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Sources for building the memory of historical events: oral history and its contexts in the Chronicle of the Order of Poor Clares in Stary Sącz from 1914–1918

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Abstract

The primary sources for the construction of a memory of historical events in a cloistered community in the light of monastic chronicles are: official information, confirmed media (press) releases, oral testimony of third-party witnesses to events, and oral testimony generated by the monastic community. These sources are subject to verification and valorisation as to their reliability within the chronicle text itself. The multifaceted nature of the accounts and their mutual corroboration (or exclusion) allow the construction of an account of an objectified collective witness to history.

Keywords

social memory research, oral history, monastery chronicle, First World War



“1 September: Whether the situation is indeed so dangerous, whether they are just assuming the worst, we really don’t know! But we are alarmed by the news. The sight of numerous trains with wounded (large red crosses on the wagons) also gives us a sinking feeling”¹ – this is what the chronicler nun of the Stary Sącz convent of the Poor Clares writes under the date of 1 September 1914 in the convent chronicle, adding another thread to the collective historical memory of the image-textual vision of the beginning of the World War. From the windows on the first floor of the convent, perhaps from the slope on which the convent is located, perhaps from the upper garden or the wooden verandas for tuberculosis patients, the chronicler looks out towards the tracks of the Tarnów-Leluchów railway line running along the convent wall. When one reads this passage today, holding the image in the mind’s eye poses no problem.

In this paper, I will focus on tracing the chronicle entries of the Order of Poor Clares in Stary Sącz² from 26 July 1914 to 26 December 1918, a timeframe spanning the growing threat of the impending war, its outbreak, course, and resolution. My working hypothesis is that the chronicle record bears evidence of the difference between direct personal or communal experience and the experience and awareness of processes happening in a spatially distant context: the former (direct) experience is subject to more careful source critique and experiential verification, creating more distrust. I also surmise that an awareness exists of the different motivations for constructing a witness’ narrative of the war as compared to other events – one that is discernible and lends itself to critical verification. Ultimately, the aim of this analysis is to discern what types of data sources there are for the construction of a collective memory of historical events that indirectly, yet unambiguously,

1 “1 września: Czy stan rzeczy istotnie taki niebezpieczny. Czy tylko przypuszczają najgorsze, nie wiemy doprawdy! Jesteśmy jednak tymi wieściami zaniepokojone. Widok licznych pociągów z rannymi (na wagonach duże czerwone krzyże) także wywołuje przygniatające uczucie.” Quotes excerpted from the archive of the Order of Poor Clares in Stary Sącz, Kr/10: the chronicle of St. Kinga Monastery under the Reverend Mother Superior Zofia Serafina Hańska (1911–1916) and Kr/11: the chronicle of St. Kinga Monastery, from the third year of the War (1917) until the end of 1934. The chronicle was being produced continuously from 1844, with sister Maria Franciszka Kruszyńska (1861–1928) chronicling events in years 1900–1928. The chronicler nun was appointed by the mother superior. M. Franciszka Kruszyńska’s 28-year-long appointment as chronicler was an exceptionally long one: chroniclers of the Order of Poor Clares in Stary Sącz customarily held this office for several years, marking the beginning and end of their work in the chronicle in the margins of the main text with formulaic notes: “from now on writes sister...”, “up to this point wrote sister...” The article cites volumes 10 and 11 of the chronicle (A4 in-line format, hard cardboard binding). Volume 10 encompasses 196 pages (handwritten numbering was added later); in Volume 11, entries dated to the text are found on pages 3–18.

2 The convent of the Urbanist Poor Clares in Stary Sącz was founded by the decree of St. Kinga of Poland (Cunegunda) on 6 July 1280.

significantly affect the fate of a particular community, and how these sources are identified, verified, and valorised in the chronicle record itself.

It appears that the cloistered convent community is an ideal subject for a study (at the micro- and macro-scale) of communicative processes of events and narratives, of remembering and the formation of collective memory,³ as well as the formation of communal and individual memory in both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Ultimately, it crystallises in collective memory, here understood as: “a set of perceptions of the members of a community about its past, agreed upon in acts of internal communication and transmitted through intergenerational transmission.”⁴ The Stary Sącz chronicle of the Poor Clares, as well as other creative artefacts of this cloistered community, indicates their keen interest in matters of the world, understood here as the knowledge necessary to understand and interpret the world at large and to intercede for it spiritually to God.⁵

The convent chronicle is not only a source for various historical, demographic, economic and customary studies but also a material for reflection on communication. Such chronicles are often considered and evaluated as manifestly persuasive tools with explicit factual limitations and interpretative distortions. In my view, however, this type of narrative often replicates its historical, geographical, and social milieu and the consciousness and cognitive condition of its community: given the doubts about veristic narrative on the part of the chronicler, I (perhaps somewhat naively) assume that the analysed chronicle is, par excellence, a factual record. Furthermore, in Waldemar Czachur's terms, the analysed chronicle falls into the paradigm of a medium of memory.⁶

The chronicling narrative, obviously depending on the tradition of the place, as well as on inclinations of individual chroniclers, essentially constitutes a conglomeration of entries recording current events concerning the community itself⁷ – constant, with little mobility and limited personal rotation, embedded in the context of the ecclesiastical organisation, the secular community, in the economic

3 This definition follows M. Golka, *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty*, Warszawa 2009, p. 15.

4 J. Nowak, *Społeczne reguły pamiętania. Antropologia pamięci zbiorowej*, Kraków 2011, p. 13.

5 In regard to the convent of Stary Sącz, refer to *O duchowości klariańskiej*, in D. Sułkowska (ed.), *Za klauzurą. Starosądecki klasztor klarysek od założenia do współczesności*, Stary Sącz 2006, pp. 110–115.

6 W. Czachur, *Lingwistyka pamięci. Założenia, zakres badań i metody analizy*, in W. Czachur (ed.), *Pamięć w ujęciu lingwistycznym. Zagadnienia teoretyczne i metodyczne*, Warszawa 2018, p. 17.

7 I exclude here the extensive list of scholarly works on monastic chronicles, as they deal with issues and periods not overlapping with the material under analysis. The 20th century monastic chronicle is not a text commissioned or controlled by external instances or introduced as a cultural novelty, see K. Targosz, *Piórem zakonniczy. Kronikarki w Polsce XVII w. o swoich zakonach i swoich czasach*, Kraków 2002; M. Borkowska OSB, *Łatanie pamięci, czyli rzecz o klasztornym kronikarstwie retrospektywnym*, 'Znak,' vol. 480, no. 5, 1995, pp. 103–110. The activity discussed here is unlike the old practices of reconstructing communal memory and depositing it in the form of textual retrospection.

world and its realities, as well as in the natural life experience, related to the variability of the seasons, harvests and natural disasters, and finally in the greater politics of peace and war. The monastic chronicle was also a place for preserving, and thus shaping, the pragmatic knowledge of people and times, related not only to the local context of the convent's existence but also to broader horizons, sometimes reaching the geographical limits of the known and understood world of the time.

Such is the case of the narrative of the female chroniclers of Sary Sącz convent, who, not only during the war of 1914–1918 but also at other moments of historical significance, did not shrink from keeping score of matters far beyond the narrowly perceived story of their own community and, as they often used to write, of their monastic seclusion in their convent. Interestingly, this perspective appears to have been characteristic of female communities. As Hanna Paulouskaya demonstrates, the world of male convent chronicles tends to be hermetic, recording events but not embedding them within a narrative that would show the real life of the community: most likely, it is crafted that way to project a positive image of the monolithic community vis-à-vis the world outside. Chronicling in women's communities to a larger extent reveals contexts of personal, individual, and communal lives.⁸

The major historical events are recorded and remembered in the discussed chronicle despite the community's apparent disconnection from the outside world. In turn, several research studies on the formation and transmission of memory in the monastic communities demonstrate that this memory and the resulting image of events are often rationalised, sustained and established in such a way that subsequent generations have a far better orientation and self-awareness of the history of past generations and of their relations with the outside world (here understood very broadly, not merely denoting other communities). This memory is shaped and structured, circularly revisited and updated in subsequent generations. Entrants to the community are adults, so they have to learn, among other matters, where they are, what brought about the creation of space they reside in: the history of the place and the community. The chronicle narrative is actualised in view of successive generations of nuns who, during their formative years, become acquainted with excerpts from the chronicles. For them, the chronicle becomes a pedagogical tool, enhancing their awareness of place and underscoring the value of the past – a persuasive tool which shapes the self-awareness of one's participation in the community of past and present members of the convent, their personal and collective experiences, ambitions, and fears, all transmitted through recorded oral history. Grzegorz Marzec writes that any study of memory must consider the fact that “societies remember, and sometimes forget.”⁹

8 Cf. H. Paulouskaya, *Grodzieńskie kroniki klasztorne XVII i XVIII wieku. Formy gatunkowe i aspekty komunikacyjne*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 151–153.

9 G. Marzec, *Ekonomia pamięci*, Warszawa 2016, p. 24. In the case of the cloistered community, remembering works much better than forgetting.

The construction of an established and fossilised narrative,¹⁰ which in time answers the question of what the war was like, is a work of many authors in the convent chronicle: on the one hand, the chronicle narrative is written by a single author at a time (sometimes by a nun known by name, but, in earlier times, most often by an anonymous nun or one who took care not to divulge any identifying details), but, on the other hand, the chronicle also records the convent's general mood, their communal memory, emotion, understanding, interpretation and evaluation of ongoing events. The chronicler (the one assigned that duty at that moment) does not frequently adopt an individual, personal approach or write down her thoughts, observations, or knowledge. Much more often, she tries to show the course of events from an impersonal experiential perspective, one to which any member of the community would relate. Writing in the first-person plural, she makes her community the speaking subject, using verbs in impersonal forms or the third person plural when she indicates the actions of people connected to the community but not part of it, such as monastery labourers. When the chronicler evaluates the period in office of Mother Superior Lucia Kinga Heidinger, she writes that, "let there be this albeit faint acknowledgement by the writer that the Mother Superior ruled wisely, prudently, and, moreover, with a mother's hand",¹¹ immediately adding that she "would like to point out that these words only weakly express the general sentiment, not only of our house, but also of the general populace."¹² I use the entry of July 1902 to indicate that the chronicler is at least volitionally shaping their account as objectified and reflecting the public mood rather than her private views and judgements. Through this shaping, there emerges a mode of relating memory data that employs it to construct a collective identity. Linguisticised memory places the communicating subject at the centre: the said subject, oriented towards cultural and identity values, acts not only as a recorder of events, but also, and perhaps above all, a recorder of the substance (content) of the data in commemorating narratives, here recast as a collective artefact.¹³ The narrative of war reconstructed here, then, is to become an ongoing experience, one foundational to

10 For language as a model for collective memory, cf. M. Wójcicka, *Język pamięci zbiorowej (w kontekście kultury oralności, piśmienności i elektralności). Prolegomena*, in *Pamięć w ujęciu lingwistycznym...*, pp. 68–93.

11 "niech będzie ten acz słaby głos uznania piszącej, że Przew. Matka Ksieni rządziła mądrze, roztropnie, a nadto po macierzyńsku."

12 "Zaznaczam, że słowa te są tylko słabem echem ogółu, nie tylko domu naszego, ale i ogólnego głosu na zewnątrz."

13 I refer here to the model of collective memory as outlined by Wojciech Chlebda, which places memory at the centre, establishing a horizontal tension (between the individual/collective subject of memory and the observer-relator of the memory content) and a vectorial relationship (between the memory content given in the narratives and the object of memory), W. Chlebda, *Pamięć ujęzykowiona*, in J. Adamowski, M. Wójcicka (eds.), *Tradycja dla współczesności. Ciągłość i zmiana*, vol. 6, *Pamięć jako kategoria rzeczywistości kulturowej*, Lublin 2012, p. 116.

the process of remembering history - not in the individual context but through a communal experience of the world and its events. "The preservation of historical memory, a commemorative function, is treated by the authors of the chronicles as one of the most significant. The aspect of memory is emphasised very often in the text."¹⁴

Objectified, impersonal source of knowledge

A review of five years of records in the Stary Sącz Chronicle makes it possible to indicate that information referenced within most frequently comes from impersonal sources, not explicitly named and not subject to criticism or nuance. Often, such sources are summarily referred to (more often in the first months of the war, later usually once a month) as some kind of 'continuous digest' of the recent news. It seems that this kind of abbreviated record is mediated through more established news sources, such as official communiqués and authority reports that reached the convent through media (and were probably looked forward to).

26 July 1914: On the very feast day of St. Mother we learnt of growing strife between Austria and Serbia. We are threatened with war. The ultimate reason for this is the failure of the Serbs to accept the taxation imposed by Austria, which justifiably demands satisfaction from its restless neighbour for the continual unrest which Serbia causes, and which has also been accused, because of an investigation, of the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne, and his Noble Spouse Sophie during their stay in Sarajevo, whither the Archduke had gone after manoeuvring on 28 June. Everyone was affected by this terrible crime perpetrated against one of the best Catholics, against the noblest descendant of the House of Habsburg. Serbia provided the weapons for the young murderer; Serbia incited the act - Serbia's most eminent personalities are disgraced. Our Emperor Franz Joseph I demanded that the Serbian Government express its regret that this murder had been carried out, that it announce in an official newspaper that it condemned the deed, that it remove all officials who propagate anti-Austrianism, that it endeavour by all means to remove from the schools everything that aids this unfriendly propaganda, that it allow Austrian officials on Serbian soil to investigate the murder of the Heir to the Throne, etc. Serbia did not agree to any of these demands, and war broke out.¹⁵

14 H. Paulouskaya, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

15 „26 lipca 1914: W sam dzień św. Matki dowiedziałyśmy się o ostrzejszym zatargu między Austryją a Serbią. Grozi nam wojna. Ostatecznym powodem jest nieprzyjęcie przez Serbów podatków podanych przez Austryę - która domaga się z całą słusznością od niespokojnego sąsiada satysfakcji za te ustawiczne niepokoje, które Serbia wywołuje, a której też przypisuje się na podstawie śledztwa zamordowanie Arcyksięcia Franciszka Ferdynanda, następcy tronu i Jego Dostojnej Małżonki Zofii podczas ich pobytu w Sarajewie, dokąd podążył Arcyksiążę po skończonych manewrach dnia 28 czerwca. Wszyscy odczuli tę straszną zbrodnię wykonaną na jednym z najlepszych katolików, na najzaciejszym potomku domu habsburskiego. Serbia dostarczyła broń dla młodego mordercy, Serbia namawiała do tego czynu - najznakomitsze osobistości serbskie są skompromitowane. Cesarz nasz Franciszek Józef I żądał, aby Rząd serbski wyraził swe ubolewanie, że ten mord wykonano, by to ogłosił w urzędowej gazecie, że potępia ten czyn, że usunie wszystkich urzędników, którzy propagują niechęć do Austrii, że wszystkimi siłami i sposobami starać się będzie usunąć

28 August: Yesterday we found out that in N. Sącz there are 1,500 Cossack prisoners of war who are being transported to Hungary.¹⁶

4 November: Again the newspapers announce that the population is to leave Kraków, even the wealthier folk. We are at a loss as to what the reason for this might be. In any case, nothing reassuring.¹⁷

30 August 1915: News comes to us from the battlefield of the victories of our allied troops in the Kingdom of Poland. They captured Warsaw at the beginning of the month and are advancing towards Brześć Litewski.¹⁸

21 November: Various reports come from the battlefield and many of our men die in Serbia, which they have been fighting since 7 October with the help of allied troops and the Bulgarians. They also die in the battles in the south with the Italians, who are doing their utmost to take Greece and Tyrol in full force. Our troops are also engaged in a bloody battle with the Muscovites in eastern Galicia, from which they have not yet been driven.¹⁹

This repetition and updating of records of an objectified historical account constitute a vital process for the status of collective memory, seen as unstable, indeterminate, and still subject to correction.²⁰

The chronicler's notes, written down almost on the spot, would be the first stage in the formation of collective memory – from the perspective of cognitive psychology, they would be the material substrate of memory forming in the long term that records and processes facts and experiences.²¹ At the time of writing,

ze szkół wszystko, co tej nieprzyjemnej propagandzie dopomaga, że zezwoli urzędnikom austriackim na ziemi serbskiej przeprowadzać śledztwo dotyczące się mordu Następcy Tronu itp., Serbia nie zgodziła się na wszystkie punkta i wybuchła wojna.”

16 „28 sierpnia: wczoraj dowiedzieliśmy się, że w N. Sączu jest 1500 Kozaków jeńców, których przewożą do Węgier.”

17 „4 listopada: znowu ogłaszają gazety, aby ludność opuszczała Kraków i to nawet zamożniejsi. Gubimy się w domysłach, co być może powodem tego. W każdym razie nic pocieszającego.”

18 „30 sierpień 1915: Z pola walki dochodzą nas wieści o zwycięstwach wojsk sprzymierzonych naszych w Królestwie Polskiem. Zdobyli Warszawę na początku miesiąca i postępują ku Brześciu Litewskiemu.”

19 „21 listopad: Z pola walk dochodzą różne wieści i wiele naszych ginie w Serbii, którą biją od 7 października z pomocą wojsk sprzymierzonych i Bułgarów. Giną też we walkach na południu z Włochami, którzy wszystkich sił dokładają, by zająć Grecję i Tyrol w pełni. Biją się też nasi krwawo z moskalem we wschodniej części Galicji, z której dotąd nie zostali wyparci.”

20 Cf. H.H. Hahn, R. Traba, *O czym (nie)opowiadają polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, in R. Traba, H.H. Hahn (eds.), *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, vol. 1: *Wspólne/Oddzielne*, Warszawa 2015, p. 12.

21 Cf. I. Kurcz, *Pamięć. Uczenie się. Język*, Warszawa 1995, p. 39.

they probably also had therapeutic significance, both for the writer herself and for the community, which, through this record, tried not only to document their fate and their own situation on an ongoing basis but also to produce a didactic message for the future, to put the world in order, to manage their fears.²² As a non-fictional text, the monastic chronicle does not introduce, as I have already noted, a separate narrator, adhering to the homodiegetic narrator figure, which is indeed its distinguishing feature.²³ The chronicler's 'we,' being symptomatic here, remains quite evident in the chronicling tradition. For the chronicler writes down events from the perspective of the community: she herself is not the narrative subject.²⁴

Objectivised official information communications

The convent most positively valued and desired news from official sources, such as communiqués of the authorities, which were seen as reliable, indisputable, certain and reassuring.

9 August 1914: There was a sermon during the Mass. The preacher mentioned that seven armed countries lay in wait (that would be Austria and Serbia, Russia and Germany, France, Belgium and England). The preacher encouraged contributions for the 40,000 young men who are waiting in Kraków and Lwów for the word to cross the border.²⁵

31 December 1916: With a tearful eye we closed the old year, with a tearful eye we greet the new one, but not without hope that the just cause will ultimately prevail. This hope should grow stronger because, as we have read, the reason for the war is the desire of the enemies of the Holy Church to destroy and fragment Catholic Austria, the only major state with a thoroughly Catholic dynasty.²⁶

5 November 1916: After hiding the Blessed Sacrament, our Reverend Chaplain Antoni Pałka stepped out onto the steps of the altar with a writ in his hand, which he read out to the assembled people. It was the proclamation act of the Polish State, issued by order of Emperor Franz

22 Cf. R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Między autobiografią a literaturą*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 38–83.

23 H. Paulouskaya, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

24 This tendency is highlighted by, among others, Jolanta Sawicka-Jurek, J. Sawicka-Jurek, *O życiu zakonnym i historii łomżyńskiego klasztoru panien benedyktynek w świetle zapisków siostry Alojzy Piesiewiczówny*, in J. Pietrzak Thebault, Ł. Cybulski (eds.), *Przestrzeń klasztoru – przestrzeń kultury*, Warszawa 2017, p. 72; Cf. H. Paulouskaya, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

25 „9 sierpnia 1914: było kazanie podczas Mszy św. Wspominał kaznodzieja, że siedem państw uzbrojonych czeka (to byłaby Austria i Serbia, Rosya i Niemcy, Francya, Belgia i Anglia). Zachęcał ks. Kaznodzieja do składek na rzecz 40 000 młodzieńców, którzy czekają w Krakowie i Lwowie na hasło, by przekroczyć granicę.”

26 „31 grudnia 1916: Łzawem okiem zakończyliśmy rok stary, łzawem witamy nowy, lecz nie bez nadziei, że sprawa słuszna zwycięży ostatecznie. Ufność ta wzmacniać się powinna, bo jak czytaliśmy przyczyną wojny jest chęć wrogów Kościoła Św. zniszczyć, rozebrać katolicką Austryę jedyne większe państwo z dynastją na wskrós katolicką.”

Joseph and Emperor Wilhelm. After the reading, they sang God Save Poland. The news of the resurrection of the Polish state came so unexpectedly that it was hard to bear!²⁷

In the final entry we find an example of the construction of a cultural memory narrative from the perspective of Jan Assmann, for whom it is important to move from communicative memory, based on oral transmission, to a narrative that focuses on the self-reflexive construction of the group identity that shares a body of knowledge relating to the past.²⁸ Here, the chronicler's account has the hallmarks of a record of oral transmission. For it can be assumed that the chronicler, like all members of the convent, did not participate in the events taking place in the convent church. The nuns participate in them only exceptionally: their spiritual activities are mostly focused around the convent choir, a separate sacred space, where the nuns pray at different times than the laity. It was the lay participant in the service in the convent church who had to recount (most likely to the door-keeping nun) the course of events, and the latter had to pass the story forward: to the chronicler and to the community. I make this assumption on two grounds. The chronicle notes that the reading of the proclamation act occurred during the High Mass, one of a structure very different to the type usually said in the monastery. Furthermore, the longer passage surrounding this extract about the proclamation reads that "[a]fter the High Mass, the *Te Deum* was sung" (in the passive); conversely, while referring to the activities in which the convent members participate, the chronicler employs the first-person plural and personal forms. The subjectivity of the community is crucial here: the chronicler does not use the singular in the account, consistently employing the first-person plural to note activities of the convent nuns. For example, in the entry of 5 November 1916, the third-person plural appears: "they sang *God Save Poland*." The chronicler records an oral communal account: she does not record her own recollections.

10 November 1918: At the High Mass, instead of a sermon, the Chaplain read a proclamation from all the Galician Bishops professing their gratitude to God and their joy at the creation of Free Poland and the incorporation of our Galician district into it.²⁹

27 „5 listopada 1916: Po schowaniu N. Sakramentu wyszedł na stopnie ołtarza W. Ks. Kapelan nasz Antoni Pałka z pismem w rękę, które odczytał zgromadzonym. Był to akt proklamacyjny państwa polskiego, wydany z rozkazu cesarza Franciszka Józefa i cesarza Wilhelma. Po przeczytaniu odśpiewali Boże coś Polskę. Wiadomość o wskrzeszeniu państwa polskiego nadeszła tak niespodziewanie, że opamiętać się trudno!”

28 Cf. J. Assmann, *Pamięć zbiorowa i tożsamość kulturowa*, 'Borussia. Kultura – historia – literatura,' vol. 29, 2003, p. 16.

29 „10 listopada 1918: Na sumie zamiast kazania odczytał Ks. Kapelan odezwę wszystkich Ks. Biskupów galicyjskich wyznających swą wdzięczność dla Boga i radość z powodu powstania Wolnej Polski i przydzielenia naszej dzielnicy Galicyi do niej.”

Both of the types above would probably be closest to the intentions that Marzec points out in the context of the research interpretation of the memory resource, indicating that memory (and, above all, research on memory) superimposes the capital of the collective and deindividualized correct memory of history upon the factographical research (defined in terms of an unbiased historical narrative).³⁰ In analyses of the monastic chronicles, it is also pointed out that this type of strategy – metatextuality in historical narrative – represents an important distinguishing feature of narrative authentication (through the citation of reliable sources and documents).³¹

Subjective, personal external accounts

The second type of sources of information concerning the course of hostilities, the frontline situation and the position of the civilian population are personal sources, unnamed and sometimes made intentionally anonymous. Here, the spatiality of the information acquisition is regularly indicated: during meetings in the parlours or as news that the population brings to the monastery gate, passes it on to the gatekeeper, and the latter presumably on to the community.

2 August 1914: Various news are reaching us that the Austrian army has been beaten in some skirmish. This uncertain news is the worst!³²

31 August: All sorts of grim news are reaching us about the incursion of the Muscovites into eastern Galicia, about various treacheries on the part of the Galicians in favour of Russia!³³

6 September: The panic of the population is terrible, so whoever can, leaves, but not only the women, because the men also leave, and in order to justify their undignified departure and abandonment of the threatened city, they spread intimidating and very worrying news here. There is no official news these days, and we are distressed and fear for ourselves, should the Muscovite really prevail, as they tell us.³⁴

30 G. Marzec, *op. cit.*, pp. 162–201, (see in particular: *Przejsście od pamięci żywej do nagromadzonej*, also in relation to Assmann's interpretation).

31 Cf. H. Paulouskaya, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75.

32 „2 sierpnia 1914: różne dochodzą nas wieści, że wojsko austr. pobite zostało w jakiejś potyczce. Najgorsze są te wieści niepewne!”

33 „31 sierpnia: Różne dochodzą nas wieści złowrogie o wtargnięciu moskali do Galicji wschodniej, o różnych zdradach ze strony galicyan na korzyść Rosyi!”

34 „6 września: Panika ludności straszna, kto więc może wyjeżdża, lecz nie tylko kobiety, bo mężczyźni również uchodzą, a chcąc upozorować swój niezaszczytny zresztą wyjazd i opuszczenie zagrożonego miasta, rozpuszczają tu wiadomości zastraszające i bardzo niepokojące. Wiadomości urzędowych nie ma w tych dniach, a my trapimy się i lękamy o siebie, gdyby Moskal rzeczywiście zwyciężył, jak to opowiadają.”

25 September: We are fraught with dread! These fugitives bring ever more terrible news to the bars and worry us mercilessly! Some of them urge us to leave the convent, others lament the uncertainty of our fate, and so on. And our very nerves are getting the best of us!³⁵

27 September: Today some better news reaches us that ours have won, but by the same route as the unrest. Through the parlour.³⁶

2 October: Various news are spreading, but there is no certain and comforting message from the battlefield. It is not good, for such news would spread, for everyone awaits it like salvation.³⁷

20 November: About four o'clock two Cossacks came to the utility gate, they asked where our army was, whether it was in Sącz. They reassured us that there was nothing to be afraid of.³⁸

3 December: A soldier told our gardener that they were in a sorry state, that they did not know what would happen to them, that he had 300 (three hundred) miles to go, to where he had left his family.³⁹

7 December: Out of the evening others came again to the gate and again asked about the Magyars, but the gatekeeping sister reassured them that no one was allowed into the cloister.⁴⁰

30 May 1915: The students sing, sometimes also soldiers, who behave very admirably during the service. They pray from prayer books. The elders also, and neither cast an eye in either direction, as eyewitnesses tell us.⁴¹

35 „25 września: Jesteśmy pełne trwogi! Te uciekinierze coraz nowe straszniejsze przynoszą wieści do kraty i niepokoją nas bez litości! Jedni namawiają wprost byśmy opuszczali klasztor, inni ubolewają nad niepewnością losu naszego itp. A nam grają nerwy że aż strach!”

36 „27 września: Dziś jakieś lepsze wieści nas dochodzą, że zwyciężyli nasi, ale tą drogą co i niepokoję. Przez rozmównicę.”

37 „2 października: Wiadomości różne krążą, lecz pewnej a pocieszającej z pola walki nie ma. Dobrze nie jest, boć rozeszłaby się ta nowina, bo jej wszyscy wyglądają jak zbawienia.”

38 „20 listopada: Około godziny czwartej przyszło dwóch Kozaków do bramy gospodarczej, pytali, gdzie nasze wojsko, czy było w Sączu. Uspokajali, że niema się czego bać.”

39 „3 grudnia: pewien żołnierz naszemu ogrodnikowi opowiedział, że ich położenie przykre, że nie wiedzą co z niemi będzie, że ma 300 (trzysta) mil, gdzie zostawił rodzinę.”

40 „7 grudnia: Z wieczora przyszli znowu inni do furty i znowu pytali o Madziarów, lecz ich s. furtyanna upewniła, że do klauzury nie wolno jej wpuszczać nikogo.”

41 „30 maja 1915: Śpiewają scholastycy, czasem i żołnierze, którzy się bardzo pięknie zachowują podczas nabożeństwa. Modlą się z książeczek. Starszyzna również, i ani okiem w żadną stronę nie rzucą, jak nam to opowiadają naoczni świadkowie.”

9 December 1917: From the battlefield comes comforting news. The faithless Italians have been defeated and in five days (early November) have lost all the possessions they had seized during the 2½ year struggle. Our troops and those of the Germans have penetrated Italy as far as Padua.⁴²

Let us note that the examples above are regularly arranged in a structural sequence: a statement of fact and an appraisal, stemming from the desire to reflect one's own current feelings, but also to express the emotions of the community (the further away from the outbreak of the war conflict, the fewer there are). What we have here is a record that seeks to capture episodic memory, relating to personal experience, and at the same time to construct semantic memory, generalising and introducing some broad conclusions about the world.

It also seems, in the context of the chronology, that the end of the war (yet unknown to the chronicler) overlays the fatigue of its persistence with some kind of emotional control and composure. One might venture that this standardised rendition of the entries serves as a resource for managing fear, or that – in therapeutic terms – it allows a bridge to be built between the past and the present.⁴³

Subjective, in-person accounts

Significant, but questionable in terms of relevance and status, is the information that members of the convention acquire on their own, i.e., through personal experience, observation, participatory experience.

9 September 1914: while we were eating supper, we received some very bad news about the occupation of Lwów by the Muscovites! Some believe it, others disbelieve it, in any case the sword of justice hangs over us!⁴⁴

13 September: Various news are coming from the battlefield, which make us pray more and more fervently. The Muscovite is in Galicia, and despite our efforts, they cannot oust him, as they are constantly being betrayed by the Ruthenian populace. Today, one of the nuns received a postcard from Przemyśl, saying that it is still calm there and that the Muscovites will refrain

42 „9 grudnia 1917: Z pola walki dochodzą nas pocieszające wieści. Wiarołomne Włochy pokonane zostały i w pięciu dniach (na początku listopada) utraciły wszystkie majątności, które w czasie 2½ rocznej walki zajęli. Wojska nasze i niemieckie wtargnęły do Włoch aż pod Padwę.”

43 Cf. P.A. Levine, *Trauma i pamięć. Mózg i ciało w poszukiwaniu autentycznej przeszłości*, Warszawa 2020.

44 „9 września 1914: za to przy kolacyi doszły nas bardzo przykre wiadomości o zajęciu Lwowa przez moskali!! Jedne wierzą, inne niedowierzają temu, w każdym razie miecz sprawiedliwości zawisł nad nami!”

from advancing after the losses they suffered on 8 September, but we do not know in the vicinity of which village, somewhere near Lwów.⁴⁵

November 9: We were greatly alarmed: after breakfast the Mother Superior told the sisters assembled in the refectory that the situation had worsened and that those who were afraid would be able to leave [...] and around midday came the news that no train would depart – unless by horse, but it was impossible to get horses! Towards evening, calmer news came again. Nobody really knows where the enemy is, they say different things, some have already seen them in Nowy Sącz that night, but it was our troops, unknown in these parts, because they were Tyrolean.⁴⁶

18 November: We were greatly disturbed by the people coming from outside the gates, who were constantly coming to the bars with sad news that our troops were retreating, that they had been beaten, that Przemyśl had been conquered, that Tarnów was occupied, that the enemy was coming towards us, that they wanted to cross over into Hungary, and so on. [...] the poor folks [...] came to the gate with grievances and tears, presenting the situation in an ever worse light. It upset us all.⁴⁷

24 December: We dined on Christmas Eve together with our dear guests from Staniątki.⁴⁸ A few days ago, these unfortunate nuns received a message from their Mother Superior through another messenger, who came on foot from Staniątki. He brought sad news. The monastery had been bombarded for seven days; the effect was terrible.⁴⁹

45 „13 września: z pola bitwy różne dochodzą wieści, które nas do coraz gorętszy pobudzają modlitwy. Moskał w Galicyi i nasi pomimo usiłowań wyprzeć go nie mogą, bo ustawicznych doznają zdrad ze strony ruskiej ludności. Dziś jedna z siostr otrzymała kartkę z Przemyśla, że tam jeszcze spokojnie i że Moskałom się odechce pochodu po ciągach, które dostał 8 b.m., lecz nie wiemy w pobliżu której miejscowości, gdzieś koło Lwowa.”

46 „9 listopad: przyniósł nam zatrwożenie bardzo wielkie: po śniadaniu powiedziała W.M. Ksieni zgromadzonym siostrom w refektarzu o pogorszonej sytuacji i że siostry bojące się będą mogły wyjechać [...] a koło południa przyszła wiadomość, że żaden pociąg nie pójdzie – chyba końmi, lecz koni dostać niepodobna! Pod wieczór znowu nadeszły spokojniejsze wiadomości. Nikt właściwie nie wie, gdzie nieprzyjaciel jest, różnie mówią, jedni widzieli go już w Nowym Sączu tej nocy, a to było wojsko nasze, lecz w tych stronach nieznanie, bo tyrolskie.”

47 „18 listopada: Do zaniepokojenia naszego bardzo wiele przyczyniały się osoby z za furty, które ciągle do kraty przychodziły, już to ze smutnymi wiadomościami, że nasi się cofają, że zostali pobici, że Przemyśl zdobywają, że Tarnów zajęty, że nieprzyjaciel zbliża się ku nam, że chce przejść do Węgier itd. [...] biedni ludziska [...] z żalami i łzami przychodzili do furty, przedstawiając sytuację coraz w gorszym świetle. Zdenerwowało nas wszystkie.”

48 The Stary Sącz convent temporarily hosted some Benedictine nuns from the Staniątki monastery.

49 „24 grudnia: Wilię jadyśmy wspólnie z naszymi kochanymi gośćmi staniąteckimi. Biedaczki dostały przed kilku dniami wiadomość od swojej P. Ksieni przez osobnego posłańca, który piechotą przyszedł ze Staniątek. Wiadomości przyniósł smutne. Klasztor był przez siedem dni bombardowany, skutki są straszne.”

31 August 1917: Reverend Bishop Anatol Nowak visited Stary Sącz [...] afterwards the Reverend Bishop came to the parlour, spoke kindly with our Mother Superior, and with the older Mothers, and finally all the sisters came, to whom he gave his blessing. Again, this month there was much talk of the Holy Father's efforts to bring about the desired peace. England and France object, believing this speech of the Holy Father expresses sympathy to our Central Powers.⁵⁰

26 December 1918: The holidays have passed peacefully. No one in the world is in high spirits today! Every letter from relatives brings sad news, this affects everyone, and we only ask and implore God more and more fervently for mercy for us and the whole country.⁵¹

The last quotation demonstrates most fully the function of the convent chronicles, captured by Małgorzata Borkowska in the following way: "they constitute the fullest evidence of the nuns' reflections on history – their own, the congregation's and the world's – and an attempt to discern in these histories the loving hand of God."⁵²

The excerpts from this historical account presented here originally came in the oral discourse. Once written down, they document the process of constructing one's identity and memory, embedded in the history-telling trajectory:⁵³ – the recorded history, private or communal, lives not only in memories but also in images brought alive through reading.

These records seem to confirm that the oral account becomes a source for constructing a memory of a significant historical event: reconstructed and written down, it nevertheless remains the community's evidence for its relationship with the world outside. The cloistered convent uses the oral account sources on major historical events to construct its own identity, memory, and knowledge of the world and of its own status, ascertained in confrontation with historical events. To some extent, then, we can speak here of the documented influence of oral history on the formation of communal identity. We also find substantive evidence that the communicative structures recorded and archived in the chronicler's account represent an essential value for shaping the community's historical memory:

50 „31 sierpień 1917: Odwiedził Stary Sącz W. Ks. Biskup Anatol Nowak [...] przyszedł potem W. Ks. Biskup do rozmównicy, rozmawiał uprzejmie z N. M. Ksienią i ze starszemi Matkami, a w końcu przyszły wszystkie siostry, którym udzielił błogostawieństwa. W tym miesiącu mówiono znowu wiele o staraniach Ojca Św. by uzyskać pokój upragniony. Sprzeciwia się Anglia, Francja, które upatrują w tem wystąpieniu Ojca Św. sympatyę dla naszych państw centralnych.”

51 „26 grudnia 1918: Święta przeszły spokojnie. Wielkiego humoru nie szukać dziś u nikogo na świecie! Każdy list od krewnych sióstr przynoszą smutne wiadomości, to udziela się wszystkim i tylko Boga coraz goręcej prosimy i błagamy o miłosierdzie dla nas i kraju całego.”

52 M. Borkowska OSB, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich w XVII–XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 1996, p. 328.

53 Cf. D. Gocół, *Między wspólnotą a indywidualnością – szczególny przypadek opisu własnej tożsamości*, in B. Szejgiec, D. Gocół (eds.), *Subiektywizm w języku*, Lublin 2017, p. 28.

the community's agency and self-identity is continually established throughout every entry that transcribes overheard news, crucial for the convent's existence.

The chronicler's records of the Poor Clares of Stary Sącz may seem circum-spect and equivocal as far as socio-political or pro-independence involvement is concerned. On the one hand, we are dealing here with a chronicler's account: one essentially intended for the internal use of the community, not made available and not addressed to a reader outside the monastery. One would therefore assume that its tone would be more candid, and the narrative, more participatory. On the other hand, however, it must be remembered that prudence in the wording of the records was certainly due to the political situation and the monastery's relationship with the outside world, being mostly informed by an abiding memory of 18th century events. The decision to dissolve the convent on 11 February 1782 coincided with the almost complete plundering of its archival documents (which are still held on deposit in Lwów). This gap in the convent's memory,⁵⁴ as well as the risk that the internal documents could be used against the monastery at any time, certainly influenced the chronicler's narrative and shaped the transmission of the memory of the 1914–1918 war.

54 Cf. I. Borkowski, *Tradycja ustna versus pisana. Ustalanie obrzędowości i (re)konstruowanie tradycji w klasztorach żeńskich na przykładzie działalności s. Domiceli Barbary Fox, klaryski starosądeckiej*, 'Quaestiones Oralitatis,' vol. I 2, 2015, pp. 67–84.



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**Summary**

The text analyzes the types of data sources on events related to the outbreak, course and end of the First World War in the years 1914–1918. The entries in the chronicle of the cloistered convention methodically list the types of personal and impersonal sources, formal, official and unofficial, along with their criticism, evaluation and interpretation. The research problem posed in the text is the indication which sources (employed for building, shaping, criticism and intergenerational transmission of social memory) are used by a community with a high degree of identity awareness and a particular approach to events of political and social history.