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## JERZY TOPOLSKI'S HISTORY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

### Abstract

The place of the history of historiography in Topolski's comprehensive oeuvre has not been subjected to a holistic analysis yet. I will try to highlight some of the key topics rather than propose an exhaustive interpretation of them. The article concentrates on the analysis of both the notion of historiography itself, as well as interpretation of the main historiographic work of the Poznan historian.

**Keywords:** Jerzy Topolski, history of historiography, methodology of history, theory of historiography, Polish historical writing after 1945

I. I would like to start with a personal reflection. My first contact with Jerzy Topolski's work was, of course, during my studies. To be perfectly honest, I read then *Methodology of History* with considerable difficulty. However, it was only after being employed at the Institute of History of the University of Lodz that my first mentor, Krystyna Śreniowska, recommended the recently published *Teoria wiedzy historycznej* [*Theory of Historical Knowledge*] as 'summer reading'. The very fact that it was done by a historian of historiography, co-creator of the "Łódź school of the history of historiography" developed under the patronage of Marian H. Serejski, seems to me significant from today's perspective. Today I view her suggestion as a desire to interest me, a young historian, with something else than the vision of historiography that dominated in Łódź and as a declaration arising out of the conviction that when dealing with historiographic reflection, one cannot limit oneself to such a formula of it which is in fact a kind of reasoned bibliography containing information about authors and short summaries of their works. Reading *Theory of Historical Knowledge* was also not an easy task. Today I know that because, *inter alia*, of the system of historical education in Polish universities at that time, I was only slightly pre-

pared for it. I read some pages several times, making use of Władysław Kopański's *Słownik wyrazów obcych* [*Dictionary of Foreign Words*] from time to time. However, the lesson that I learned from reading the book then helped me throughout my future academic career.

In 1986, in collaboration with the still existing periodical *Nowe Książki*, I received a review copy of Topolski's monograph *O nowy model historii. Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949)* [*On a New History Model. Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949)*]. It was with great fear that I wrote a review entitled *O historyku z Poznania* [*About the historian from Poznań*].<sup>1</sup> Reading it today I go back to the times when Topolski proved to be not only a methodologist, but also as a historian of historiography. Appreciating the value of Topolski's work, I also had the courage to formulate critical remarks. I questioned one of the main theses of the Poznań author, which made Jan Rutkowski a Marxist, and wrote that in this case one could rather speak of a Marxist inspiration. Even today I am ready to defend this thesis while bearing in mind at the same time various difficulties related to the precise definition of the concept of Marxism in historiography

II. The place of the history of historiography in Topolski's comprehensive oeuvre has not, as it seems to me, been subjected to a holistic analysis yet.<sup>2</sup> The literature devoted to the author of *Theory of Historical Knowledge* focuses primarily on the interpretation of his works in the fields of methodology of history and economic history, and sometimes other themes, e.g. history of science.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the publishers of two collections of Topolski's texts — his students — Wojciech Wrzosek and Ewa Domańska, have not done it either. The former was content with brief general remarks. It is interesting because the collection itself includes several of his mentor's works of clearly historiographical provenance. However, it is worth recalling what Wrzosek wrote in the introduction to the book *Varia historyczne* [*Historical Varia*]

<sup>1</sup> „O historyku z Poznania (rec.) J. Topolski, *O nowy model historii. Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949)* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986)”, *Nowe Książki* 1 (1987): 118–120.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Topolski, see e.g. Rafał Stobiecki, „Jerzy Topolski (1928–1998). Marksista, który miał odwagę różnić się od innych,” in Rafał Stobiecki, *Historycy polscy wobec wyzwań XX wieku* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2014), 341–374; Piotr Gałkowski, *Poznawanie dziejów czy wytwarzanie historii? Jerzego Topolskiego przemiany poglądów na uprawianie historii* (Poznań: Fundacja im. Jerzego Kmity, 2019); Jan Pomorski, „Jerzy Topolski jako homo metahistoricus,” in Jan Pomorski, *Homo metahistoricus. Studium sześciu kultur poznających historię* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2019), 17–92 and the texts referred to in the later parts of this article.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. texts from two books devoted to Topolski *Między historią a teorią. Refleksje nad problematyką dziejów i wiedzy historycznej*, ed. by Marian Drozdowski (Warszawa – Poznań: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988); *Oblicza przeszłości*, ed. by Wojciech Wrzosek (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Epigram, 2011). One of few authors who referred to Topolski's historiographic reflection included in the aforementioned works was Marian Drozdowski, „Od badań regionalnych do syntez dziejów narodowych i historii powszechnej”, in *Między historią a teorią. Refleksje nad problematyką dziejów i wiedzy historycznej*, ed. by Marian Drozdowski (Warszawa-Poznań: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), 17–18.

published in the series *Klasyki nauki poznańskiej* [*Classics of the Poznań science scene*]:

In his work, Jerzy Topolski struggled with the basic dilemmas of humanistic and historical cognition [...] He urged both methodologists and historians of historiography to look at the research practice of history, trying to remedy the speculative nature of many theoretical considerations about historiography. Historiographic research inspired by methodological questions should be viewed as Topolski's merit in the field of research in both disciplines. He strongly inspired the milieu of historians of historiography and developed his views while holding discussions with them. Cooperation and friendship with Andrzej F. Grabski and Jerzy Maternicki brought mutual benefits [...] As a result, a kind of symbiosis of the traditions of Marian H. Serejski and Grabski with Topolski's methodological proposals was formed. Thus methodological history of historiography and historiographically sensitive methodology of history emerged. Such works as *Marksizm i historia* [*Marxism and History*] (1977) and *Nowe idee współczesnej historiografii* [*New Ideas of Modern Historiography*] (1980) and participation in the prominent edition of *Great Historians*, for which Topolski prepared biographies of Polish historians, strengthened his position as a historian of historiography.<sup>4</sup>

Even less space for Topolski as a historian of historiography was devoted to by Ewa Domańska, although in this case it should be emphasized that the main goal of the publication was different (to remind us of theoretical statements of the author of *Methodology of History*). In the anthology published by her, history of historiography is mentioned in only a few places, including the section on myths in historiography.<sup>5</sup>

It is also worth recalling the last statement of two younger representatives of the Poznań school of methodology of history — Maria Solarska and Maciej Bugajewski. They both start by questioning the less common thesis about the lack of coherence between Topolski's work from the "Marxist" period and his later works referring to the narrative turn in theory of history. In their opinion:

[...] such an image of an epistemological cut loses what is most important, that is, Topolski's determined endeavor to understand historiography and its development as

<sup>4</sup> Wojciech Wrzosek, "Szkic do portretu Jerzego Topolskiego," in Jerzy Topolski, *Varia historyczne*, ed. by Wojciech Wrzosek (Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2010), 25–26; Similar evaluation can be found Wojciech Wrzosek, *Jerzy Topolski 1928–1998*, w: *Wybitni historycy wielkopolscy*, ed. by Jerzy Strzelczyk (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 643–644. Wrzosek's intuition regarding the relationship between Topolski and Grabski is confirmed in the preserved correspondence. I had the opportunity to see it thanks to the courtesy of Danuta Topolska. It proves the close relationship of both historians. The letters abound in mutual exchanges of ideas, show how often they both reviewed each others' works, exchanged hard-to-come-by books and supported each other in the implementation of scientific projects. They also often wrote international publications together, as was the case with the volume *International Handbook of Historical Science. Contemporary Research and Theory* ed. by Georg G. Iggers, Harold Parker (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Jerzy Topolski, *Teoretyczne problemy wiedzy historycznej. Antologia tekstów*, ed. by Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2006), 27 and 209–222. The history of historiography is also absent from the glossary at the end of the book.

a science about the past in its changing forms. Hence, at no stage of work of the author of *Theory of Historical Knowledge*, historiography is understood as literature in opposition to science. If one refers to the Aristotelian distinction between history and poetry, it can be said roughly that, in Topolski's perspective from the 1990s, a collection of historiographic statements has a common field with poetry in the form of some elocutionary forms (narrativization, metaphorization, etc.), distinguishing itself from the latter by an aspiration to scientificity understood as acting in accordance with the changing standards of scientific rationality, which define how to strive for the truth.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the above-mentioned circumstances, my attempt to analyze Topolski's historiographic works should not be viewed as a definite analysis. I will try to highlight some of the key topics rather than propose an exhaustive interpretation of them.

III. It is appropriate to start with remarks of a semantic nature. How did Topolski understand the history of historiography? In *Methodology of History*, he referred to it as "reflections on the results of research, i.e. on the science of history interpreted as a set of statements on the domain under investigation". In the concept proposed in this work, Topolski saw the history of historiography as part of the broadly understood methodology of history.<sup>7</sup> One can advance a thesis that the above position was a proof of a kind of "cognitive imperialism", which entailed implementing in the research field of the methodology of history, both the history of historiography and considerations in the field of the philosophy of history. Another significant factor was the fact that Topolski was strongly inspired by the analytical philosophy of history (Maurice Mandelbaum and his followers), which often emphasized pragmatic value of history. *Methodology of History* can also be read as a kind of manifesto that reflection on the past is becoming a true science, the culmination of which has become (was to become?) historiography based on the theory of historical materialism. Topolski saw it as the best platform for integrating sciences, and social sciences in particular.<sup>8</sup>

This approach gradually disappeared in another seminal work of the Poznań historian, namely *Theory of Historical Knowledge*. In this book, there are definitely fewer passages suggesting thinking about the development of historiography as a one-way evolution from primitive to more and more mature states, which was to be reflected in the transformation of historical reflection from pragmatic to dialectical.

This is where the theory of the system of historical science and its doubly "determined" development appears. This system includes: historical science in

<sup>6</sup> Maria Solarska, Maciej Bugajewski, „Historia historiografii jako historia prawdy. Dwugłos o podstawach teoretycznych historii historiografii Jerzego Topolskiego”, *Historia@Teoria* 3, part 1 (2017): 124.

<sup>7</sup> Jerzy Topolski, *Methodology of History*, transl. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (Warsaw: Springer, 1976), 30.

<sup>8</sup> Jerzy Topolski, *Metodologia historii* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1973), 187. See also Jerzy Topolski, „Integracyjny sens materializmu historycznego”, *Studia Metodologiczne* 1 (1965).

the strict sense, and reflection on this science— “type of the history of historiography and the methodology of history and these three components of historical knowledge must be treated jointly”.<sup>9</sup>

In Topolski's opinion: “the development of historical science on its theoretical and methodological plane and the inextricably linked to it level of explanation, and partly also on the factual plane [...] occur, therefore, through the emergence (or potential expiration) of newer theoretical and methodological principles, some of which become standard, and others, prior to becoming ones or being eliminated, retain the status of non-standard principles for a longer or shorter time”.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the Poznań researcher emphasized the second determinant of the development of historical science, related to the influence of the “ideological and political sphere of social consciousness” on it.<sup>11</sup> According to Topolski, it was done simply in this way, “[...] so that historians, as representatives of the society, in the same way as other people, participants and witnesses to historical processes and events, reflected [...] in their writing, and even to a greater or lesser extent, shaped various ideas (political, social, religious, etc.) with their writing [...]”.<sup>12</sup>

Commenting on the above remarks, it should be clearly emphasized that in *Theory of Historical Knowledge*, the history of historiography regains its autonomy and becomes an equal element of the system of historical knowledge, along with history proper and the methodology of history. Historiography is treated as a material for testing standard and non-standard methodological principles present in it. This is also the main task of its researchers. Topolski's understanding of the mechanism of the development of historiography was also changing. It resembled, to a small extent, a situation in which the degree of scientificity of history is determined by its saturation with contents of broadly understood Marxist origin (even the most unorthodox), but more by a process in which various forms of historical reflection compete with each other.<sup>13</sup> As a result, Jan Pomorski wrote about the concept of the so-called shifting frontier of science

<sup>9</sup> Jerzy Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1983), 30. Cf. Jan Pomorski, “Metodologiczne «boje o historię»”, in *Między historią a teorią. Refleksje nad problematyką dziejów i wiedzy historycznej*, ed. by Marian Drozdowski (Warszawa-Poznań: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), 30; Jan Pomorski, “Metodologia historii a historia historiografii”, in Jan Pomorski, *Spoglądając w przeszłość. Studia i szkice metahistoryczne* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii-Curie Skłodowskiej, 2017), 181 (first published in 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, 44–45.

<sup>11</sup> Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*.

<sup>13</sup> However, it remained important for Topolski to distinguish between “traditional” and “scientific” historiography. The decisive criterion in this case is the degree of saturation with theory. Topolski, *Teoria wiedzy historycznej*, 22–26. See also Jerzy Topolski “Idee przewodnie i metody historiografii renesansu i baroku”, in *Europa i świat w początkach epoki nowożytnej*, part 2 ed. by Antoni Mączak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, 1992), 193–218. A different approach was used by Topolski in the entry “Historiografia,” in *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1995), 763–765, in which he distinguishes various types of

present in Topolski's thought, which assumed that "the criteria of science are not given once and for all, but historically relativized".<sup>14</sup> I would like to add that in this way practicing the history of historiography, as well as the methodology of history, took on a less dogmatic and more pluralistic character.

Finally, the last of the ways of perceiving the history of historical science distinguished by me can be found in Topolski's works from the 1990s. In his textbook, *Od Achillesa do Béatrice de Planissoles* [*From Achilles to Béatrice de Planissoles*], which is a record of lectures, the historian from Poznań distinguished three types of "teachings (or texts —my emphasis) related to the study of the past".<sup>15</sup> He included history proper, the methodology (philosophy) and "history of historiography, that is, history of historians' work (historical research)" which, according to him, was "part of history proper".<sup>16</sup> Further, the author of the textbook wrote, probably largely self-critically: "this aspiring of writing about the past to be called science [...] severely limited the field of view of historians of historiography. They began to identify it with the process of «scientification» of historical narrative. In this way, this history has become a series of descriptions considered as an evolutionary sequence of developmental stages attempting to reach the level of the «hardest» science possible. Such an approach dwarfed many things that in this striving for the «scientificity» of construction (in the opinion of the vast majority of historians — reconstruction) now seemed to be of little or no importance".<sup>17</sup>

Influenced by broadly understood postmodernism, or more precisely, the linguistic turn, Topolski largely rejected the distinction, which was crucial for his earlier considerations, between the "objective" and "subjective" dimensions of the historical process, in other words, history as understood by *res gestae* and *rerum gestarum*. Viewing history, and thus the history of historiography, primarily through the prism of texts created by researchers, fundamentally changed the goal that he set for specialists in this field. Henceforth, according to Topolski, they should focus on the analysis of historians' language, the structure of historical narrative, its types, and the rhetorical tropes used by their predecessors. At the end of the book, he also defined the mechanism of the development of historiography differently. In this context, he welcomed Raymond Martin's opinion that progress in this area could only be obtained by confronting different interpretations of the same events.<sup>18</sup> One gets the impression that Topolski tried to follow the example of, *inter alia*, Hayden White to stimulate reflection on history by rejecting its scientific mask in favor of emphasizing its links with

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historiography, e.g. religious and commemorative, pragmatic, erudite, erudite genetic and structural.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Pomorski, "Historiografia tradycyjna, modernistyczna i postmodernistyczna", in *Współczesna dydaktyka historii*, ed. by Jerzy Maternicki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Juka, 2004), 131.

<sup>15</sup> Jerzy Topolski, *Od Achillesa do Béatrice de Planissoles. Zarys historii historiografii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Rytm, 1998), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Topolski, *Od Achillesa*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Topolski, *Od Achillesa*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Topolski, *Od Achillesa*, 155.

literature and art. Thus, the question of how we explain history turned into the question of how we write and understand history.<sup>19</sup>

III. Even a cursory review of Topolski's oeuvre in the field of the history of historiography leads to the conclusion that he was extremely versatile. It comprises syntheses, monographs, articles on particular epochs in the history of historiography, texts containing biographies and analyses of the achievements of leading historians. Applying Andrzej F. Grabski's typology, one can ask what form of the history of historiography dominated in his work?<sup>20</sup> It seems that Topolski clearly privileged its cognitive aspects dealing with selected problems in the field of historical thought, at the expense of object-oriented historiography, focusing mainly on historical individualities. This fact is confirmed both in his monograph *From Achilles ...* and in many other studies.

How did Topolski's research on the history of historiography look like in practice? Due to the limited scope of this article, in the following part of my discussion I will limit myself only to a few examples in order to show, as far as it is possible, various forms of the Poznań researcher's historiographic reflection.

I will start with the previously mentioned textbook. It is a concise exposition on the history of historiography from ancient times to the present day. As Topolski pointed out, contemporary historiography was his starting point. Such a procedure is somewhat similar to the use of the retrogressive method in medieval studies. Topolski wanted to show the roots of modern historiography, to evaluate its achievements from the perspective of the end of the 20th century.

The aforementioned assumption determined both the structure of the book and the arrangement of its contents. Nearly two-thirds of the narrative is devoted to the history of historical science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Excerpts from sources, in the form of passages from historians' works, which are attached to the text, are an interesting solution and are useful from the didactic point of view.

Topolski's book is also distinguished by a periodization different from what we can usually find in textbooks on the history of historiography. The Poznań researcher did not refer directly to the division into epochs, but constructed a story with a clearly "heroic" meaning. The carriers of new ideas, changing the research methods of historiography and its place in the intellectual toolbox of people, are not only historians but also outstanding thinkers: from Thucydides and Herodotus, through Chladenius, Ranke, to Foucault and Schama. The story

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<sup>19</sup> This is what Gałkowski writes about it: "Significant for this stage in the development of Jerzy Topolski's thought was a change in the methodological perspective, which entailed shifting emphasis from explanation to the dimension of creating historiography. The above change can be seen in the new characteristics of the relationship that takes place between narration and explanation. The issue of explaining in narrative was treated here not so much as part of the context of justification, but as an element of the philosophy of argumentation (based on the theory of argumentation)," Gałkowski, *Poznanie dziejów*, 119. For more on the concept of narration in Topolski's work from the 1990s, see Pomorski, *Homo metahistoricus*, 79–91.

<sup>20</sup> Andrzej F. Grabski, "Przedmiot i modele badań historiograficznych", in Andrzej F. Grabski, *Kształty historii* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1985), 75–100.



arc that binds the tale of the history of historiography conceived in this way is, on the one hand, Achilles, symbolizing the relationship between myth and history, and on the other, Béatrice de Planissoles, personifying the conventional boundary between ‘great’ and ‘small’ history.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to other studies of this type, the textbook does not contain extensive biographical data on historiographers. It seems that three issues remained at the center of Topolski’s interest.

First of them was tracing the fate of historical narrative from its origins in the ancient world, through the attempts to make it more “scientific”, at least since the Renaissance, to the narrative breakthrough that challenged these efforts. The researcher tried to recreate the nature of its coherence each time, which could be achieved via “the historian’s vision of the world and man, including the vision of the historical process and ideology from various levels of generality, up to and including the historian’s personal preferences”<sup>22</sup>.

Secondly, Topolski analyzed the ways of understanding truth that had changed throughout history in connection with the development of source criticism. Consequently, he wrote about pragmatic truth, about various types of realistic concepts, and in the final parts he referred to the category of consensual truth.

Thirdly, and finally, he was interested in issues related to the gradual widening of the fields of historical reflection. Topolski drew attention to the long-lasting domination of political history, the emergence of new disciplines such as history of culture or economic history, and finally, referring to the 20th century, he commented on the visions of global history.

For these reasons, when reading the book, one can sometimes get the impression that it is structurally “cracked”. It is difficult to find any single guiding principle in it. A kind of “eclecticism” is perhaps most visible at the conceptual level. Topolski refers to the methodology derived from two opposing, in a sense, visions of historiography. Scientific language is accompanied by moderately constructivist language. From this perspective, the book shows a kind of “suspension” of historical reflection between culture and science; and its justification is drawn from both spheres.

As in *Theory of Historical Knowledge*, Topolski tried to combine the influence of “external” factors on historiography with an emphasis on its “internal” changes. On the one hand, he devoted a relatively large amount of space to philosophical considerations, e.g. ways of understanding time, reconstruction of the intellectual climate of a given epoch.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, he referred to the “classic” historiographic analysis when discussing selected works by historians.

<sup>21</sup> Topolski, *Od Achillesa*, 8, 146.

<sup>22</sup> Topolski, *Od Achillesa*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, Topolski argued that “the impact of changes in the field of philosophy, philosophy of science and humanities on writing the history of historiography should be manifested on three levels: 1. In the historiographic analysis of current [...] historical production, to show the indescribable transformations taking place in its domain without taking into account this influence; 2. In adopting from the new philosophy of history the constructs arising from it that facilitate the analysis of historical works [...]; 3. In the



The second example I would like to refer to concerns the already mentioned monograph on Rutkowski. Despite the passage of years, to this day it remains the only book about this figure in Polish historiography.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps one can reasonably argue that this is Topolski's most "classic" work in the field that interests me. He successfully combined the intellectual portrait of Rutkowski with a passionate analysis of his theoretical and methodological views. Topolski tried to "include" the vision of history created by his mentor into two corresponding contexts.

The first was related to the general changes that had been marked in historiography since the 1930s and which were continued after World War II. At that time, there was a period of profound reorientations and reevaluations concerning both the field of historical ontology and epistemology. As it is known, especially in the first post-war years, before the Stalinist unification, the community of Polish researchers was also involved in them. Criticism of some historiographic traditions of the Second Polish Republic was accompanied by the search for "new paths", both in the methodological sense and with regard to the reinterpretation of the image of Polish history, which was needed according to most researchers.<sup>25</sup> Topolski wanted to show his protagonist as "an early precursor of the model of historiography which could be called theoretical explanatory and global at the same time".<sup>26</sup> He drew attention to his cooperation with the leading innovators of the 20th-century historical science from the *Annales* circle, above all with Marc Bloch.<sup>27</sup>

The second context that I would like to highlight here is related to the discussion taking place in Poland at that time on the shape of Polish economic historiography. Formally, it concerned only the economic history of the pre-partition era, but in fact, due to the importance of the economic aspect of the historical process within the theory of historical materialism, as well as the contemporary situation in the historian community, it had a meaning that went far beyond the aforementioned subject matter. From today's perspective, it can probably be considered an early phase of the struggle for position in the field (to use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology), within the whole community of past

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reinterpretation (understood as a permanent process) of the views of past historians in accordance with Gadamer's concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, i.e. in the constant reevaluation of the changing horizons of historians of historiography and historians of the past, Jerzy Topolski, "Historia historiografii wobec wyzwań *linguistic turn*", in *Metodologiczne problemy syntezy historii historiografii polskiej*, ed. by Jerzy Maternicki (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 1998), 41.

<sup>24</sup> From the later works it is worth paying attention to the following comprehensive article: Krzysztof Zamorski, "Potrzeby badań nad historią gospodarczą", in *Metodologiczne problemy syntezy historii historiografii polskiej*, ed. by Jerzy Maternicki (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 1998), 251–264.

<sup>25</sup> I am referring here to the title of the following article: Henryk Barycz, "O nowe drogi historiografii polskiej", *Nauka i Sztuka* 2 (1946): 324–336. The text was written earlier, in October 1944; the author was inspired, *inter alia*, by the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising.

<sup>26</sup> Topolski, *O nowy model*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Topolski, *O nowy model*, 97–100.

researchers. It concerned the answer to the question of whose and what vision of historical materialism would prove to be the most influential and widely accepted in the research community.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast to the Stalinist period, it took place among a group of historians, not ideologues. I mean such names as Natalia Gąsiorowska-Grabowska, her student Witold Kula, Stanisław Śreniowski and the protagonist of Topolski's work — Jan Rutkowski. Analyzing the dispute that was taking place at the time, e.g. at the 7th General Congress of Polish Historians in Wrocław in September 1948<sup>29</sup>, Topolski clearly defended his mentor's main theses. He stated, *inter alia*, the reasons for recognizing the division of income as the axis of the synthesis of the pre-partition economic history, defended Rutkowski against the accusations that he did not see the essence of periodization divisions in history (the so-called scheme of the theory of socio-economic formations), and finally emphasized those themes in his mentor's works that deviated from the principle of economic determinism.<sup>30</sup> From this point of view, he criticized the reasoning of Kula and other representatives of the Łódź community.<sup>31</sup> He also questioned Gąsiorowska's opinion included in the review of the first volume of *Historia gospodarcza Polski [Economic History of Poland]*, who stated that the theory of historical materialism was 'alien' to Rutkowski.<sup>32</sup> Incidentally, it is worth adding that Rutkowski himself, for various reasons (his worsening disease, the desire to finish the second volume of *Economic History of Poland*), was rather passive in this dispute. This may also be corroborated by the refusal of Władysław Konopczyński's request to write or amend a chapter on the theory of historical materialism, which was to be included in *Historyka* but was finally blocked by censorship.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> In the context of Topolski, I wrote about it in the article Rafał Stobiecki, "Między dogmatem ideologa a modernizacją. Marksizm Jerzego Topolskiego," in *Oblicza przeszłości*, ed. by Wojciech Wrzosek (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Epigram, 2011), 53–68.

<sup>29</sup> Topolski, *O nowy model*, 234–236.

<sup>30</sup> Topolski wrote, *inter alia*, that Rutkowski "also indicated the impact of «individual components of the superstructure» on the economic basis," Topolski, *O nowy model*, 253.

<sup>31</sup> On October 30, a special discussion was organized in Łódź on Rutkowski's book, *Historia gospodarcza Polski [Economic History of Poland]*, in which the author did not participate. In a letter to Gąsiorowska (of December 12, 1946), Rutkowski, wanting not so much to refute the critics' accusations but to broaden the discussion within the community, suggested publishing two survey articles in the journal *Roczniki Dziejów Społeczno-Gospodarczych [Annals of Socio-Economic History]* on the application of the theory of historical materialism in the works of foreign and Polish historians. He suggested that the articles should be written by Gąsiorowska herself and Kula. In response (a letter of January 30, 1947), Gąsiorowska refused to participate and suggested, what was typical, that the texts should be written by Stanisław Ehrlich, Stefan Żółkiewski or Adam Schaff. Ultimately, their publication did not take place. I quote from Topolski, *O nowy model*, 248–249. Over time, Kula clearly softened his position on the question of the importance of Rutkowski's achievements. See Witold Kula, *Problemy i metody historii gospodarczej*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1983), 337.

<sup>32</sup> *Roczniki Dziejów Społeczno-Gospodarczych* II (1947): 159.

<sup>33</sup> For more information, see Piotr Biliński, "Kilka uzupełnień na marginesie wydania «Historyki» Władysława Konopczyńskiego," *Klio Polska* VIII (2016): 180–181.

While reading Topolski's book, a question arises as to what extent, when writing the monograph on Rutkowski and proving his Marxist views, he referred to his own experiences related to the struggle for the position of "the first Marxist in Polish historiography" and a disputation, *inter alia*, with Adam Schaff?<sup>34</sup>

These two books by no means exhaust the richness of the Poznań historian's historiographic reflection. We should also mention, for example, the texts published in the collections entitled: *Marxizm i historia* [*Marxism and History*] (1977)<sup>35</sup>; *Nowe idee współczesnej historiografii* [*New Ideas in Contemporary Historiography*] (1980)<sup>36</sup>, *Prawda i model w historiografii* [*Truth and Model in Historiography*] (1982)<sup>37</sup>, and finally in the book *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej* [*How to Write and Understand History: Mysteries of Historical Narrative*] (1996). The first of them contained pioneering works in Polish historiography about the Annalists, Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel, reflections on Michel Foucault, perhaps the first essay on psychohistory in Polish literature, and finally remarks on the emergence of historical anthropology.<sup>38</sup>

In *New Ideas ...* we can find several texts concerning issues regarding Polish history, *inter alia*, articles on the methodology of monographs on Polish history and attempts at a model exposition on economic history.

In the work *Truth and Model...*, published in Łódź, there are articles on both universal historiography in the form of a text about Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy, one of the precursors of Enlightenment thought, and Polish historiography, including Joachim Lelewel as one of the pioneers of economic history. This collection also includes an article about Rutkowski, in a way foreshadowing the future book.

Finally, a number of interesting interpretative tropes and erudite historiographic analyses can be found in the book *How to Write and Understand...* . From the point of view that interests me in this publication, the fragments concerning the relationship between myth and historiography (Topolski referred to the earlier findings of Kula more or less at the same time when Grabski was writing about this issue), historiographic reflections on the Holocaust or an erudite study on Ernst Kantorowicz's work stand out.

Understandably, not all of these texts have stood the test of time in the same way (I mean those written before 1989), but when they appeared, they successfully popularized the ideas of historiography, or more broadly, of Western

<sup>34</sup> Stobiecki, *Między dogmatem ideologa*.

<sup>35</sup> The bibliography compiled by Topolska contains 12 reviews of this work in academic journals and the socio-cultural press. The following historians wrote about it: Andrzej F. Grabski, Jerzy Tomaszewski and Jerzy Serczyk, *Między historią*, 103.

<sup>36</sup> This work was reviewed by Henryk S. Michalak and Andrzej Zybertowicz, *Między historią a teorią*, 110.

<sup>37</sup> This work was discussed by Sławomir Magala, Jerzy Maroń and Jerzy Maternicki, *Między historią a teorią*, 114.

<sup>38</sup> Only then were Grabski's studies on the same subject published in the book *Kształty historii* [*Shapes of History*], completed in 1981 but only published until 1985.

humanities in the Polish community. This was particularly important due to the limited availability of some works in the Polish libraries of that time and the small number of translations. Topolski took up in them both new themes, such as the above-mentioned text on Lelewel, and ones that had already been somehow endemic in the historiographic reflection in Poland, as in the case of the interpretation of the partitions in Polish and German historiography until 1939.<sup>39</sup> In *How to Write and Understand...*, in turn, he acted as a commentator and popularizer of the latest trends in world historiography.

IV. The ‘classic’ history of historiography includes three corresponding domains: 1. research on the “infrastructure” of historical science — history of institutions, schools, seminars and scientific societies; 2. studies on the changing theoretical and methodological assumptions of historiography; 3. finally, historians of historiography are often interested in the vision of universal or national history, created within different cultural circles, selected historiographic tradition or historian community.

Looking from this perspective, Topolski was not a “classic” historian of historiography and he did not cover all the above-mentioned areas to the same or even comparable degree. He created his own, original model of practicing this discipline. For him, historiographic reflection was a pretext to elaborate on theoretical and methodological considerations. At the same time, I agree with Solarska that he defended the idea of truth. He considered it an element (feature?) of history’s identity and that without it history ceases to be itself. From this point of view, it must remain at the center of the exposition on the history of historiography.<sup>40</sup>

Topolski was primarily interested in reflecting on history, including the phenomenon of historicity, i.e. answering the question of how people in successive epochs dealt with the past, how they understood it and why. In this way, he created a general framework for more specialized historiographic studies, provided them with the necessary context, and prioritized fundamental problems. By emphasizing the dialogical dimension of reflection on the past, he stubbornly built the foundations of methodological self-reflection in the Polish community. For this he used both the methodology of history and history of historiography. Thus, he created conditions for their close cooperation. His successors, who represent both “sister” disciplines, have been trying to be faithful to this message, as far as it is possible.

Translation Paweł Hamera

<sup>39</sup> In 1970, the following work was published: Marian H. Serejski, *Europa a rozbiory Polski. Studium historiograficzne* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970).

<sup>40</sup> Maria Solarska, “O prawdzie w historiografii – pragmatycznie i idealistycznie”, *Historia@Teoria* 3, part 1 (2017): 125–126. Cf. Jerzy Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2008), 302–304.

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