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# A discourse on Copernicus' nationality in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – a monographic article\*

Several years ago<sup>1</sup>, the discovery of Nicolaus Copernicus' skull by Professor Jerzy Gąssowski's team was an extraordinary event. The discovery was widely celebrated because Copernicus is a historical figure who had long incited debate and evoked strong emotions. History has a social dimension, which is why historians search for patterns in past events, and historical debates are often discussions about the present. Nicolaus Copernicus' nationality stirred heated controversy for more than a century. This debate was in fact a discourse about German-Polish and Prussian-Polish relations. Andrzej Wojtkowski, the late historian of Wielkopolska region<sup>2</sup>, had conducted extensive

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<sup>1</sup> The article had been previously published by D. Kasperek and N. Kasperek under the title of *Przyczynek do dyskusji o narodowości Kopernika w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, [in:] *Historia. Archiwistyka. Informacja naukowa. Prace dedykowane Profesorowi Bohdanowi Ryszewskiemu*, ed. M. Świgoń, Olsztyn 2009, pp. 60–68; as well as: *Podróż Tadeusza Czackiego do Prus celem znalezienia grobu Kopernika na tle dyskursu o jego narodowości w I połowie XIX wieku*, [in:] *Ateny Wołyńskie – między historią a współczesnością. Волинські Атені – між історією і сучасністю*, eds. A. Szmyt, H. Stroński, Olsztyn–Кременець 2015, pp. 89–99 [also with an Ukrainian title]; D. Kasperek, N. Kasperek, *O narodowości Mikołaja Kopernika w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku. Zarys problematyki*, [in:] *Mikołaj Kopernik i Warmia. O pamięci regionalnej w 550. rocznicę urodzin i 480. śmierci*, ed. A. Kopiczko, Pelplin 2023, pp. 505–515.

<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Wojtkowski (1891–1975) graduated from a secondary school in Ostrów. Before World War I, he studied classical literature, history of Polish and Russian literature, and history at the Berlin University. Wojtkowski was a member of the *Zet* Association of Polish Youths. He served in the German army during World

research into the portrayal of Copernicus in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century encyclopedias<sup>3</sup>. However, his manuscript has never been published. In most of the compendia analyzed by Wojtkowski, in particular English-language sources, Copernicus was described as a German scientist. At present, both *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Encyclopedia Americana* ascribe Polish nationality to Copernicus<sup>4</sup>. This is yet another error because a 16<sup>th</sup> century figure cannot be described with the use of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts<sup>5</sup>. During the reign of the Jagiellonian dynasty, Poland was a multinational, multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious state, and nationality was less important than loyalty to a given monarch. Nicolaus Copernicus had no qualms, and he was a faithful subject of King Sigismund I the Old, and he proved his loyalty at a time of war and by dedicating his research to the monarch.

The Polish-German discourse about Copernicus' nationality was in fact a discussion about history. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German historians who criticized Prussia for the partitions of Poland pointed only to the second and the third partitions, but never the first partition which involved the annexation of Royal Prussia, including the Region of Warmia. A growing number of German historians became convinced that all three partitions were necessary to protect Prussian interests<sup>6</sup>. After the annexation of Warmia in 1772, Warmian bishop Ignacy Krasicki lodged a request with the Prussian king Frederick II to erect a monument commemorating Copernicus. The Prussian king took credit for the initiative, and in a letter addressed to Voltaire in 1773, he wrote that although Prussian jurisdiction did not extend to Toruń, he would build a monument on the famous astronomer's grave in a small Warmian town. In the same letter, Frederick II remarked that "a nation that gave the world the great Copernicus should not plunge into savage disarray incited by the tyranny of Polish nobility"<sup>7</sup>. Prince Józef Aleksander Jabłonowski first wrote about his wish to erect a monument of Copernicus in Toruń in 1765<sup>8</sup>.

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War I, and he took part in the Wielkopolska Uprising and the Battle of Lviv during the Polish-Bolshevik war. After the war, Wojtkowski was employed by the State archives. In 1922, he traveled to Switzerland and retrieved archival documents from the Polish Central Agency in Lausanne. Wojtkowski was the co-founder of the Association of Friends of Western Territories (renamed to the Association of Friends of History in 1925). In 1923, he left the State archives and took up a lecturer's position at People's University in Dalki. In 1926, he became the vice director of the Raczyński Library in Poznań, and he was promoted to the library's director in 1928. In 1939, he was expelled to Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. Wojtkowski became a professor at the Catholic University in Lublin in 1944. He was a renowned expert on 19<sup>th</sup> century German policy.

<sup>3</sup> According to Wojtkowski's student, professor Janusz Jasiński of Olsztyn.

<sup>4</sup> The street sign on rue Copernic in the 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris contains the words "Polish astronomer".

<sup>5</sup> General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski never became fluent in Polish and preferred to communicate in German.

<sup>6</sup> M.H. Serejski, *Europa a rozbiory Polski. Studium historiograficzne*, Warszawa 1970, pp. 156–160; J. Topolski, *Poglądy na rozbiory Polski*, [in:] *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie w historiografii. Część pierwsza. Studia z dziejów historiografii polskiej i niemieckiej*, eds. J. Krasuski, G. Labuda, A.W. Walczak, Poznań 1979, p. 421.

<sup>7</sup> [Frederick II], *Oeuvres posthumes de Frédéric Roi de Prusse*, vol. 9, Berlin 1788, pp. 194, 208.

<sup>8</sup> In 1808, this initiative was continued by Stanisław Staszic, and the cornerstone was set in 1809. A committee in charge of building the monument of Toruń's famous astronomer was founded only in 1853. Over time,

After the third partition of Poland, most historical research was done by the Society of Friends of Science in Prussian-occupied Warsaw. Poet Marcin Molski and historian Tadeusz Czacki set out on a scientific journey to East Prussia to trace the work and life of Nicolaus Copernicus. They described their findings in letter to Jan Śniadecki (brother of the famous Polish physician and philosopher Jędrzej Śniadecki). Śniadecki published the report in the local press. He was of the opinion that language is a fundamental symbol of nationality, and he wrote a highly interesting treatise about Copernicus' astronomical research<sup>9</sup>. Czacki and Molski addressed their report to Śniadecki in recognition of his accomplishments. The letter was written in Königsberg, the capital city of East Prussia, and it contains both German (Allenstein, Frauenburg) and Polish (Królewiec, Warmia, former "Polish Prussia") place names. Molski and Czacki emphasized that the purpose of their journey was to find traces of an "extinguished Fatherland". They were able to identify the burial site of Copernicus in Frombork, which turned out to be the most interesting part of their journey. The letter was published, and it was frequently cited over the years<sup>10</sup>. When describing their in-depth investigations, the authors remarked that the "Warmian chapter was as eager and positively inclined towards spreading the glory of our shared nation". The writers probably relied on the concept of a historical nation in their description of Prussia, and they extended this definition to include German-speaking canons. In another treatise on pre-Teutonic Prussia, Czacki wrote that the local population had the same language and customs as the Lithuanians.

#### Letter about Copernicus

Letter about Copernicus to His Lordship Śniadecki, written in Königsberg in 1802

During our journey to retrieve memories of our extinguished Fatherland, we also searched for signs commemorating Copernicus. Upon the Assembly's request, we have the honor and pleasure of presenting our discoveries, albeit small, to the man who conducted a thorough analysis of Copernicus' work and life circumstances. Nicolaus Copernicus was a canon of the Warmian Chapter who administered the chapter's assets in Allenstein. His life was split between two cities, and he kept observatories in both. Poems written in

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the committee evolved into the Copernicus Society for Science and Art (Coppernicus-Verein für Wissenschaft und Kunst). The construction was completed in several months, and the unveiling ceremony took place on 25 October 1853. Frederick Wilhelm IV of Prussia made a significant financial contribution to the project. A Latin inscription was engraved on the front wall of the plinth: *Nicolaus Copernicus Thorunensis. Terrae motor, Solis Caelique stator*. Professor Rudolf Brohm was the author of the inscription. The dates of the astronomer's birth and death were engraved on the rear side of the monument.

<sup>9</sup> "Nowy Pamiętnik Warszawski" 1802, vol. 8, pp. 356 et seq.; vol. 9, pp. 84 et seq. and pp. 211 et seq. (these papers were translated into French, Russian, and Italian, and Persian abstract was published). The German version was plagiarized; for more information, see: *Bibliografia Literatury Polskiej Nowy Korbut*, vol. 6, part 1, Warszawa 1970, p. 288.

<sup>10</sup> "Rocznik Towarzystwa Warszawskiego Przyjaciół Nauk" 1802, vol. 2, pp. 188–190; "Nowy Pamiętnik Warszawski" 1802, vol. 7, pp. 222–226.

Copernicus' hand used to hang on the chimney in an apartment that was subsequently occupied by a Lutheran pastor. The pastor vacated the premises fifteen years ago, taking this priceless memento with him. The astronomer's coat of arms had been engraved in color in the glass pane of the window. This remarkable token of remembrance had survived for two and a half centuries, but has been lost due to sheer negligence only fifteen years ago. During Copernicus' residence, an opening had been made above the door to let in sunlight and direct the beam of light to points marked in the second room. However, the present occupant closed the opening with bricks only six years ago. Note: the opening was probably a part of an astronomical gnomon that had been built by Copernicus to measure the exact time at midday, conduct observations of Solstitiorum et Aequinoctiorum, and draw conclusions about the obliquity of the ecliptic.

The tower in which Copernicus spent many a night is in poor shape, and the basement presently houses a prison which resounds with the clanging of shackles. We are now staying in Frauenburg. We chanted Copernicus' name on our walk to the temple where his remains are buried. The great man is remembered tenderly by the old and the young alike. The locals leave the science to the scientists, but they are able to recall all the good things that Copernicus had done for the local community. The high part of the city, where the church stands, had been deprived of water, and there wasn't a single watermill in the entire area. Copernicus installed a lock measuring fifteen and a half ells on the Bauda River to raise the water level by half a mile. He built a watermill with a giant wheel that lifted water to the top of the tower. From there, water was supplied by a system of pipes directly to every canon's courtyard. The machinery broke down, and the Warmian Chapter, which suffered a substantial loss of income in 1772, undertook to repair it now at low cost. According to the more knowledgeable locals, a design of the machine had been requested during the reign of Louis XIV. We entered the church and found a tombstone by the cannons' altar. The tombstone was partly covered by a marble gallery above the main altarpiece. Ineptly engraved spheres and the letters N i c o l marked the burial site of the great astronomer's venerable remains. The Warmian chapter, which was as eager and positively inclined towards spreading the glory of our shared nation, allowed us to remove the obstacles. We washed the tombstone and discovered the letters N i c o l... C o p... u s, and O b i i t A n... M... in the second line – the remaining letters were effaced. We removed the tombstone and the digging began (canons and bishops had not been buried in the cathedral before the 18<sup>th</sup> century). All we found were fragments of decayed bones. Most of them had to be deposited in the chapter, but we were allowed to keep five fragments, together with certificates of authenticity signed by the highest-ranking prelates. These mementos are in our possession. We are sending one fragment to the church in Puławy, and we will bring two fragments to the Assembly... We searched for Copernicus' manuscripts, and we found his signatures on the chapter's official documents. We were

pleased to find that the chapter spared no expense on the astronomer's travels to Italy, where he made his early discoveries. According to the locals, some instruments had been built by Copernicus himself. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Tycho de Brache received from Hanno, a Warmian canon, a wooden instrument called parallaticum that had been fashioned by the great man (as he called him). These memorabilia have been lost, and the type and number of these instruments cannot be accurately ascertained because the tales spun by the locals differ considerably. All of these works had met a cruel fate, and Copernicus' treatise on the minting of money, an undertaking that was continued by Newton, was allegedly deposited in a town in the former Polish Prussia. We found some letters describing the astronomer's daily affairs. We are sending one letter to verify Copernicus' hand, if other manuscripts were ever to be found. We have visited his house. There is a small chamber on the top floor which opens up onto the astronomer's observatory through a gallery, and the stairs leading up from the ground floor have been partly preserved. On three sides, the observatory opens onto a view of the lagoon, and the fourth side faces a plain that was later obstructed by a tower.

According to Ewa Danowska, Czacki sent Copernicus' alleged remains to Princess Izabela Czartoryska to be deposited in the temple of Sybil. He also presented the princess with a brick from Copernicus' grave.

The interest in Copernicus was revived in the period of the Duchy of Warsaw. The Polish government and central institutions were evacuated to Toruń in 1809. Stanisław Staszic was among the relocated officials, and he made considerable efforts to commemorate the great astronomer<sup>11</sup>. The polemic about Copernicus' nationality was rekindled by an article in a German newspaper which posited that the brilliant astronomer had been a German national. An unnamed journalist in "Gazeta Poznańska" argued in favor of Toruń's Polish roots and emphasized that Teutonic Prussia had surrendered voluntarily to the Polish monarch<sup>12</sup>. Similar arguments were put forward by Feliks Bentkowski<sup>13</sup>, and Ludwik Osiński<sup>14</sup> composed a poem celebrating Copernicus. Even in the territories occupied by Russia, the press reported on the donation of a brick from the building in Toruń, which was believed to be Copernicus' birthplace at the time, to the temple of Sybil in Puławy<sup>15</sup>. However, these reports were not free of errors and simplifications which obscured Prussia's history. Gerard Gley made a significant contribution to the debate surrounding Copernicus<sup>16</sup>. Gley, almost completely forgot-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. Jasiński, S. Skowronek, *Wschodniopruskie kampanie Napoleona. Wielka Armia, tradycja, legendy*, Olsztyn 2007, pp. 219–220.

<sup>12</sup> "Gazeta Poznańska" 1810, no. 41 of 23 October; "Gazeta Warszawska" 1810, no. 38 of 12 May.

<sup>13</sup> "Gazeta Literacka" 1809, no. 23; "Gazeta Poznańska" 1810, no. 42,

<sup>14</sup> "Rocznik Towarzystwa Warszawskiego Przyjaciół Nauk" 1812, vol. 8, part 1, pp. 56–61.

<sup>15</sup> "Kurier Litewski" 1810, no. 21 of 12 March; "Gazeta Poznańska" 1810, no. 20 of 10 March.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. N. Kasperek, *Prusy Wschodnie w polskiej myśli politycznej lat 1795–1847*, Olsztyn 1995, p. 26.

ten, had been an officer in Napoleon's army who was tasked with administering the Duchy of Łowicz that had been granted by Napoleon to marshal Louis-Nicolas Davout. Gley kept a diary of his affairs in Poland, and he translated Adam Naruszewicz's literary works into French<sup>17</sup>. Gley wrote that directly [!] after the battle of Pruska Hławka (7–8 February 1807), he was ordered by Napoleon to find Copernicus' grave in Lidzbark. Gley's account of his trip to Lidzbark bears numerous similarities to the report penned by Molski and Czacki. Gley's diary does not provide highly original insights about Warmia's history. His accounts of present-day affairs in the region were overshadowed by the war, which explains the report about the hospital in Olsztyn's castle. The description ends with the following remark: "there is no doubt that Braunsberg<sup>18</sup>, Heilsberg, and Allenstein are German names, but local residents who still use the Polish language have given Polish names to these towns"<sup>19</sup>. In this highly interesting account, the author swiftly transitioned from Copernicus' times to the contemporary era which received little coverage from journalists in the Duchy of Warsaw.

Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, one of the most prominent figures in the autonomous Kingdom of Poland, also visited Prussia. Niemcewicz traveled extensively to collect historical memorabilia<sup>20</sup>. During his journeys, he visited Elbląg, Frombork, Braniewo, Heiligebeil, Königsberg, Ryn, and Kętrzyn<sup>21</sup>. Niemcewicz emphasized that Warmia was a Catholic region, and he mentioned the most prominent bishops as well as the "great Copernicus". He traced the border separating Royal Prussia and Ducal Prussia (which had ceased to exist by that time). During his stay in Königsberg, Niemcewicz visited St. Nicolas' church, the oldest and the only Polish temple in the city, where – according to his account – father Oloff was the parish priest. However, the traveler's memory had failed him, because he not only changed Jerzy Olech's name, but turned the Protestant pastor into a Catholic priest<sup>22</sup>.

Tadeusz Krępowiecki was an equally known Polish traveler in Prussia, although he was less famous for his literary achievements than for his political and conspiratorial activity. Krępowiecki was not a member of Niemcewicz's generation (he was 40 years younger, and he was Niemcewicz's political opponent), and he traveled to

<sup>17</sup> G. Gley, *Voyage en Allemagne et en Pologne pendant les années, 1806 a 1812*, vol. 1–2, Paris 1816; B. Leśnodorski, *Gley Gerard*, [in:] *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 8, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1959–1960, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Which Gley confused with Frombork.

<sup>19</sup> "Gazeta Poznańska" 1810, no. 45 of 6 June, appendix.

<sup>20</sup> Which resembles the introduction to *Do ziemi naszej. Podróże romantyków*; cf. N. Kasperek, op. cit., pp. 26, 34–38.

<sup>21</sup> J.U. Niemcewicz, *Podróże historyczne po ziemiach polskich od 1811 do 1828 roku*, Paryż–Petersburg 1858, pp. 224–282. Niemcewicz wrote several manuscripts, and his book had gained popularity even before it was published. His seminal work influenced Romantic literature on Polish national monuments (cf. J. Kowalczyk, *Starożytnicy warszawscy połowy XIX w. i ich rola w popularyzacji zabytków ojczystych*, [in:] *Edukacja historyczna społeczeństwa polskiego w XIX w.*, Collection of essays, ed. J. Maternicki, Warszawa 1981, p. 158).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. W. Chojnacki, J. Dąbrowski, *Krystyn Lach Szyrma. Syn Ziemi Mazurskiej*, Olsztyn 1971, pp. 27, 136.

“Polish Prussia” in 1829. He described his impressions in three letters that were published in *Kolumb* magazine, a successor to “*Dziennik Podróży Lądowych i Morskich*” [Journal of Terrestrial and Marine Travels]<sup>23</sup>. The first letter was sent from Zoppot (Sopot). From Oliwa, Krępowiecki traveled along the Baltic coast to Königsberg. He admired Malbork and toured Frombork. He alleged that the Frombork cathedral housed the tombs of Hosius (which is incorrect) and Copernicus, and he devoted much attention to the famous astronomer in his letters. For Krępowiecki, Copernicus was not only a brilliant astronomer, but also the builder of the municipal waterworks. He wrote that “all there is to commemorate this great man is a marble plaque of meager size that had been installed quite late”<sup>24</sup>. Copernicus is frequently mentioned in Krępowiecki’s journals<sup>25</sup>. In his “Pamiętnik obejmujący imiona miast, wsi lub miejsc w Polsce będących, które się w ojczyźnie przysłużyły, tudzież imiona ludzi w historii lub literaturze znane” [Journal listing Polish towns, villages, and places that had served our Fatherland, as well as famous historical figures and great men of literature], the main emphasis was placed on Copernicus as the great Polish astronomer<sup>26</sup>. A report by a little-known writer, F. Krzeczkowski, states that: “as a [Warmian] canon, Copernicus dedicated his life’s work to the Polish nation... this obedient priest served the church and his brethren as a physician”. Krzeczkowski also wrote that “Copernicus passed into eternity on 4 May [!] 1543 and was buried in the Warmian cathedral (...) the Cracow Academy takes great pride in the fact that Copernicus is recorded in its book of alumni”<sup>27</sup>. The unveiling of Copernicus’ monument in Warsaw, the work of the famous Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, epitomizes the period of the autonomous Kingdom of Poland (1815–1830). The construction of the monument was financed from a bequest made by Stanisław Staszic in his last will. The monument was erected in front of the palace building that had been acquired by Staszic and donated to the Society of Friends of Science. The monument was unveiled by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz on 11 May 1830. The following explicit inscription is engraved on the plinth: “To Nicolas Copernicus – Fellow Countrymen”<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> N. Kasperek, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> T. Krępowiecki, *Przejażdżka po Prusach Polskich. List trzeci: Kolumb. Pamiętnik podróży*, 1829, no. 28, p. 187; *List drugi*, no. 29, p. 232; *List trzeci*, no. 30, pp. 316–327. For more information about Krępowiecki’s travels, see also: I. Fabiani-Madeyska, *Odwiedziny Gdańska w XIX wieku*, Gdańsk 1957, pp. 108–118.

<sup>25</sup> T. Świącki, *Opis starożytnej Polski*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1828, p. 402; J.U. Niemcewicz, op. cit., p. 263; T. Krępowiecki, op. cit., p. 327; “Orzeł Biały” 1820, vol. 6, no. 12 of 21 June, p. 189; “Pszczółka Polska” 1823, vol. 1, no. 13 of 20 May and no. 17 of 29 May.

<sup>26</sup> Czartoryski Library in Cracow, manuscript 2963, *Pamiętnik obejmujący imiona miast, wsi lub miejsc w Polsce będących, które się w ojczyźnie przysłużyły, tudzież imiona ludzi w historii lub literaturze znane*, books 82–83; 133.

<sup>27</sup> Czartoryski Library in Cracow, manuscript 5224, *Pisma polityczne różne 1820–1821*, vol. 11, book 25: F. Krzeczkowski, *Mowa na pochwałę Mikołaja Kopernika, kanonika i astronoma*, books 327–328.

<sup>28</sup> The unveiling ceremony received extensive press coverage. During World War II, the Polish inscription was covered with a German-language plaque by the Nazis. The plaque was removed by Alek Dawidowski,

In 1831 and 1832, many Polish insurgents who were forced to emigrate after the fall of the November uprising found shelter in the Prussian province on their journey to foreign destinations or during their return to Poland. Many interned insurgents left behind diaries that gave an account of this turbulent period and described the history of this land to which bitter fate had thrown them. Copernicus emerged as the leading figure in these accounts, and he was mentioned by most of those who kept diaries. Napoleon Kraczk, an officer who fought in the Lithuanian uprising, wrote about Copernicus' grave in the "cathedral of the Archdiocese of Warmia"<sup>29</sup>. Franciszek Szeluto wrote his memoirs in verse and observed that "the soldiers took up permanent quarters in Frauenburg (...). The city enjoys great fame. This is where Copernicus was buried". Domeyko and Ekielski posited that Copernicus was a Pole. Potrykowski also noted in his journal that Frombork was a small town, but it rose to fame as the "birthplace of our great and immortal astronomer. A large and wealthy Catholic church in Frombork houses Copernicus' grave". These highly personal accounts not only facilitated an interpretation of historical facts, but also created a schematic, black-and-white narrative about the past. This dispute was much needed during this challenging moment in history because it bolstered Polish insurgents' resolve after the failed uprising<sup>30</sup>.

The most heated debate about Copernicus' nationality took place in the period between the uprisings<sup>31</sup>. This issue continued to stir up strong emotions throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the widespread claim that Copernicus was an ethnic German provoked vehement conflict. Dominik Szulc admitted that he felt compelled to study Prussia's past because much harm had been done to "the scientific prowess of our country by including the Transformer of the Heavens among the geniuses of the Teutonic lineage"<sup>32</sup>. Szulc was born on 10 April 1794 in Minsk governorate, where he attended elementary and secondary schools. He became a student of the Vilnius University in 1815. After graduation, he took up teaching positions in Vilnius and Białystok, followed by Lublin in 1835–1840. He rejected the post of a Polish language teacher in the Kiev University and moved to War-

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a Grey Ranks soldier, during a famous sabotage operation. In 1944, the monument was designated for scrapping, and it survived by an extraordinary stroke of luck. It was restored to its original location after renovation.

<sup>29</sup> Polish Library in Paris, manuscript 485, Napoleon Kraczk: *Krótkie opisy miejsc w ciągu podróży do Francji przebywanych pod niektórymi względami zasługujących na uwagę*, book 24.

<sup>30</sup> For example, F. Szeluto, *Pamiętniki powstańca 1831 roku*, Warszawa 1930, p. 34; [I. Domeyko], *Pamiętniki... (1831–1838)*, ed. J. Tretiak, Kraków 1908, p. 95; A. Ekielski, *Podróż z Elbląga do Awinionu przez porucznika artylerii wojsk polskich*, ed. E.H. Nieciowa, "Rocznik Biblioteki Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Krakowie" 1964, y. 10, p. 202. In 1853, Potrykowski wrote that Copernic was born in Toruń, not Frombork (J.A. Potrykowski, *Tulactwo Polaków we Francji. Dziennik emigranta*, part 1, ed. A. Owsńska, Kraków 1974, p. 49, and part 2, p. 162; cf. N. Kasparek, *Powstańcy epilog. Żołnierze listopadowi w dniach klęski i internowania 1831–1832*, Olsztyn 2001, p. 255).

<sup>31</sup> N. Kasparek, *Obraz przeszłości Prus Wschodnich w historiografii polskiej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku*, [in:] *Prusy Wschodnie w polskiej opinii publicznej XIX i XX wieku*, eds. N. Kasparek, A. Stanisze-wski, series: *Studia i Materiały WSP*, nr 111 – Historia, Olsztyn 1992, pp. 25–45.

<sup>32</sup> D. Szulc, *O znaczeniu Prus dawnych*, Warszawa 1846, introduction, pages not numbered.



saw to pursue his scientific interests. His monograph entitled *O znaczeniu Prus dawnych* [On the Significance of Old Prussia] was first published by journal "Biblioteka Warszawska" in 1844 and 1845, and it came out in print as a separate publication in 1846<sup>33</sup>. His controversial findings received harsh criticism from historians, but they undoubtedly increased the public's interest in the history of Prussia. Szulc took his hypotheses very seriously, but his erudition was illusory, and his treatises followed a journalistic style of writing. Nonetheless, Szulc's findings gained ground in the Polish scientific community for some time<sup>34</sup>.

According to some press reports, the assertion that Copernicus was an ethnic Prussian did not imply that he was German because Royal Prussia ("voivodeships of Chełm, Pomerania, and Malbork, and the Archdiocese of Warmia") belonged to Poland after 1466<sup>35</sup>. In 1843, which marked the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great astronomer's death, king Ludwig I of Bavaria honored Copernicus in the pantheon of famous Germans in the Walhalla memorial. This event triggered considerable controversy in the media. "Trzeci Maj", a Polish magazine with ties to Adam J. Czartoryski's political camp in exile, took a strong stand in "defense" of Copernicus. Krystyn Lach Szyrma, a native of East Prussia and a member of the Hotel Lambert camp, published a famous English-language treatise about Copernicus<sup>36</sup>. Jan Czyński, a Polish left-wing independence activist in exile, and Joachim Lelewel also joined the debate about Copernicus' nationality<sup>37</sup>. The assertion that Copernicus was a German scientist was most violently opposed by Adrian Krzyżanowski, a mathematician and translator of German literature<sup>38</sup>. Most of his famous works were dedicated to the issue<sup>39</sup>. In the concluding paragraph of an article entitled

<sup>33</sup> *Życie Mikołaja Kopernika* was published in 1855. Cf. W. Kot, *Z dziejów Kopernikanizmu w filozofii polskiej XIX wieku*. Dominik Szulc 1797–1860, Poznań 1970.

<sup>34</sup> For example, L.H. Siemieński, „Tygodnik Polski” wychodzący w Pszczynie, Górnym Śląsku, “Przegląd Naukowy” 1846, vol. 1, p. 51; H. Skimborowicz, *Recenzja D. Szulca „O znaczeniu Prus dawnych”*, “Przegląd Naukowy” 1846, vol. 1(1), pp. 29–32; J. Majorkiewicz, *Rozbiór krytyczny „O znaczeniu Prus dawnych” p. Dominika Szulca*, “Przegląd Naukowy” 1846, vol. 2(11); “Przegląd Naukowy” 1845, no. 25, p. 828; “Przegląd Poznański” 1846, vol. 6, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> For example, “Tygodnik Literacki” 1843, y. 6, no. 23 of 5 June, p. 184; “Gazeta Wielkiego Księstwa Poznańskiego” 1843, no. 101 of 1 May, p. 811; “Trzeci Maj” 1844, y. 5, no. 2–3 of 3 February, p. 12; “Trzeci Maj” 1847, y. 8, no. 25, p. 490.

<sup>36</sup> [K.L. Szyrma], *Copernicus and his Land*, London 1844. A lively debate was also initiated in the literature, including “Przegląd Naukowy” 1845, no. 11, pp. 367–370.

<sup>37</sup> J. Czyński, *Kopernik et ses travaux*, Paris 1847; cf. S. Kalembska, *Dwa dziewiętnastowieczne dzieła emigracyjne o Koperniku Jana Czyńskiego i Ludwika Wołowskiego*, [in:] *Z dziejów nauki polskiej. Księga pamiątkowa Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu (1785–1975)*, eds. A. Hutnikiewicz, O. Janiszewski, Warszawa–Poznań–Toruń 1975, pp. 135–144; J. Lelewel, *Kopernika, tudzież innych astronomów polskich w geografii zasługa*, Poznań 1862.

<sup>38</sup> Adrian Krzyżanowski (1788–1852) graduated from the Piarist School in Łomża, where he worked as a teacher. He was a professor in Rydzyn, Płock, Warsaw Lycée, and University of Warsaw. Krzyżanowski was in favor of incorporating probability theory into university curricula. After the fall of the November uprising and the closure of the University, he made a living by translating Alexander von Opplé-Bronikowski's novels, including from German.

<sup>39</sup> A. Krzyżanowski, *Kopernik w Walhalli*, Warszawa 1843 (a detailed review appeared in “Gazeta Wielkiego Księstwa Poznańskiego” 1843, no. 101 of 1 May, pp. 809–811 and “Tygodnik Literacki” 1843, y. 6,

*Kopernik w Walhalli* [Copernicus in Walhalla], dated 19 February 1843, Krzyżanowski wrote: “The Bavarians were pleased that the great Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus had been usurped by the Germans, and they gave him *einem ehrenplatz* among *Walhallas genossen*. This shameful act, unworthy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was heralded by *Munchen* on 15 July 1842, and the article was widely disseminated in the German press. Valhalla is a mythical place in Norse mythology, but does this lofty tower in Regensburg on the Danube, erected in memory of the great Germans, belong to the realm of poetry as a tomb of the truth? This cannot be. After all, Europe is not Asia, where history is equated with mythology. Prose is replaced by poetry, and truth by lies. In the name of history, this article stands in defense of prose, and truth, similarly to that by our esteemed colleague and compatriot Ignacy Loyola Rychter, who has also recently stood in defense of our national property close to the heart of 50 million Slavs. We hope that his article, published in our magazine, will be promulgated by all Polish and foreign journals. We are addressing this heartfelt plea to all Editors”<sup>40</sup>. Krzyżanowski completed his manuscript entitled *Mikołaja Kopernika, założyciela dzisiejszej astronomii, w 300 lat od jego skonu i objawienia jego układu, spomnienie jubileuszowe* [In Memory of Nicolaus Copernicus, the Father of Modern Astronomy, on the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Death and the Publication of His Great Discovery], on 24 May 1843. The concluding paragraph reads: “the German state may have begotten Kepler, but it was unable to recognize his greatness. Deeply ashamed of his nation, Kepler died in poverty on 15 November 1631, the day on which the Perpetual Diet convened in Regensburg, near the present-day Walhalla memorial. The great man died clutching *Stella Maris*, his immortal work in the name of which he begged the German parliament to make an outstanding and due payment for his services (...) The German nation is unable to admit, despite its pride and enlightenment, that instead of adorning Walhalla’s walls with stolen property, the right thing to do would be to honor their fellow countryman Kepler with a monument commemorating his immortal merits and bearing the following inscription: Copernicus was the father of Kepler and Galileo, and the grandfather of Newton”<sup>41</sup>. In the manuscript, Krzyżanowski also recalls efforts to erect monuments of Copernicus in Toruń and Warsaw.

Jan Radwański, a physician, writer, and historian, followed in the footsteps of Szulc<sup>42</sup> and wrote *Żywoty Mikołaja Kopernika (Gwiazdarsza)*<sup>43</sup> [The Life of Nicolaus Copernicus (Astronomer)], but the book’s title is probably his only original contribution. Tadeusz

no. 23 of 5 June, pp. 183–184); idem, *Mikołaja Kopernika, założyciela dzisiejszej astronomii, w 300 lat od jego skonu i objawienia jego układu, spomnienie jubileuszowe*, Warszawa 1844; idem, *Dawna Polska ze stanowiska jej udziału w dziejach postępującej ludzkości, skreślona w jubileuszowym Mikołaja Kopernika roku 1843*, Warszawa 1844 (including *Mikołaja Kopernika...*); idem, *O kalendarzu Mikołaja Kopernika*, Warszawa 1844.

<sup>40</sup> A. Krzyżanowski, *Kopernik w Walhalla...*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Idem, *Mikołaja Kopernika...*, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> He referred to Frombork as Narzyce, and to Toruń as Tarnów Mazurski.

<sup>43</sup> Kraków 1853.

Bulharyn, a popular writer, had always asserted that Copernicus was a Pole in disputes concerning the astronomer's nationality<sup>44</sup>.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the largest number of articles, papers, and books dedicated to Copernicus and his nationality were published in the anniversary-marking year 1873. This issue also received coverage in *Samuel Orgelbrand's Universal Encyclopedia*<sup>45</sup>. But that is a different story.

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### **A discourse on Copernicus' nationality in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – a monographic article**

**Summary:** History has a social dimension, which is why historians search for patterns in past events, and historical debates are often discussions about the present. Nicolaus Copernicus' nationality stirred heated controversy for more than a century. The Polish-German discourse about Copernicus' nationality was in fact a discussion about history. Dominik Szulc admitted that he felt compelled to study Prussia's past because much harm had been done to "the scientific prowess of our country by including the Transformer of the Heavens among the geniuses of the Teutonic lineage". Prominent Polish thinkers and writers joined the debate in defense of the famous astronomer's Polish roots. Highly emotional arguments were exchanged during this stormy discourse.

**Keywords:** nationality, opinion journalism, Polish-German relations, historiography

### **Ein Beitrag zur Nationalität von Kopernikus in der 1. Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts**

**Zusammenfassung:** Die soziale Dimension der Geschichte zwingt uns dazu, in der Vergangenheit nach Vorbildern zu suchen; die historische Diskussion ist oft eine Diskussion über die Gegenwart. Die Frage der Nationalität von Nicolaus Copernicus war über ein Jahrhundert lang umstritten. Der polnisch-deutsche Diskurs über Kopernikus' Nationalität war eine Diskussion über Geschichte. So schrieb

Dominik Szulc sogar, dass er begann, sich mit der preußischen Vergangenheit zu befassen, weil es "dem wissenschaftlichen Ruhm unseres Landes schadet, wenn man den Reformator der heutigen Himmelskunde unter die Genies der germanischen Familie einordnet". Führende polnische Denker und Schriftsteller setzten sich für eine Art "Verteidigung" der polnischen Staatsangehörigkeit von Kopernikus ein. Diese Reden waren von großer Emotionalität geprägt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Nationalität, Publizistik, deutsch-polnische Beziehungen, Geschichtsschreibung

### **O narodowości Kopernika w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku. Przyczynek**

**Streszczenie:** Społeczny wymiar historii sprawia, że w czasach przeszłych szukamy wzorów, a dyskusja historyczna bywa często dyskusją o współczesności. Kwestia narodowości Mikołaja Kopernika przez przeszło wiek wywoływała spory. Polsko-niemiecki dyskurs o narodowości Kopernika był dyskusją o historii. Dominik Szulc napisał, że zaczął się zajmować przeszłością Prus dlatego, że wyrządzono krzywdę „sławie naukowej Kraju naszego przez zaliczenie Przeobraźciela terazniejszego Nieboznastwa do geniuszów rodu teutońskiego”. „Opiekę” nad polską narodowością Kopernika sprawowali czołowi polscy myśliciele, pisarze. Było w tych wystąpieniach dużo emocji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** narodowość, publicystyka, stosunki polsko-niemieckie, historiografia