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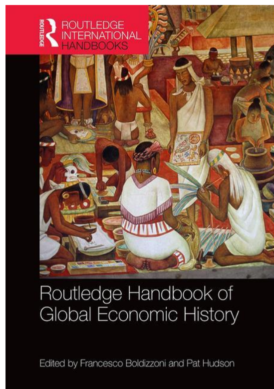

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Francesco Boldizzoni, Pat Hudson

A Periphery at The Centre of Attention

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13

A PERIPHERY AT THE CENTRE OF ATTENTION

Economic history in Poland

Jacek Kochanowicz

Poland's history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is marked by discontinuities – partitions, wars, rule of foreign powers, shifting borders, mass migrations, and far-reaching changes of economic regimes. Polish economic historians throughout the twentieth century not only had to solve the problem of what constituted the subject matter of their studies, but also had to react and accommodate to the challenges and pressures of the social and political environment in which they had to work. The beginnings of economic history as a discipline are traceable to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, its institutionalization to the interwar period, and its flourishing to the 1950s to 1970s – each of these periods radically different from the preceding one. As with other fields of historical studies, economic history has been closely related to nation-building, a complex process in the Polish case because of the nineteenth-century partitions, the troubled years of the interwar independence, the Second World War, the over forty years of a limited sovereignty under state socialism, and the changes after 1989. Despite the provincial location and the overall pressure to develop historical studies conforming to the nation-centred model, there were economic historians able to go beyond the local preoccupations, and – even if focusing on economic history of Poland – to put it into a broad, European and global framework, thus making it relevant for understanding geographically much wider processes of change. The following, while broadly sketching the development of the discipline over a century, focuses on personalities and works that made their mark due to their originality and broader significance.

A recognizable discipline

History in its modern shape formed in Poland in the second half of the nineteenth century, combined a scholarly approach with a participation in the nation-building project, interpreting the past in terms of the 'history of Poland'. The memory of the Polish state – founded in the tenth century, stretching to 900,000 sq. kilometres in the seventeenth century, and collapsing at the end of the eighteenth century – was a frame of reference. The degrees of cultural and political autonomy varied between the three partitions, the largest being the Austrian, where two Polish language universities existed, one in Kraków, the second in Lwów. In the German and Russian partitions, there was much less space for Polish-language institutions of higher learning and research, although publications in Polish were possible. After gaining

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independence in 1918, the new state engaged intensively in the (belated) nation-building process. Establishment of institutions of higher education was part of the process. This was the context in which the discipline of economic history was developing.

While a number of historians ventured into matters of the economic past of Poland in the nineteenth century, the institutionalization of economic history dates from the beginnings of the next century, with chairs and institutes devoted to the discipline, sessions on economic history at the congresses of Polish historians (1925, 1930, 1935), and one journal devoted specifically to the field of social and economic history. Two personalities stand out as programmatic leaders of the discipline and the founders of distinct schools of thought. These were Franciszek Bujak (1875–1953) and Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949).

Bujak, after finishing high school and with five zlotys in his pocket given to him by his peasant father, set out in 1894 for Kraków's Jagiellonian University (Bujak 1927). He obtained his doctorate in 1899, and his *Habilitationsschrift* on the medieval settlement of Małopolska, defended in 1905, is considered the first Polish work in economic history, a discipline in which he then started to lecture at the Jagiellonian University (Madurowicz-Urbańska 1976). In independent Poland, he transferred to the University of Lwów, where he established an institute devoted to economic history. In 1931 he and Rutkowski founded a journal, *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* (Social and Economic History Annales), which is still published today.

Throughout his writings and organizational efforts, Bujak worked to make economic history a discipline in its own right, in terms of a subject matter, research methods, and university curricula. His approach – as that of his Kraków university teachers – was positivist and empirical, with a stress on the use of statistics. He understood the discipline as history which is both economic and social and which should take into account demography, settlement and colonization, money, credit, and prices, but also the impact of such exogenous factors as weather, fires, epidemics, and wars. At the core of his proposed approach were systematically researched, multi-aspect monographs of basic units of social and economic life, such as households, villages, towns, landed estates, and industrial enterprises. Bujak was an institution-builder, creating what is known as 'the Bujak school'. Under his tutelage, his followers produced several volumes of price history, as well as various monographs employing his methods.

Rutkowski, coming from a well-to-do bourgeois family, was for most of his career a professor of economic history at the newly established University of Poznań (Topolski 1986). Having independent means, he travelled a lot. His contacts included Marc Bloch and Henri Seé. His own research, primarily on the agrarian history of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, combined empirical studies with attempts to develop a comprehensive, original programme of reformulation of economic history (Rutkowski 1956). He capped his work by a large comprehensive synthesis of Polish economic history, in its structure a model for the later publications of this sort (Rutkowski 1953).

Rutkowski wanted – in a way similar to the Annales School – to see economic history as not simply descriptive, but as problem-oriented and theory-informed. About standard economic theory's claim to universality he had his doubts and suggested that a specific theory might be necessary for each economic system (Rutkowski 1934a). His somewhat dry style of writing and his methodology were closer to social sciences than to traditional history – personalities do not show in his narrative; instead he employed a rigid comparative framework when explaining historical processes. What he labelled the problem of synthesis was a search for a theoretical axis that would integrate various sub-fields of economic history (Rutkowski 1925). He thought that such integration would be possible if the distribution of social

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(national) income between various social groups and institutions was treated as a key question of economic history. To this issue he devoted several works, one of book length, which developed a classification of incomes of landed estates and a methodology for their statistical reconstruction (Rutkowski 1938).

The perspective of distribution of income served Rutkowski as an analytical tool to address the key questions about modern Polish history: about the specific route of the Polish economy, since the sixteenth century onward, particularly the emergence of demesne farming, and the collapse of the Polish state at the end of the eighteenth century (Rutkowski 1925, 1934b). Why did the late medieval system of peasant tenancy based on money rents and similar to that of the West evolve into demesne farming, based on corvée? He answered this question through a comparative analysis of agrarian regimes in various countries and explained this process by the parallel occurrence, in the Polish case, of two factors: urban demand for grain and a possibility of reinforcing peasant serfdom. The latter gave the lords a possibility of controlling peasants more thoroughly and thus of increasing their share of incomes at the expense of the peasantry. In a book comparing serfdom in France, Germany, and Poland, he explained the diverse evolution of agrarian regimes by differences in the relations between the nobility and the state, both competing for the revenues that could be obtained from the peasantry (Rutkowski 1921: 108–9). Where the state was stronger, it could limit the nobility's power over the peasantry, thus weakening serfdom.[1] The weak Polish state, in turn, could not raise revenues necessary to sustain an adequate military force, which led to its eventual collapse (Rutkowski 1921, 1930). These sorts of ideas came to have great influence in international debates, and from the 1960s, were applied to 'feudal structures' on a broader geographical canvas (Wallerstein 1974; Aston and Philpin 1985).

The importance of Bujak's and Rutkowski's contributions went beyond their own research, as through their seminars and the work of their doctoral students they established schools of younger researchers following their tracks. Both scholars collaborated closely as editors of *Roczniki* . . ., but differed in their approaches to the discipline. While both were putting stress on statistics, and both considered the discipline as history which is economic and social, for Bujak the detailed multi-aspect monographs were a key tool, while Rutkowski stressed a problem-oriented approach. The former was closer to ethnography, giving weight also to psychological factors; the latter tended to see economic history as an objectivist social science. Both, and in particular Rutkowski, attempted to dissociate ideology from scholarly activity and to pursue a value-free type of research to the degree that it was possible.

Flourishing in hard times

The Second World War and its aftermath were a shock for Polish society. The material and human losses were immense; the state territory was moved over two hundred kilometres to the West, followed by mass migrations. The pre-war social structures were destroyed, with the middle and the landed classes eliminated either socially or physically, the Jews exterminated, and the intellectuals who survived put into poverty. Both the Nazis and the Soviets targeted the elite, making its human losses disproportionally high compared with other social groups. The discipline of history suffered additionally due to the destruction of many archives.

The process of post-war reconstruction involved academic life, with new universities established in Toruń, Łódź, and Wrocław. Reconstruction unfolded under new political conditions. The expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence over East Central Europe meant the imposition of state socialism and communist ideology. Remnants of pluralism remained until 1948/9; after that, the political system entered its totalitarian/Stalinist phase. Political

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life was liberalized only in 1956, the change being triggered by the famous Khrushchev secret speech during the twentieth congress of the CPSU.

Intellectuals accommodated to the new conditions partly out of necessity, partly out of the urge to participate in the reconstruction of the country, and partly out of conviction (Miłosz 1953). Witold Kula, a non-communist but leftist economic historian, wrote during the early 1950s an essay (published only in 1958) in the form of letters of two fictional Romans of the time when Christianity had been imposed upon the empire (Kula 1958). The protagonists were torn between a hope that the new faith would bring new promises and a fear that it would destroy the values of an established civilization. That was the inner dialogue of many intellectuals at the time.

History was meant to be rewritten. A 'grand narrative' of pre-war history was the story of the Polish nation and nation-state, with its ascent in the Middle Ages, the glory in the sixteenth century, the crisis of the seventeenth and early eighteenth, the partial revival in the late eighteenth, the collapse in 1795, the fight for independence in the nineteenth century, culminating with its revival in 1918. This vision was now to be replaced by the Marxist narrative, conceptualizing the past in terms of consecutive 'modes of production' or 'socio-economic formations' – feudalism, capitalism, and socialism – the change being fuelled by the rise of productive forces and class warfare. One of the tasks of the newly established Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN) was to produce a multi-volume *History of Poland*, written according to these new prescriptions.

However, the Sovietization of intellectual life in Poland was far from complete; academics trained before the war – even if attacked by young party zealots – maintained high prestige and in most cases were allowed to keep at least research positions. The strength of the intelligentsia and academic *milieu*, hardened by the war experience (clandestine research and teaching included) made the imposition of Soviet-imported solutions far from easy, and made Poland different from other countries of East Central Europe (Connelly 2000; Górny 2007: 151). The authorities tried to remake academic institutions upon the Soviet model, one of the ideas being the establishment of the research institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences, separated from teaching. However, looking for a degree of legitimization among the historical profession they accepted the internationally acclaimed medievalist Tadeusz Manteuffel (1902–70) as Head of IH PAN. He was not a communist. During the Nazi occupation he had served, together with many other historians (including Witold Kula), in the information and propaganda section of the clandestine Home Army, a military arm of the Polish government in exile in London.[2] Thus the above-mentioned *History of Poland*, of which Manteuffel and Kula were among the editors, while organized according to the Marxist interpretation, offered in fact a broad-minded picture of the past, duly reporting academic controversies and debates.

Ascertaining the real role of Marxism in Polish intellectual life in general and historical studies in particular is not an easy matter (Górny 2007; Pleskot 2010: 574–80; Stobiecki 1993). In the introductions to the historical works published in the first half of the 1950s, one finds mandatory ritualistic references to Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin (Siewierski 2011: 157). They are usually followed by good practices of the 'historian's craft' – the discussion of literature (even if dubbed 'a bourgeois science'), and the criticism of sources. After 1956, Stalinist rituals vanished and scholarly language took more standard forms. Marxism, however, was present before and after 1956 not solely as an ornament or a camouflage, but also in some deeper sense. Many members of the Polish intelligentsia tended to be left-oriented (but rarely communist) before and, in particular, during and after the war (Miłosz 1953; Shore 2006). No doubt, the Great Depression was a formative experience for many

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who grew to maturity in the 1930s (Kula 1976: 455; 1994; Małowist 1988). They thought that capitalism brought little to Poland in terms of economic development and social fairness and were looking towards some form of socialist solution. Many treated Marxism seriously before it became mandatory, as opening new vistas for philosophy, social research, and the study of the past. Some of the younger people embraced communism, attracted by its Promethean promise. However, to take Marxism just as a faith was intellectually not easy. At its most abstract level, the Polish Marxist philosophers had to relate themselves to logical positivism, the most important philosophical current before the war, represented by the Lwów–Warsaw school (one of the members of which was the world-renowned logician and mathematician Alfred Tarski). As many of its representatives survived the war, it was influential even under the communist system. This tradition formed one of the checks against accepting Marxism in its primitive, Stalinist version, and also contributed to an empiricist current in the Marxist-inspired interpretations (Malewski 1956). Jerzy Topolski (1928–98), an economic historian turned methodologist, and initially an avowed Marxist, developed from the 1960s onwards his ideas of historical explanation which closely followed a Popperian–Hempelian approach (Topolski 1968: 368–499; 1983: 361–433).[3]

Paradoxically, economic history gained quite a lot of freedom in the otherwise difficult circumstances of the early 1950s. It was considered to be somewhat in tune with the official ideology, stressing so much the role of the 'forces of production'. As Topolski (1983: 96–7) observed, Marxism served the historians at that time as a tool of selection of the subject matter of research, privileging economic history. With this came opportunities in terms of positions and research funds, however meagre they were in the post-war conditions. Young, gifted historians became attracted to the field, feeling that it offered more elbow room than political history. At the same time, as teachers and role-models they had outstanding academics, trained before the war (Siewierski 2011). Research and publication of sources and monographs mushroomed, making the period between the early 1950s and the late 1970s the most prolific for the discipline. Not surprisingly, much attention was devoted to agrarian matters – manorial and peasant farming, peasant obligations, trade in agricultural products, and the like. Economic history was closely linked on the one hand with the history of material culture, on the other hand with social history. The latter initially focused on class warfare, in the 1960s and the 1970s, increasingly on social stratification, and also on family history. The 1960s brought rising interest in historical demography, which is active to this day (Kuklo 2009). While the bulk of the work done in the 1950s to 1970s was on the medieval and particularly the early modern period, nineteenth-century industrialization also attracted attention, as well as the short interwar period.

In terms of 'genre', the majority of books and articles were traditional, solid monographs, based on archival sources. Many works, particularly those on the nineteenth century, relied heavily on quantitative data, usually in the form of simple, descriptive statistics. Few works extended beyond relatively short periods of time, thus this large bulk of works presents a series of snapshots rather than an interpretation of the process of change. With few exceptions, Polish economic historians specialized in the study of the Polish past.

Marxism played some role in the selection of topics, and, to a certain degree, as a source of terminology – as was the conceptualization of historical periods in terms of 'feudalism' and 'capitalism' with its stages of free competition and monopoly. At the same time, Polish historians were open and receptive to Western scholarship. Except for a relatively short period of Stalinism (1949–56), travel to the West was possible and the professional literature accessible, although in a limited way because of lack of funds. The most important of contacts were these with the *Annales* School. From 1956, Poles were invited for shorter and longer

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stays by the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and by Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, the stays usually spent on library studies, seminar participation, and contact building rather than primary research (Kula 2010: 616). Hundreds of scholars visited both institutions, and some maintained close ties with the *Annales* circle, as duly documented in a recent large monograph (Pleskot 2010). The overall impact on the research done in Poland, however, is a matter of a debate. Contrary to an early positive assessment by Pomian (1978), Mączak (Mączak and Tygielski 2000: 167) and Pleskot (2010: 699–725) argue that the methodological influence of the *Annales* School was limited. Indeed, it is true that it would be hard to find Polish equivalents of *longue durée* regional monographs, weaving together demography, prices, land tenure patterns, and mentality into *histoire totale*. A period-specific solid monograph of a town, a village, an estate, with not much of a theoretical underpinning, remained the typical Polish product.

Men of vision

Some names stand above the large body of works produced during the three post-war decades. These are the names of historians who managed to combine meticulous research with a vision, to produce an ambitious interpretation of historical change, and to link specific research with a broad context, reaching outside the history of one country.

No doubt, one of them was Marian Małowist (1909–88), one of the few Polish economic historians who in his research went beyond Poland. He followed neither Bujak nor Rutkowski, developing instead his own original approach (Mączak 1993: 5). His doctoral dissertation was on Stockholm's foreign trade in the fifteenth century (Małowist 1935). Just before the war he finished his Habilitation on Kaffa, the Genovese colony in the Crimea which fell to the Ottomans in 1475. Of the three existing manuscript copies only one was miraculously saved, to be published just after the war (Małowist 1947). In the preface to this book he mentioned that, when reading about the cruelty of invaders' behaviour in Kaffa, he had thought these observations must have been exaggerated. Now, after what he saw during the war – part of which he spent in the Warsaw ghetto, and he lost his wife in the Holocaust – he thought they were not. He became a professor at the University of Warsaw and quickly published a large study of the early modern Dutch cloth-making industry and of Dutch economic expansion along the Baltic coast, to be followed by a series of articles on the trade relations and economic inequalities between East and West Europe (Małowist 1958, 1966, 1974, 2010). Published in foreign languages and offering a synthesizing perspective, they gave Małowist broad recognition. He crowned this line of interests with a large book on the economic relations between the East and the West of Europe in the late Middle Ages and in the modern era (Małowist 1973). His interests in Western Europe's relations with less developed regions, extended to Africa, and also to Portuguese overseas expansion (Małowist 1964, 1969, 1976).

At first glance, Małowist's writings seem descriptive. He avoided terms such as 'theory' or 'model' (Mączak 1993: 9). But, as Sosnowska (2004: 85) convincingly argues, he produced an 'implicit model' explaining inequalities and differences across space by the role of commerce and the character of social structures. He might have gone too far in interpreting the importance of Dutch capital in what he called 'the Baltic sphere' as colonization, as it was not accompanied by political dominance. He offered, however, an interesting interpretation of the rising backwardness of Eastern Europe (Małowist 1973). The crisis of the fourteenth century, affecting Western but not Eastern Europe, opened export possibilities for the latter. These exports were initially furs, timber, then increasingly grains, thus leading to the strengthening of second serfdom. Linking the primary sector of the economy with foreign

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markets weakened the urban economy, thus hampering economic development. Małowist's 'interpretative associations, his interests extending beyond Europe, his perception of the global economic linkages should be considered as antecedents of the present tendencies in the social sciences' (Sosnowska 2004: 89). Wallerstein (1974: ix) singled him out alongside Braudel as the source of inspiration for his world-system theory. Małowist had disciples and followers who became renowned economic historians themselves. They moved forward research on Baltic trade, on the Polish urban economy, but also on areas outside of Europe, particularly Africa and India.

Witold Kula (1916–88) is another important personality. Similarly to Małowist, he taught in high school before the war, while preparing his dissertation on the demography of the Congress Kingdom of Poland.[4] During the war, he taught in the clandestine university, served in the underground Home Army, and took part in the Warsaw Uprising (August–September 1944). After coming back from a German POW camp, he became a professor first at the University of Łódź and then at the University of Warsaw and simultaneously at the IH PAN. A serious illness forced him gradually to decrease his activities from the early 1970s.

Kula had a keen interest in the methodology of economic history and tried to grasp the totality of the discipline as it stood in his times. His book on problems and methods of economic history reviews a vast body of literature published in several languages, analysing the relations between economic history and other fields of historical study as well as with various social sciences (Kula 1963). It also offers a programme, according to which economic history should develop in close dialogue with economic theory; take into regard social and particularly class relations; and rely on quantification.

Like Małowist, Kula was close to the left and can be considered a Marxist, although – also like Małowist – he never belonged to the communist party. His early interest in economic history he explained by his disappointment with the history he was taught in school, solidaristic and nationalist. 'I was looking for the history of peasants and workers, of agriculture and industry; I was looking for the history of modest and unknown people, whose collective work, sacrifices, and suffering made our country as it is' (Kula 1976: 455). Inspired by a debate on whether the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed an economic revival of Poland after decades of stagnation, he set out to study early industrialization. In a Marxist vein, this was accompanied by a question about Poland's 'transition from feudalism to capitalism' (Kula 1955). Over two decades, he completed monographic studies of about twenty industrial enterprises, established in the late eighteenth century (Kula 1956). The results were contrary to initial expectations. What he found were not the beginnings of capitalism, but rather a dead end of feudalism. In particular the manufactures established by the king or by the magnates served mostly to supply luxury goods for their courts and had only a partly market character, as they relied on servile labour and raw materials coming from the landed estate with no money costs. The next wave of industrialization that occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century – as Kula's collaborators in a research team he created at the IH PAN had shown – was *not* a continuation of the earlier efforts, but a completely new process. However, this was hardly capitalist either – its main driver was the state (Jedlicki 1964).

The observations of early manufacturing undertaken in the context of the manorial economy prompted Kula (1962) to write a short book with a title clearly inspired by Rutkowski's 1934 paper – *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System*. It presents a model of the Polish economy from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and – in its broader implications – a way to analyse non-capitalist systems (Kochanowicz 1990). The model postulates two types of 'enterprises': demesne and peasant farms. The peasants' economic aim is survival and

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they rely on their own labour. The demesne farms produce grains for exports, but have no monetary costs of production, as they exploit the servile work of peasants. Cash revenues from selling the grains are spent upon the importation of luxury goods. The type of economic calculation and rationality in each kind of enterprise is system-specific and different from that of capitalism, mainly because both types of enterprise do not have to use money to acquire factors of production and are not motivated by profits in a capitalist sense. As a consequence, the book questions the validity of a universalist claim of one type of economic theory, in a manner that has wider lessons for economic historians (Boldizzoni 2011: 87). The model explains the short- and long-term dynamics of the system, in particular the strengthening of the manorial sector relative to the peasant one, and the self-destructive processes at work, such as the weakening of the urban economy.

While the material came from the Polish past, the methodology of the book refers to diverse theoretical legacies from beyond Polish borders. Apart from Marxism, visible in the way Kula treated the relations between lords and peasants, he draws on Alexander Chayanov's (1923, 1924) theory of peasant economy and on early theories of economic development, particularly that of Arthur Lewis (1954).[5] In this respect, *Theory. . .* reflected the lively interests of Polish economists of that time in the economic development of the Third World. Kula remained in close contact with Michał Kalecki and Ignacy Sachs, who established a research and training centre, visited by many young economists from the developing countries. The book was translated into several languages and triggered wide-ranging debate, amongst specialists in as diverse fields as Byzantine history and contemporary Indian economy.[6] Among others, it attracted the attention of Zygmunt Bauman (1963), then a rising star of Polish sociology, Douglass North (1977), Michael Postan (1977), and Fernand Braudel, who prefaced the French edition. It is characteristic, however, that – except for North – neither Kula's, nor Małowist's work was of interest to American neoclassical economic historians. Despite the wider applicability of the ideas and their lessons for an exclusively Anglocentric approach neither of these authors were mentioned in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History*, for instance, which pays only scant attention to the problem of the relative backwardness of Eastern Europe (Mokyr 2003).

The interpretations offered by both Małowist and Kula are pessimistic; they picture Poland and Eastern Europe as backward, stagnating, and locked in a position of dependency (the term, however, was not used by any of them) upon the West since the sixteenth century at least, and perhaps even earlier. Sosnowska (2004), in her important study of the economic historiography of the post-war period, points to 'backwardness' as a key idea organizing the thinking of Polish economic historians. Apart from Kula and Małowist, she singles out also Jerzy Topolski and Andrzej Wyczański (1924–2008) as those who offered important interpretations of Eastern Europe's and Poland's specific routes of development. Topolski, in a series of works, explained the rise of capitalism in Western Europe and the parallel strengthening of demesne farming in the East in terms of specific forms of economic activities of the gentry, attempting to increase incomes in the face of rising aspirations (Topolski 1964, 1994). Wyczański (1987) put forward an interpretation according to which Poland was, in the late Middle Ages and in the first half of the sixteenth century, 'catching up' with Europe, the later developmental divergence stemming from the incompleteness of this imitative process. Małowist, Kula, Topolski, Wyczański, and some of their colleagues and followers offered interpretations of Poland, and more generally Eastern Europe as linked to the West, but backward, or peripheral. These interpretations preceded and influenced those Western scholars working on the European and global economy, such as Perry Anderson, Fernand Braudel, and Immanuel Wallerstein (Sosnowska 2004).

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Modernization

One is justified to ask: and what about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the period of industrialization and modernization of not only the West, but also Eastern Europe? The Hungarian historians Ivan Berend and György Ránki (1987) developed their thinking on this issue in a debate with the World-System approach proposed by Wallerstein. What about the Poles? What lines of argument did the researchers of the industrialization period develop?

The 'core–periphery' perspective (but without using these particular terms) is certainly present in a few excellent works on the history of ideas (Górski 1963; Janowski 1998; Jedlicki 1988; Kizwalter 1991; Kofman 1992). They reconstruct the views of the Polish intelligentsia, for whom the gap between their country and the West became, from the end of the eighteenth century, one of the most acute issues. While looking for solutions, many writers doubted whether backwardness could be overcome by market forces alone, and were thus looking for some mobilizing role for the state. Much work has been done in this respect on the intellectual history of the nineteenth century, some on the interwar period. Less has been done on state socialism, but no doubt there were hopes that 'socialist industrialization', together with other state policies – education first and foremost – would modernize the country (Koryś 2007).

However, in the abundant and valuable research on industrialization, based on very solid analysis of archival primary sources,[7] the 'core–periphery' perspective is less visible, as is the theory of modernization. With the exception of a few outstanding scholars, there are also hardly any attempts at interdisciplinary cross-readings. The theorizing is mostly reduced to Marxist terminology (the bulk of these works dating from the 1950s and 1960s), as for instance 'free competition' and 'monopoly' stages of capitalism. Needless to say, the neoclassical approach is absent as well, and there is little of the approach of a business history kind. Most of these works, often abundant in statistics, have a descriptive character. There are few, if any, attempts to produce long-term quantitative assessments of economic development in terms of output of various industries, factor productivity, and GDP. The task is not easy, if at all possible, taking in consideration historical discontinuities mentioned in this chapter. Lacking such assessment makes it difficult to place Polish developments in a comparative perspective.

Still, this research allows one to draw a general outline of the process of industrialization of the Polish lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was quite intensive particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, although belated and on a smaller scale in comparison with the West, with the considerable role of the state in the early nineteenth century and in the interwar period, and mostly stimulated by market forces in the period now dubbed 'the first globalization', i.e. 1870–1914 (Kula 1960). The interwar period had also been under intensive study, in large measure due to the pioneering efforts of Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski. They themselves studied various aspects of the economic development of this period, particularly banking and finance, and synthesized the existing research in a multi-volume publication, available in a shortened version also in English (Landau and Tomaszewski 1967–89, 1985). The role of the state in industrialization, so important in the Polish case, was scrutinized by Drozdowski (1963), Gołębiowski (1985), and Kofman (1992). Andrzej Jezierski, initially a specialist on the nineteenth century, extended his interests into contemporary history and produced a valuable textbook on the economic history of Poland under state socialism (Jezierski and Petz 1988).

It is worth noting that the most interesting works of economic historians were conceived and discussed in a very particular intellectual climate of the period between 1956 and 1968, the beginnings of the post-Stalinist thaw and the anti-intellectual and anti-Semitic campaign,

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a reaction to students' and intellectuals' protests of March 1968.[8] After 1956, the lid of ideological suppression was partly opened, and intellectual and artistic life flourished, resulting in perhaps the best period of Polish cultural life after the Second World War. In that time Witold Lutosławski composed his highly acclaimed Second Symphony, the Polish Film School was at its best, posters created by Polish artists were influencing international graphic design, Leszek Kołakowski and Bronisław Baczko published works on Spinoza and Rousseau, Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor revolutionized theatre performance. Marxism in some ways was still treated seriously, but it was the Marxism of Gramsci rather than that of Lenin. However, one could also easily end up in jail for expressing certain views too loudly, as was the case with historian and activist Karol Modzelewski (born 1937). He was put in prison for three and half years in 1965 for writing, together with a prominent activist of the democratic opposition, Jacek Kuroń (1934–2004), a political pamphlet against the party (Kuroń and Modzelewski 1970). After his release, he focused on research, producing a doctorate which turned out to be one of the finest works on the economic history of the early Middle Ages, combining a detailed analysis of primary sources with a comprehensive synthesis of the economic bases of early-medieval monarchy (Modzelewski 1975).

The twilight

Topics other than economy increasingly drew the attention of those who started their careers as economic historians. Jerzy Topolski went his own way, towards researching the methodology of history. For other economic historians, the twin discipline of social history was the most important of these new fields. Małowist's disciples Maria Bogucka and Henryk Samsonowicz turned from studying the economy of medieval and early modern towns towards their social life. Bogucka later engaged in women's history. Wyczański and his followers researched social stratification of the early modern period, and some specialized in historical demography. Kula's collaborators, who in the 1950s focused on industrialization, later switched to a major project attempting to reconstruct social change in the Congress Kingdom of Poland in the nineteenth century. They were looking at the same processes as before, but from a different angle, studying the dissolution of the old order based on status and the emergence of a new one, with its specific patterns of social stratification. This was labelled by Kula – perhaps influenced by Gerschenkron, whose work he admired – as 'the development in the conditions of rising backwardness' (Kula 1979). Three books of Jerzy Jedlicki, one of the most talented among Kula's students of the 1950s, show vividly this broader trajectory of interests. The first was on the state-induced industrialization in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, the second about the changing place of the nobility under rising capitalism (Jedlicki 1964, 1968). The third – most known and discussed and which has much wider transnational application – is on ideas, on reactions of the Polish intellectuals of the nineteenth century to the modernity coming from the West (Jedlicki 1988). Jedlicki is also the editor-in-chief of the recent three-volume history of the Polish intelligentsia (Janowski 2008; Jedlicki 2008; Micińska 2008). Jacek Kochanowicz is one of the few of Kula's disciples who stayed with economic history, specializing in the peasant economy of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries (1981, 1992) and the processes of modernization of Polish lands (2006).

Witold Kula's own last large and perhaps most original work is devoted to traditional weights and measures and their replacement in continental Europe by the metric system (Kula 1970). It is clearly the work of an economic historian, but one who is even more a social and cultural historian, and an anthropologist at the same time (Piasek 2004). In this sense, it is well ahead of its time. The traditional systems of measures are treated as functionally related

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to a society's way of life and its vision of the world. Kula the Marxist shows how clashes of interests between lords and peasants, or town and country reflect in the conflict over what is a 'just and fair' measure. The introduction of the metric system in France and elsewhere he analyses as a part of a revolutionary attempt to impose upon various peoples a rationalistic social project.

Yet another was the route taken by Antoni Mączak (1928–2003), Małowist's disciple specializing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His early interests and important contributions were in the field of economic history; he studied the cloth-making industry, peasant economy, and the Polish–Dutch grain trade (Mączak 1955, 1962, 1972). In a small book targeted at a broader audience he presented an excellent synthesis of the beginning of modern economy in Europe (Mączak 1967). His book on sixteenth-century travellers is much closer to the cultural history of a few decades later in Western Europe and elsewhere, but the Małowist School's interest in economic divisions of Europe is still there, this time observed through the eyes of the travelling gentlemen (Mączak 1978). Once again he comes back to these differences from a perspective of political history, or perhaps historical sociology, comparing types of political structures across the continent (Mączak 1986). His last major study is on clientage, treated as an important social as much as a political institution (Mączak 2003).

The twilight of economic history, particularly of the pre-industrial period, was thus visible already in the 1970s; comparatively little has been produced since then (Kochanowicz and Sosnowska 2011). One may justly ask about the turning point of 1989 and its impact upon the discipline. After all, this was a profound change, ending the authoritarian regime, shifting Poland's position in the world geopolitically, and changing radically its economic system. Never before was the country so open and so exposed to the West, never before – with the exception of the last quarter of the nineteenth century perhaps – was it so capitalist. Moreover, the majority of the intellectual elite embraced the changes, including the turn towards neoliberal models of capitalism, with enthusiasm. Mainstream neoclassical economics, in a few years, had been imported by economics departments of leading universities and by think-tanks. But the impact of all this on the discipline of economic history has been minimal. First, overall relatively little is done as far as research on the economic past is considered. There are groups of scholars in Warsaw, Wrocław, Poznań, and Łódź, focused mostly on the twentieth century, but the bulk of this work is much smaller than was the case three or four decades ago. Second, most of it is descriptive and not engaging in dialogue with what is being done internationally, neither are Polish economic historians much visible on the international scene.

One of the reasons may be that those young historians who specialize in the earlier epochs, often fascinated by the 'literary turn' and postmodernism, focus rather on cultural history or the history of ideas. Those who are contemporary historians explore the new possibilities of studying the period of state socialism. Broadly speaking, these latter interests embrace two fields: the political history of repression and opposition, and the social history of everyday life. However, in the hundreds of historical publications on the communist period that came out during the last twenty years, very few touch on economic history (for example Chumiński 2010; Grala 2005; Tymiński 2001).

The striking paradox is that in the study of the economic past Marxism – vanishing already in the 1970s – has not been replaced by the neoclassical approach, despite the fact that Anglo-Saxon countries otherwise serve as a model in both the economic transformation and in the academic paradigms. The reason may be twofold: first, historians are not trained in the use of modern economic and econometric tools, and second, for economists, studying the past is not regarded as a way of promoting one's academic career. Additionally, the quantitative

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data necessary for this type of research are dispersed and not converted into electronic databases, increasingly the standard tool for neoclassically minded economic historians. Thus Polish economic history has been side-lined by the global neoclassical mainstream.

Concluding remarks

Polish economic historiography has been built upon the solid ground of a long-standing tradition of serious primary source research. It flourished, paradoxically, in the hard times of the early stages of state socialism. Talented scholars proved able to think creatively even under adverse circumstances of ideological and political pressure. Some of them were Marxists, but they treated Marxism in an open way, and were looking for other inspirations as well. This led them to pose new questions and to seek new answers in exploring the Polish economic past, particularly of the pre-industrial period. Simultaneously, the best Polish economic historians have not locked themselves in the study of the local past in isolation from the external world. Quite the contrary, the Polish economy was for them part of much broader systems.

In this sense, in the 1950s and 1960s they had already explored issues which became the focus of attention of the practitioners of world history and transnational history much later. While they differed in many respects among themselves, the overall picture they painted was that of an economy which, while staying in close contact with the West, took its own path, making it – mostly due to the development and strengthening of a specific system of demesne farming based on serf labour – increasingly backward in relation to the Western parts of Europe. Thus, they were talking about a 'periphery' before the concept gained its popularity, and their contribution had been noticed and reacted to. Still, these ambitious attempts were rather an exception than a rule. The lion's share of works by Polish economic historians are solid but narrow monographs; useful but less inspiring. They provide, however, a rich empirical background, a base upon which the works of the masters stand.

The importance and visibility of Polish economic historiography during the last three to four decades have declined. It stays out of touch with the recent methodological and theoretical approaches in the West, both those that stem from introducing a globalizing, transnational perspective, as well as those that come from neoclassical economics and econometrics. Neither following nor directly challenging the dominant Anglo-American methodologies means that, contrary to what it was four decades ago, Polish economic history is currently in the doldrums, despite a rich intellectual tradition that demands closer transnational re-examination.

This older intellectual tradition – despite the lapse of time – has a clear relevance to the debates of today, conceptualized in terms of transnational, global, or world history. First, on the most elementary level, it provides ample empirical material (unfortunately, hardly accessible to non-specialists because of the language barrier) upon the still under-researched (in the West) region of East Central Europe. This region, after all, has been an important component of the European and global economy, geographically and culturally very close to the 'core', but never capable of escaping its peripheral or semi-peripheral position. Understanding why this has been the case and what were the patterns of its development is relevant for better grasping global processes. Second, this older historiography is interesting because of its interpretations, not only of the visionaries such as Kula and Małowist – both in many ways precursors of approaches taken later in the West – but also of the authors of more modest descriptive monographs, because they dealt with an economy that was connected with the broader world and had to deal with those connections. Third, methodologically, the somewhat heterodox approach of Polish economic history – linking and mixing economic,

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social, cultural, and intellectual history – contributed to producing a multifaceted picture of the past, a picture in which economic processes are portrayed not in a sterilized way, but in the broader social context.

Notes

1 For the follow-up of this debate, see Kochanowicz (1989).
2 On the political background to this decision see Górny (2007: 147ff.).
3 Cf. Topolski (1977) for his views on Marxist theoretical and methodological inspirations.
4 For Kula's biography, see Kochanowicz (1985).
5 For the review of the debate, see Kochanowicz (1987). For the most recent appraisal of *Economic Theory*, see Boldizzoni (2011: 87–112).
6 Translations into Catalan, English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.
7 Ihnatowicz (1965), Pietrzak-Pawłowska (1967, 1970), Puś (1997) are just examples.
8 On the political context, see Kemp-Welch (2008).

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