorities of the city and the county, as well as from social organisations. On 31 January 1978, thus immediately prior to his retirement, Paśnik was chosen the most Popular Barlinek Resident in the contest held by the T. Kościuszko Primary School No. 1.

Regrettably, for unknown reasons, Paśnik's retirement occurred in the atmosphere of tensions or even conflict with

the town's authorities. Owing to his health problems, on 10 October 1978, Paśnik submitted a letter to the Barlinek Town and County Office requesting authorization to retire prematurely.⁶ Thanks to a positive reply of the authorities, on 1 March 1979, Czesław Paśnik retired. However, some financial questions remained pending, these related to a due monetary equivalent for his 1979 holidays. The Barlinek Office having failed to handle the issue, in October 1979, Paśnik filed a relevant complaint with the Voivodeship Office in Gorzów Wielkopolski.⁷ The intervention of a higher instance proved effective: next to the pending holiday equivalent, Paśnik was also to receive a 'bonus'.⁸

The undertone of the complaint submitted by Czesław Paśnik to Gorzów Wielkopolski reveals his deep disenchantment and sadness. Quite obviously, the founder of the Barlinek Museum felt unappreciated and personally offended when the town authorities showed no reaction whatsoever to his application. He emphasized that he had *donated to the town all his collection free of charge*: chronicles, press clippings, and archival records collected over many years, as well as, importantly, *a set of museum exhibits of high historical value*. Unfortunately, when retiring Paśnik took with him a substantial portion of the exhibits. It was not recorded how big the part of the collection was and which exhibits they were. All that is known is that it contained coins and cold steel. Paśnik passed away in 1981.

A future biographer of Czesław Paśnik (who decidedly deserves a biography) will conveniently have at his or her disposal a rich set of documents left and related to the Barlinek Museum. Paśnik himself wrote several autobiographies and recollections, now kept in the Pomeranian Library in Szczecin,⁹ State Archive in Szczecin,¹⁰ as well as in the archive of the Barlinek Museum. In the latter, we can also find town's chronicles run by Paśnik and newspaper clippings related both to Barlinek and the Museum. However, they contain no mention of the most embarrassing episode in Paśnik's life, namely his cooperation with the Security Service, SB.

The archive of the Szczecin Branch of the Institute of National Remembrance, IPN, contains a file, (unfortunately, partially disintegrated in 1990) and related to running a contact facility (LK) in Barlinek in 1968–78 code-named 'LM-4'.¹¹ The case of candidate LK was launched in September 1969 by Security Service Second Lieutenant R. Salak working for the County Citizens' Militia, MO, Headquarters in Myślibórz, a personal acquaintance of Czesław Paśnik. Maybe that is why he was chosen for the task. Meanwhile, the needs of the Security Service were enormous: *I justify the selection of the candidate to become L.K. with operational needs, in Barlinek, our unit has only one L.K. facility which owing to the extensive network of secret collaborators: t.ws, is insufficient. Additionally, plans have been made to acquire further t.ws. Holding meetings in the open air makes working with agents merely superficial, limits the possibility of systematic training of secret collaborators (tws). A contact facility, L.K. will allow a better use of the already recruited agents and better camouflage of the meetings held with them.*¹² Interestingly, when nine years later SB decided to stop collaboration with Paśnik, the decision was justified with e.g., the fact that *in Barlinek there was no longer need [to use the facility: R.S.] owing to the scarcity of sources [information, thus t.ws.: R.S.]*.¹³

Initially, it was Paśnik's private flat that served as the contact facility. In February 1973, the Museum office took over this function (the latter complying with the same rules as the first).¹⁴ After Paśnik had informed about his planned retirement (January 1979), he suggested that the Security Service could resume meetings in his private flat. However, SB did not accept that proposal, and the collaboration ceased.

One could pose a question what really motivated Czesław Paśnik, a well-connected individual in the town, a social activist, 'not a member of the Communist Party' (he was member of the Alliance of Democrats, SD, a satellite of the United Workers' Party, PZPR,) to collaborate with SB? He must have been aware of unfavourable perception to say the least of the officials of the security apparatus by the majority of Poles, and, first of all, of the individuals collaborating with them. It seems that the main motivation (if not the only one) was financial reward. Paśnik received 300 zlotys monthly (paid quarterly) for his collaboration. In order to illustrate zlotys' purchasing power let us quote the following: the first expense aimed at adapting Paśnik's flat to serve as a contact facility was allocated to the *purchase of an electric kettle (I-75 type) with electric wire*¹⁵ standing at 273 zlotys. It was stated in the profile prepared for the case that *The remuneration Paśnik will receive will improve to a degree his financial standing, since he purchases exhibits for the Regional Museum with his own resources. It is his 'hobby'*.¹⁶ It can thus be cautiously hypothesized that Czesław Paśnik decided to collaborate with SB firstly because of his deplorable financial standing (he did not even own a kettle!), since he allocated all his pay to the continuous purchases for the Museum. He never had a family, and apart from the Museum legacy he left behind no possessions, while the Museum was for him the only thing he dedicated his time and money to.

From a Memento Hall to a museum

The Museum, or strictly speaking the Memento Hall, functioned as of early December 1961. In the *Chronicle of the Town of Barlinek (Kronika miasta Barlinek)* Czesław Paśnik wrote: *On 8 December 1961, the so-called Memento Hall, namely the dawn of the future Regional Museum of Barlinek, was opened.*¹⁷ Even this brief note demonstrates that the concept of the Hall was merely temporary in order to pass to a museum in the future. Regardless of this, almost from the onset Paśnik applied the term 'museum' to describe his institution, which was the reason why the National Museum in Szczecin reprimanded him. This hyperbolic name to denote, after all, a small institution was often reiterated by Paśnik.

For the first several months the Hall was housed in Paśnik's private flat at 7 Wylotowa Street. The first collection, actually quite accidental, contained all possible mementoes of the town's history, particularly the most recent one, but also occasional findings from the area (e.g., coins). On 20 July 1962, the Hall (by that time called already 'Museum Hall') was transferred to a new facility at 64 Niepodległości Street assigned for the purpose by the Presidium of the Town National Council, MRN. Its opening was attended by representatives of the town government and of the Museum of Western Pomerania (later: National Museum) in Szczecin.

During the first period of its operation (until the early 1970s) the institution was open only on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 5 pm to 7 pm. This resulted from the regular employment responsibilities of its founder who could open the Hall and welcome visitors only after his office hours. On some special occasions visiting could be arranged by appointment on other days, while in 1963–65, 'Days' of Sunday visiting of the 'Hall' for the town community were also held. The latter allowed 1.300 individuals to visit the institution.¹⁸ Since the facility boasted merely a small surface, the Hall's display capacity was strongly limited. However, the Hall often held activities outside its own premises. To quote one example: in May 1964, Paśnik and his Museum Hall and Archive (this being yet another mutation of the institution's name) co-hosted a meeting with Barlinek's pioneers to celebrate 20 years of Communist Poland, PRL, held at the so-called Forrester's Hall of the Barlinek Timber Plant.¹⁹

According to Paśnik, his collection of the time came from his activity 'in the field' and some mementoes were acquired from the local community. He put the main emphasis on documenting the period following 1945, which in his intention appealed best to the residents and tourists. Actually, he had the latter on his mind when establishing the Hall. From the very beginning Paśnik perceived an unbreachable correlation between tourism and preservation of cultural legacy. He presented this attitude on a number of occasions, e.g., when as a social guardian of historic monuments he submitted reports on the condition of historic monuments in Barlinek and its vicinity to the Social Committee for the Protection of Historic Monuments of the Szczecin Region in Szczecin. In the early 1970s, in the final years of the Hall's operation, when Barlinek was inhabited by ca 7.000 residents, over the holiday season (June–September 1972), it was visited by over 3.000 individuals.²⁰ This undoubtedly resulted from intense tourism in this holiday town and the tourists' interest in the town's history.

A turning point in the operation of Paśnik's institution was the 'establishment' of the Regional Museum meant to take over the legacy of the Memento Hall. As recalled by Romana Kaszczyk, an artist and activist of the Society of Barlinek's Enthusiasts, TMB, after the election of the organization's Board members in 1970, a battle was launched [...] to legalize Czesław Paśnik's collection as well as to obtain a facility to house it and employment allowance at the Museum.²¹ The undertone of impatience with the temporary character of the Hall lasting for almost a decade was tangible, since despite the grandiloquent name of 'museum' applied all were perfectly aware that one room in the library basement did not satisfy the ambition either of Paśnik himself or anybody involved. Thus, the efforts were intensified to reclassify the Memento Hall into a Regional Museum.

An important document illustrating the process can be found in the report on an inspection conducted in Barlinek and Myślibórz on 2 December 1971 by the Director of the National Museum in Szczecin Władysław Filipowiak, PhD.²² It was in this report that for the first time an 'official' claim to change the legal status of Paśnik's institution was formulated: *The situation with the facility housing the Hall and particularly with the materials (exhibits) have matured sufficiently for a Regional Museum to be established in Barlinek.* Further on, the following can be read: *In view*

of the above situation and the real achievements of social activism, the National Museum in Szczecin proposes to establish a Regional Museum in Barlinek, and as of mid-1972 to allocate a full-time employment standing at 2.500 zlotys for the purpose (Manager of research status boasting tertiary education) as well as a relevant award for Citizen Czesław Paśnik, the founder of the institution. It thus seems clear that in Filipowiak's intention Paśnik was not to run the newly-established institution (he was not a university graduate). This point is actually referred to elsewhere in the report: *From mid-1972 there opens an exceptional opportunity to employ a professional to head the institution (a graduate from the University of Poznan whose husband is an economist and will find a good job in Barlinek).* Regrettably, the name of that graduate remains unidentified in writing, however it is obvious that the status transformation of the Memento Hall into a Regional Museum was to imply personal changes as well.

It is highly likely that MRN made the relevant decision on 1 January 1973. At least this can be deduced from the letter Paśnik sent to the National Museum in Szczecin,²³ and that is what he wrote in his *Chronicle*, mentioning that this also implied giving an official full-time employment status to previously voluntary work.²⁴ Meanwhile, in *Jantarowe Szlaki* the very same author confessed that he had become a full-time employee of the Museum (manager) a full year earlier. Even more confusion is produced by the 'Chronicle of the 30 Years of Barlinek' ('Kronika XXX-lecia Barlinka') also published in the same issue of *Jantarowe Szlaki* and authored by... Czesław Paśnik. In this particular article there is no mention of Paśnik having become the Museum's director, although in the entry dated 22 April 1972 there is information provided on the new Museum's premises being opened.²⁵ The dotting of the i's and crossing the t's was provided 22 pages further on by Czesław Piskorski who characterizing Paśnik informed that the current at the time (1975) Museum facility had been allocated to it in 1971.²⁶ It seems correct to say that the Hall was transformed into a Museum in January 1973, while the new premises had been allocated to Paśnik (already a full-time employer of the Memento Hall as of January 1973) a year earlier in April. The information provided by Piskorski is an obvious error. Such beginning of the Museum is confirmed by, e.g., a note in *Głos Szczeciński: On Czesław Paśnik's initiative a dozen or so years ago the so-called Memento Hall was established, at the beginning of the current year [1973] transformed into a Regional Museum.*²⁷

Upon the reclassifying of the Hall as a Museum the question of the new institution's charter emerged. Having been elaborated at the National Museum in Szczecin, it was submitted to the Barlinek MRN in October 1973.²⁸ The Council authorized the draft not introducing any alterations, and passed a resolution on 20 November giving the Barlinek Museum its Charter. In compliance with its provisions the institution structurally reported to the Barlinek MRN Presidium; its factual supervision having been assigned to the National Museum in Szczecin. Its operations were a responsibility of the manager who was to be assisted by two research staff members and a cleaner. Thus a small regional museum was founded whose work and operation should (as stipulated by the Charter) complement the operation of the museum in Myślibórz, the county's capital.

The above-mentioned (see endnote 23) admonition voiced by the National Museum in Szczecin that every museum should be established by a minister responsible for it, on the one hand demonstrates Paśnik's high ambitions, while on the other his relatively small interest in (and possibly his lack of recognition) administrative procedures going beyond the county and related to museological activity. This is also proven by the fact that in the reports published annually in *Materiały Zachodniopomorskie* submitted to

Szczecin by museums from Western Pomerania we would look for reports from Barlinek to no avail. Therefore, it seems that the activity of Czesław Paśnik, although standing out within the Voivodeship, was of private character from the very beginning. This lack of 'efficient seeing to things' can to a degree be also visible today: the Barlinek Museum has no organizational and legal autonomy, and continues to operate within the structure of the Barlinek Cultural Centre.

Abstract: The paper discusses the establishment and the first decade of the operation of a small regional museum in Western Pomerania and one of the first in the region: in Barlinek. It provides an example of an institution whose operation over the years was based on the energy of two subsequent managers. Supported merely marginally by local-government institutions, they ran and developed one of the few of the type cultural institutions in the region. From the beginning of the Barlinek institution's operation (founded in

1961), it stood out as the 'first private' museum in Poland, this emphasized not merely by the local, but also national press. When running the Museum, its founder Czesław Paśnik did not stop his social and political activism, focusing mainly on heritage preservation and promotion of the regional history. The only shadow cast on this period of his activity is Paśnik's collaboration with the Security Service, SB, however, as documents reveal, he consented to do so in order to provide financing for the Museum.

Keywords: museology in Western Pomerania, Museology in the Lubusz Land, Barlinek Museum, Barlinek's history.

Endnotes

- ¹ The first very brief mention was published in *Express Wieczorny* ('Tylko Barlinek posiada prywatne muzeum', 9 February 1963, 33), the second was in *Kurier Szczeciński* ("Prywatne" hobby Czesława Paśnika, 17-18 March 1963, 64). In the latter it was added that this is *private regional museum, the only such one in the Voivodeship*.
- ² 'Prywatne muzeum', *Wrocławski Tygodnik Katolików* 10 September 1967; 'Prywatne muzeum dokumentów polskości', *Słowo Powszechne* 17 August 1970, 196. The latter article (anonymous) is quite extensive, but it had ceased being relevant three years before the publication.
- ³ F. Midura, 'Rozwój muzealnictwa w okresie czterdziestolecia PRL', *Muzealnictwo*, 33, (1896), (p. 5).
- ⁴ For an extensive biography of C. Paśnik see S. Rewers, G. Przybyłski, *Śladami pionierów Barlinka*, ed. by E.H. Dzierbunowicz (Piła: 2019), pp. 274-276.
- ⁵ Some of the repatriated individuals who attempted to return to Poland following their forced labour or POW camps, were obliged to settle down in the so-called Regained Territories. *Halted by the Headquarters operating within this area and Soviet units as well as those establishing Polish administration, they were sent to e.g., farms and instructed to immediately start field works*. K. Rembacka, 'Początek. Polscy mieszkańcy Mętna w 1945 r.', *Rocznik Chojeński*, 12 (2020), (p. 22).
- ⁶ Archive of the Regional Museum in Barlinek (AMRB), Cz. Paśnik's letter to the Town and County Office (UMiG) in Barlinek dated 10 October 1978, 1116/XV/2/17.
- ⁷ Complaint with a copy of the letter to UMiG in Barlinek as attachment in the collection of the Regional Museum in Barlinek, no ACNO.
- ⁸ AMRB, Decision No, 5/79 of the Head of the Town and County in Barlinek dated 29 October 1979, 1115/XV/2/16. Here also the reply from the Voivodeship Office in Gorzów Wielkopolski.
- ⁹ These were recollections written for the 'History of Szczecin Families in the 20th Century' Contest in February 1970.
- ¹⁰ State Archives in Szczecin (APS), Fonds: Bogdan Frankiewicz 1923-2003, 188, 227, 299.
- ¹¹ Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Szczecin (AIPN Sz), File: LK/MK, IPN Sz 001/242.
- ¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 6-7; also p. 50.
- ¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 71. Interestingly, *in the 1970s, the tendency to extend the TW network was maintained; only the verification conducted in 1975 resulting from Poland's administrative reform led to its short-term reduction by ca 15 per cent. The economic crisis increasing as of 1976 and intensified dissident activity led to almost doubling the TW number in the second half of the decade*. A. Dudek, A. Paczkowski, 'Polska', in *Czekiści. Organy bezpieczeństwa w europejskich krajach bloku sowieckiego 1944-1989*, ed. by K. Persak, Ł. Kamiński, (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2010), p. 439.
- ¹⁴ AIPN Sz, LK/MK Fonds, IPN Sz 001/242, p. 65.
- ¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 64.
- ¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 51.
- ¹⁷ C. Paśnik, *Kronika miasta Barlinka. Lata 1945-64. Cz. I (Kronika I)*, Regional Museum in Barlinek.
- ¹⁸ AMRB, Commemorative book for entry of public opinion's comments, 15 May 1965, unnumbered pages.
- ¹⁹ *Kronika I*, p. 54.
- ²⁰ C. Paśnik, *Kronika miasta Barlinka. Część III. Od roku 1972 do roku 197 (the last figure missing)* (*Kronika III*), Regional Museum in Barlinek.
- ²¹ R. Kaszczyk, *Towarzystwo Miłośników Barlinka 1969-2009. Fakty, wspomnienia, refleksje...*, (Barlinek: Towarzystwo Miłośników Barlinka, 2009), p. 11. Paśnik himself wrote in *Jantarowe Szlaki* that as of 1969 attempts were started to acquire a larger brighter facility. C. Paśnik, 'Barlineckie muzea', *Jantarowe Szlaki*, 5 (143, 1975), p. 11.

- ²² AMRB, Report on the inspection conducted in the Chamber of Mementoes in Barlinek and the Regional Museum in Myślubórz on 2 December 1971.
- ²³ Ibidem, Ring Binder: Kronikarstwo (2, 5), Sprawy muzealnictwa w powiecie myśliborskim, p. 3. This piece of information was negatively reacted to by the Museum in Szczecin: *We know nothing about establishing the Museum in Barlinek [...] A Museum is founded by the Minister of Culture and Art, and without his authorization the Museum in Barlinek formally does not exist*, Ibidem. Response of Witold Szczepaniec (MNS's Deputy Director) to C. Paśnik's letter. See more: R. Skrycki, 'Czesława Paśnika diagnoza stanu muzealnictwa w powiecie myśliborskim (1973)', *Civitas et Museum. Rocznik Muzeum Pojezierza Myśliborskiego w Myśluborzu*, 1 (2022), (being printed).
- ²⁴ Kronika III, entry under the date 1973. On 28 August 1973, the Director of the National Museum in Szczecin sent a letter to the Town and County Office in Barlinek informing that *Citizen Czesław Paśnik should be classified as a renovator in the remuneration group [...] earning 3.400 zlotys monthly*, APS, National Museum in Szczecin (MNS), Supervision of and correspondence with regional museums 1967-1979, ACNO 189.
- ²⁵ C. Paśnik, 'Kronika XXX-lecia Barlinka (ważniejsze wydarzenia okresu powojennego)', *Jantarowe Szlaki*, 5 (143, 1975), (p. 16).
- ²⁶ C. Piskorski, 'Czesław Paśnik – regionalista', *Jantarowe Szlaki* 5 (143, 1975), p. 38.
- ²⁷ (bros), 'Propozycje godne zastanowienia – Muzeum Regionalne. Dla utrwalenia naszych dziejów', *Głos Szczeciński* 5 April 1973.
- ²⁸ APS, MNS, Supervision of and correspondence with regional museums 1967-1979, ACNO 189. Letter of MNS's Director to the Town Council in Barlinek, 29 October 1973. Here also the Charter and decision of the Town Council in Barlinek, as well as the final version of the document.

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