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## PROTESTANTS IN MASURIA. ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

### 1.

The presented volume of studies *Protestants in Masuria. History and Literature* is the harvest of an important scientific meeting, the National Scientific Conference "The History, Culture and Writings of Protestants in Masuria: From the 16th to the 21st Century." It took place in an unusual place: in the temple of the Parish of Divine Love in Ełk (June, 22-23, 2016) and its co-organizers were: the Faculty of Philological Studies "East-West" from the University of Białystok, the Historical Museum in Ełk, the Scientific Association "Oikoumene" and the Methodist parish itself.

What is important: it was in this parish where for many years Edward Małek (1907-1995) was the pastor. He was the defender and guardian of the Prussian Masurians, Germans and Polish evangelicals in Ełk and its surroundings, he was also the author of an excellent work *Where is my Homeland? Memoirs* (Białystok – Ełk 2016).<sup>1</sup>

We dedicate this volume to his memory.

### 2.

The conference was scientific and interdisciplinary. It gathered scholars of literature, language, and history of Masurians and of the Masurian Protestants from Białystok, Ełk, Poznań, Warsaw, Olsztyn, Gdańsk, Bydgoszcz and Wrocław, and it was organised under the honorary patronage of the Bishop of Methodist Church for Southern and Central Europe, Fr. Patrick Streiff, PhD; the Dean of the Faculty of Philology UofB, Prof. Bogusław Nowowiejski, and the Mayor of Ełk, Tomasz Andrukiewicz.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E. Małek, *Gdzie jest moja Ojczyzna? Wspomnienia (Where is my Homeland? Memoirs)*, introduction and edition by J. Ławski, preface by Fr. D. Zuber, Białystok – Ełk 2016, pp. 721 (ed. 2. amended: Białystok – Ełk 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The town of Ełk supported, as always, the organization of the meeting. The Historical Museum in Ełk played a particular role.

The honorable guests of the session were the representatives of the Małłek family: the son of pastor Edward Małłek – Andrzej Małłek from Hamburg and Mrs. Jadwiga Siewierska-Małłek (Denmark). The Scientific Committee of the meeting consisted of Prof. dr habil. Zbigniew Chojnowski (UWM, Olsztyn), Fr. Bp. Edward Puślecki, PhD, (the Evangelical-Methodist Church in Poland), Director Kazimierz Bogusz (Historical Museum in Ełk), Łukasz Zabielski, PhD (the Scientific Department of the Łukasz Górnicki's Library in Podlasie, Białystok) and Stefan Michał Marcinkiewicz, PhD (UWM, Olsztyn). The Committee was chaired by Prof. Jarosław Ławski (UofB, Białystok) and Fr. Dariusz Zuber (Parish of Divine Love in Ełk), assisted by: Monika Jurkowska (UofB, Białystok), dr habil. Anna Janicka (UofB, Białystok).

The meeting inaugurated an interdisciplinary, long-term project of research into Masurians' culture, their history, literature from the beginning to the present. The origins of this project go back to 2013, when in Ełk there was organized – with the support of the town's authorities – the International Scientific Conference “The Multicultural World of Siegfried Lenz. History. Present day. Interpretations” (October, 11-12, 2013), which yielded a volume under the same title (Białystok – Ełk 2014). Next, work was undertaken on the editing of Edward Małłek's opus vitae, *Where is my Homeland? Memoirs*. In the initial idea of the originator, the Masurian conferences should be held every two years – necessarily in one of Masurian towns, and they should be organised by research centers operating in north-eastern Poland: Ełk, Olsztyn, or Białystok. The issues to be discussed during the conference devoted to Masurian Protestants were formulated as follows:<sup>3</sup>

- Historical aspects of the functioning of Protestant communities from the 16th century to the present.
- Protestant literature and literature inspired by Protestantism.
- Material culture, art, local customs and traditions of Protestants.
- Pastor Edward Małłek, his activities and writings.
- Protestantism among other denominations in historical and literary terms.
- Polish writers, German Protestants from Masuria.
- Protestant spirituality in Masuria.
- Polishness and its changes in Warmia and Masuria.
- The Picture of Protestantism in Polish and German literature.

Further scientific meetings, if they occur, must have a well-defined topic and gather researchers from different disciplines, both from Poland and abroad. Their formula should also be open to interested students and residents of Masuria. Undoubtedly, it will be an interest of an elite group of self-aware researchers of history, simply because that is how it often is.

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<sup>3</sup> *Wielokulturowy świat Siegfrieda Lenza. Studia (Siegfried Lenz's Multicultural World. Studies)*, edited by J. Ławski and R. Żytyńiec, Białystok – Ełk 2014, pp. 319.

## 3.

The Elk conference in 2016 had its moments worthy of being preserved, including the inauguration, in which apart from the organizers, the floor was given to Andrzej Małłek, the son of pastor Edward Małłek. The guests were greeted by the Vice-Mayor of Elk, Artur Urbański. The ceremonial opening of the session was made by an expert on Masurian topics, Prof. Zbigniew Chojnowski from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The conference was preceded by an important ecclesial event: A synod of the Evangelical-Methodist Church in Poland, which was held for the first time in Elk, and the preparations to it were led by Fr. Dariusz Zuber.

Undoubtedly, what will stay in the memory of all participants is the excellent piano concert by Prof. Robert Marata from Warsaw (June 23, at 5.00 p.m.), built on Chopin's repertoire. Earlier (May 20, 6.00 p.m.), in the Methodist Church, a psalm concert of the *Cit hera Cantorum* group was held. It presented psalms from a 16th-century Evangelical *Psalter*.

Special – and unexpected – guests of the conference were the excellent Warsaw linguists: Prof. dr habil. Janusz Siatkowski (UW, Warsaw), who in the 1950s conducted studies of the vernacular in Masuria, and dr habil. Dorota Rembiszewska, Prof. of IS PAN from the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, who conducts research on the language of Masuria, Podlasie and northern Mazovia. Young people from Elk high schools were also among listeners of the lectures on the first day of the session.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the event accompanying the session, and a subject of a major discussion, was the edition of the book by pastor Edward Małłek *Where is my Homeland? Memoirs*. Its promotion took place on February 25, 2016 in Zofia Nasierowska's Municipal Public Library in Elk.<sup>5</sup> Both during the session, and during the promotion event there were guests living in Elk, who directly knew pastor Edward Małłek. Among them was Mrs. Lilia Skindzier, who visited him in Germany, and who used to host him when he returned to Elk.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Compare: J. Siatkowski, *Studia nad słowiańsko-niemieckimi kontaktami językowymi (Studies on Slavic-German Language Relations)*, Warsaw 2015; D. Rembiszewska, *O języku Glogera (On Gloger's Language)*, In: Z. Gloger, *Pisma rozproszone (Straggled Writings)*, Vol. II: 1877–1889, Eds. J. Ławski, J. Leończuk, introduction: A. Janicka, D. Rembiszewska, edition and footnotes: Ł. Zabielski, S. Kochaniec, M. Siedlecki, G. Kowalski, notes and dictionary of periodicals: A. Janicka, indexes M. Al.-Kaber and M. Siedlecki, Białystok 2015.

<sup>5</sup> E. Małłek, *Krótką historia parafii Elk Kościoła Metodystycznego. A short history of the Elk parish of the Methodist Church, (Napisał pierwszy pastor Edward Małłek) written by the first pastor Edward Małłek*, provided by Fr D. Zuber, ed. and preparation for print; J. Ławski, Polish-German version, Hamburg 1989 – Białystok/Elk 2015. This extremely rare publication is available in five Polish libraries.

<sup>6</sup> The discussion in the Parish of Divine Love (PDL), accompanying the promotion of the book, had following participants: Prof. Jarosław Ławski (UofB), Dir. Iwona Adeszko (PDL), Stefan Michał

In this way, the Methodist Church in Elk was the place which entwined the histories of many people interested in the history and culture of Masuria, and in the activity of pastor Małłek, who in 1983 sent a *Krótką historią Parafii Kościoła Metodystycznego* (*Short History of a Methodist Parish Church*) written both in Polish, and in German, published in a small volume in 2015 (This is a specially adapted fragment of his Memoirs). Publications listed and many others could be acquired during the Conference. The book, which I am inviting you to read, will hopefully increase the number – still not so great, but growing<sup>7</sup> – of interesting, scientifically reliable publications about Masuria.

#### 4.

The figure of Edward Małłek, a man of unprecedented temperament and, therefore, a controversial person, seems to be a good starting point for a realistic conversation about Masurians, their relations with Poles and Germans, Russians and Lithuanians. Future discussion should avoid the shallows of mush correctness, but also aggressiveness. It should not be free from controversial questions such as those which Małłek raised in his Epilogue to the Memoirs, and therefore about the future of Masuria, and of the Masurian culture. On the other hand, one should not hide under the carpet the elements of revisionist thought, alive not only in Germany.

Masurians, Germans and Poles should make themselves well aware of the question about cultural identity, memory and rights to the homeland of all those who not only “settled” the former East Prussia – that is, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians and others – but also of those who were simply born here, who created their Cosmos and their culture.

There are no Masurian Atlantis sunken in the past, no mythical land. There is always only Reality, which embraces the inseparable past, present and future, which *hic et nunc*, is revealed, born, and created in Masuria. It encompasses all the fields of the Existing: culture, but also geopolitics, memory and imagination going into the future, nature and culture, different ethnoses, but after all also the ethos created by nations, their literature, as well as demography, economy, religions, and climate. Reality allows from time to time for myths to come into existence. A slice of the place is given to Borussias and Atlantises, and just then, sometimes unceremoniously, it restores its reign.

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Marcinkiewicz, PhD (UWM), Fr. Dariusz Zuber (PDL in Elk), Mrs. Lilia Skindzier (Elk) and the inhabitants of Elk.

<sup>7</sup> See *Ślązacy, Kaszubi, Mazurzy i Warmiaci – między polskością a niemieckością* (*Silesians, Kashubians, Masurians and the Warmiak – between Polishness and Germanness*), Ed. A. Sakson, Poznań 2008; S. Achremczyk, *Historia Warmii i Mazur* (history of Warmia and Masuria) vol. I-II, Olsztyn 2010–2011; G. Jasiński, *Słownik duchownych ewangelickich na Mazurach w XIX wieku (1817–1914)* (*The Dictionary of Evangelical Clergy in Masuria in the 19th Century, 1817–1914*), Dąbrówno 2015.

The “Masurian Studies” project should be free from mitolatry but open to myth creation and exploring cultural myths. It should include interdisciplinarily different dimensions of – in this case – Masurian ecumenism. I cannot imagine that it could be formed under the wings of one methodological option: postcolonial studies, neo-regionalism, culture studies, etc. All of them, by setting in motion the consciousness of familiar dimensions of Reality, pass quickly, undercut by their creative but also unilateral monotonousness.

There is no doubt that Masuria, including its capital, Elk, deserves serious research<sup>8</sup>, if only because it is rarely that one cultural space has had its land sowed in modern times with so many cultures: of Baltic Prussians, Yotwingians, Teutonic Knights, Poles, Germans, Lithuanians, and Russians. And yet this is still the same Masurian Land.

## 5.

Pastor Małek in his Memoirs set in motion two contradictory perspectives of viewing Masurian issues: the nostalgic and – quite the opposite – the geopolitical one. The former is recorded in acts of reminiscent immersion in remembrance ...

I wonder if today, after 70 years (I am now 81 years old), I would find in the homeland fields, meadows, forests, and mires: roe deer, deer, foxes, hares; wild ducks, flowers, hawks, cuckoos; squirrels, hedgehogs; pikes, crucian carps, roach; the tasty slippery jacks, yellow knights, penny buns, red pine mushrooms ...?

Are there storks on Müllerka's barn, which proclaimed joy and mirth with their “clanging”? Only memories have remained...<sup>9</sup>

The latter, geopolitical, perspective is outlined by a vision of the future Republic of Prussia, which is created by the writer with momentum and faith. “Masurian Studies” are, I believe, supposed to initiate reflection on the abolition of this antinomy: of the nostalgic vision and the geopolitical vision<sup>10</sup>. They should focus first and foremost on the Reality, past and present, study its pulse, directions, thus creating the image of Masuria as it was and is, rather than what it should be as an imagined being.

At the beginning of 2018 it is hard not to remember that Masuria – former and present, even if we do not recognize the connection between them – is only a small but mysterious part of Europe. And Europe's history is in ferment.

*Elk, June 26, 2017*

<sup>8</sup> Compare: S. M. Marcinkiewicz, *Mityczna stolica Mazur. Między Elkiem a Lyck. (The Mythical Capital of Masuria. Between Elk and Lyck)*, Elk 2015.

<sup>9</sup> E. Małek, *Where is my Homeland?...*, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> Compare in this context the publications of the Historical Museum in Elk: *1957. Elk w obiektywie Giseli i Klauza Skibowskich (1957. Elk in the Lens of Gisela and Klaus Skibowscy)*, Elk 2015; *Kraina. Opowieść o wąskim torze (Land. The Story About a Narrow Track)*, photographs W. Moskwa, words M. Olszewski, Elk 2016.