

# Mariusz Ciesielski

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**Mariusz Ciesielski**  
(Bydgoszcz)

**THE ANCIENT GERMANIA AND GERMANS IN POLISH  
HISTORIOGRAPHY. FROM NARUSZEWICZ TO THE PRESENT  
DAY**

Summary of doctoral dissertation defended at the Faculty of Humanities, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011; dissertation supervisor Prof. Leszek Mrozewicz.

The dissertation discusses transformations in the perception of the Germanic issue in Polish science, which primarily depended on the political factors.

The structure of the work entails, apart from the introduction and conclusion, four basic chapters and an appendix with cartographic materials, index of abbreviations and the bibliography.

The issue of ancient Germania and Germans of the last two hundred years is indisputably related to the political history of Poland and the experiences resulting from being Germany's neighbours. Such a general conclusion appears upon analyzing the literature of the studied period, i.e. from Adam Naruszewicz until the present day. Most Polish scholars did not remain indifferent, consciously or otherwise, to the influence of current political developments or the impact of certain ideas and cultural trends. This, in turn, had an effect on the picture of this part of barbarian Europe and the peoples which inhabited it in the first centuries AD. This interdependence was further complicated by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic, search for the Slavic ethnogenesis, to which the lands of Poland were particularly predestined, in which the work of Tacitus played a key role.

Characteristically, in the domestic science Germans were usually given a secondary role, in the sense that the interest in them was motivated by the neighbourhood and relationships with the Slavs as well as potential Germanic influence. The ancient Germans were a kind of negative with regard to studies focusing around Slavdom, due to their temporary, as it had been presumed, stay on the lands of Poland.

In the part of the work devoted to the territorial extent of the ancient Germania a certain consistent trait becomes apparent in its marking. The antique sources, which served as a starting point, did not protect Polish scholars from formulating sometimes extreme or even fantastic theses. These sources were quoted in each instance, but they were interpreted very liberally, or simply *corrected*. Therefore the ancient Germania would be located on a relatively large area, reaching the Jutland Peninsulas in the west, to the vast, virtually unknown to the ancients and fabulous expanses of Eastern and Southern Europe. Depending on the concept, its frontiers were traced from Elbe to Vistula and farther east, and from Scandinavia to the northern coasts of the Black Sea.

The general assertion that in the antiquity Germania was merely a geographical, not an ethnic notion, was the only one not to arouse greater controversy. Unfortunately, it provided the opportunity to locate various peoples and tribes freely, on a randomly construed area, which lead to disputes with the German

science. Particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for many scholars, at least from the Roman times, the territory of the Central Europe was considered a domain of the Slavic tribes.

The present approach of the people of science is devoid of such emotional and nationalistic hue as it was once. It is evident, for instance, in noticing that within a broader notion — Germania, there exists a narrower one — Suebia, which constitutes its most heterogeneous part in terms of ethnicity. Even Tacitus, quoted on so many occasions, and who provides a comprehensive description of Germania, did not define it clearly in the geographical aspect. This became the cause of a series of misunderstandings in historiography, and at the same time an inspiration to delve into that research problem. In the past, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Suebia was interpreted by the Polish science as an area inhabited by Slavic tribes. In fact, this simple technique allowed its frontier to be placed farther in the west of Europe, far beyond the territory of the present day Poland.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the political situation of Poland shaped the interests of domestic researchers. In consequence, one focused on the history of one's own nation and the search for its remotest past. This fact, along with the development of pan-Slavism, at least partly justifies the accounts for the fact of Polish interest in "Slavs" exclusively, in the face of the real threat from German expansionism.

The interwar years proved exceedingly exciting in the Germanic-Slavic issue. After a century-long hiatus, the independent Polish state was reborn, to a large extent created from the lands of the former Prussian partition, with which the Germans never came to terms. This led to an unprecedented politicising of the science and exploiting history, archaeology in particular, to support territorial demands of Germany, humiliated after the lost war. In Poland, on the other hand, research continued on the Slavic lands, for the areas on the Oder and the Vistula were considered as such. The then ethnic issues were a foundation of archaeological research, conducted with incredible ardour, from the Bronze Age to early Middle Ages, with a particular emphasis on the period of Roman influence. At that time, nationalistic theories were being endorsed in German science, guided by the archaeological-settlement method of Gustaf Kossinna's, which turned out to be a greatly convenient tool of propaganda. It was widely believed then that it can dispel doubts in cases where historians were helpless due to lack of written sources.

In Poland, the chief opponent of the German archaeologist was his former pupil, Józef Kostrzewski, who devoted attention to Germans in numerous pub-

lications, although the Polish archaeologist was disposed to losing objectivity, and wrote about prehistoric Germans in the style of his scientific adversaries.

In effect, nationalism and politicization of science caused a narrowing of the area of interest with ancient Germans. It was usually limited to disproving German theories and rejecting claims to the western Polish lands and in turn making claims to the lands on the Oder.

After the end of the war, refuting theories propounded by the German science was initially the dominant practice. Meanwhile, Poland's new geopolitical shape dictated, once again, embarking on studies concerning the autochthonism of Slavs between the Oder and the Vistula. The leading role in the research was played by the need, heavily endorsed by the Communist authorities, to prove that the western territories, the so-called Regained ones, possess a pre-Slavic origin and only returned to the Motherland after a centuries-long break.

Only since the 1970s did one begin to study ancient Germans more broadly. It was favoured by the change in political climate and in the relationships between Poland and the German states, as well as a fairly widespread acknowledgement of a new theory about the descent of Slavs, and on top of that the denationalization of archaeology and history. This resulted in a shift to issues other than only ethnic ones.

In debatable issues, related to *Calisia*, *Lugii* and *Silingi*, it was also attempted to demonstrate that these peoples and geographical names mentioned in the antique sources are Slavic ethnonyms and toponyms. For a large part of the studied period they were actually considered as such. Especially *Calisia* and *Lugii*, whose Slavic character was confirmed by linguistic research. Furthermore, based on archaeology it was found that a large settlement from the period of Roman influence existed in the environs of Kalisz. However, it is difficult to state conclusively that it is identical with the locality mentioned by the Alexandrian Geographer.

The *Lugii* became the main focus of scientific attention. They even fell within the scope of interest of Henryk Sienkiewicz, which aroused a lively discussion concerning the origin of one of the heroines in his novel. As regards the *Lugii*, extensive archaeological and linguistic research provided evidence for ethnic interpretation, which attested to their Slavic character. To a limited extent, the existence of another ethnic component, e.g. Celtic or German, was admitted, yet beyond the dominant bulk of the Slavic autochthonous population. Only in newer literature did one interpret the ethnic makeup of this tribal organization differently, which is not to say that there is a shortage of scholars who subscribe to the traditional view.

In the last chapter, an inventory of the most important pieces of evidence, from the point of view of Polish science, to which the aforementioned toponyms and ethnonyms contributed, was a convenient means to support the views on ancient history in this part of Europe. It was usually attempted to demonstrate that the names mentioned by the antique authors survived in the accounts of medieval writers, while in the settlement layers, on the principle of continuity, in the form of artefacts of material culture, and indicated Slavic population. At times, Polish scholars displayed great inventiveness trying to prove the assumptions adopted in advance. In particular, this applied to historians and linguists, who, in their exceedingly convoluted and erudite disquisitions dissected the disputed issues to the minutest detail. In the past, embarking on, and conducting studies on those still controversial, and in many aspects open-ended research problems was the sole premise which justified becoming engaged in the topic of ancient Germans and Germania. Naturally, one notices a certain fluctuation in the perceptions of Germans in historiography. There were spells when they were an object of honest study, without political encumbrances and connotations, yet, unfortunately, for the greater part of the studied period they succumbed to non-scientific influences. On those occasions, individual disciplines of science, such as archaeology and history, so prone to relativism, were utilized in propaganda actions. In Poland, the "Slavic" Biskupin acquired such a propaganda significance.

In conclusion it needs to be clearly stressed that the factor which shaped the interest of Polish science in ancient Germania and Germans in the studied period was the complex political past of Poland and the consequent powerful focus of the scholars on studies devoted to own, earliest history. A considerable role here was due to the neighbourhood of the Germans, who exerted scientific pressure and saw themselves as descendants of the ancient Germans. The examined literature encourages such conclusion, which is further corroborated by the emerging general picture of the Germanic interests and studies in Poland during the last two hundred years.