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The Institute of History (on the right) is headquartered in a beautiful historic building on Warsaw's Old Town Square

The Legacy of Masters

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The Institute of History today remains one of the most important centers for historical research in Poland, covering the past and recent transformations in Europe and in the world

When Tadeusz Manteuffel (1902-1970), one of Poland's most outstanding historians and the Institute's current namesake, was appointed its director in 1953, he presumably treated this nomination not as an honor

but as an exceedingly difficult duty to safeguard past achievements and to foster developmental opportunities for the kind of historical research that had been so successfully pursued in the interwar period in Warsaw, Kraków, Lwów (Lviv), Poznań, and Wilno (Vilnius). This involved not just research into the past, but also the difficult task of preserving a certain historical awareness among the population of Poland that had then only recently been reestablished by the Yalta accords, within a changed set of borders and limited sovereignty.

This is particularly poignant in view of the fact that the Institute of History (like the Polish Academy of Sciences as a whole) was founded during the Stalinist period, and was meant to be an institution fully subordinate to the authorities and to set a certain model to be followed by university-affiliated research communities. Moreover, in view of history's significant role in molding public aware-

ness, the Institute of History was from the outset intended to be an institution focused on propaganda aims, thus not to be expected to produce reliable scholarly research.

From the past

Yet although many propaganda-aimed works were indeed produced at the Institute in the early decades, publications not even deserving to be called "academic research," it is worth underscoring here that conscientious and innovative work nevertheless still played a dominant role in the Institute's activity. Above all, the Institute and the circle of researchers associated with it were successful in educating a considerable number of Poland's present-day historians – an oft-neglected achievement. All of this was possible due to the courage and sagacity shown by Tadeusz Manteuffel and other scholars of his generation: Marian Małowist, Aleksander Gieysztor, Witold Kula, Stanisław Herbst and Stefan Kieniewicz – in short, by the few surviving prewar researchers from the Warsaw historical community who strove to instill in their students a commitment to produce conscientious, respectable research.

Outstanding achievements

The Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute today remains one of the most important historical research centers in Poland, and has retained this image despite the sharp downturn in funding for research at Polish Academy of Sciences institutions seen in recent years. If we look back over the past half-century, the Institute's most prominent achievements include source publications and dictionary-format works. We should mention the impressively-sized edition of the *Revisions of Royal Assets in Poland in the 16-18th Centuries*, editions of the *Lithuanian Chronicles*, and the continuation of *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*. Also significant are the subsequent series of the *Historical Atlas of Poland*, the records of the *Officials of the Republic of Poland in the 12th-18th Centuries*, ongoing and retrospective bibliography editions, and above all the monumental *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, one of the oldest and highest-caliber publications of its type in the world.

The Institute of History has also been the initiator and publisher of a range of synthetic studies, ranging from its now-controversial *History of Poland*, through regional historical syntheses (devoted to Gdańsk, Pomerania, Silesia, Toruń) and a *History of Latin America*, to the modern *Culture of Medieval Poland*. It also publishes and sponsors a range of the most important Polish historical periodicals, encompassing

the country's premier historical quarterly *Kwartalnik Historyczny* (*Historical Quarterly*), the foreign-language *Acta Poloniae Historica* (which offered the first window-to-the-world for the historical sciences in this part of Europe), as well as numerous other Polish-language historical periodicals.

Yet the Institute of History first and foremost remains a lively center for historical research, and its scope of interest covers history and civilizational transformations in Europe, the Americas, and other continents. Like at other European institutions of its sort, the Institute's research units are presently organized on a not-just-chronological basis: cultural affairs remain the domain of medieval historians, the issues of polity and religion are pursued by specialists in the early modern era, while 19th century researchers remain focused on social issues, the history of ideas and the social groups associated with them. The emphasis within modern history is laid with research units studying the history of totalitarian systems in a worldwide context and the history of population migrations in the 19th and 20th centuries. Another prominent line of research looks at the transformations that have taken place in Eastern Europe, concentrating on the modern era and contemporary history, especially on the innovatively-posed research topic of the history of Polish-Russian relations.

Present challenges

As an institution with but a half-century of tradition, like most of the research establishments in Poland, the Institute of History itself experienced difficulty in coping with the political and economic transformations of the past decade and a half, and especially in adapting to the new research conditions present in Eastern Europe. This led to a severe slump in spending on research in the social sciences. Despite these difficulties, the Institute has nonetheless successfully created and advanced a program of doctorate studies over the past 15 years, working to guarantee what is indeed the most crucial aspect of scholarship: educating subsequent generations of high-caliber researchers with excellent knowledge of technique and upright morals. The Institute's capacity to adapt to modern-day challenges is perhaps best exemplified by a joint project together with Polish Public Television to create

an Internet version of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, which will offer a wide audience of Poles not only greater exposure to the history of their ancestors, but also access to sound, film, and illustrative material not available in the original edition. ■



Award medal bearing the effigy of the Institute's first director, Prof. Tadeusz Manteuffel, an eminent Polish medievalist