

## The concept of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*: its history and editorial issues

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the article is to present a concept of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* (*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, PSB), which has been published in Krakow since 1935 as a multi-volume publication of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU), and realised by the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the PAN. Over 28,000 biographies of people associated with Poland (and with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Commonwealth of Both Nations, and their fiefs), who lived or operated in the country and abroad from the time of legendary Duke Popiel (9<sup>th</sup> century) to 2000, have been published in 52 volumes so far. The concept of the PSB is presented in the historiographic context as well as the context of contemporary problems and challenges that the PSB is facing.

**Keywords:** biographical dictionary; the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*; iPSB; Władysław Kopczyński

### Introduction

The *Polish Biographical Dictionary* (*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, PSB) is a unique publication in Polish historiography. Hidden under its old-fashioned graphic layout and grey-green cover, which are far from the contemporary standards of visual culture, are unique stories about eleven centuries of Polish history. The stories were created in the form of miniessays – not simply encyclopaedic entries, but microhistories. They show the past from different perspectives: from the point of view of characters from the distant past as well as in the light of the most recent scientific discoveries. For the 85 years of its existence, all the time with its editorial office in Krakow at 17 Sławkowska Street, in the building of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, the PSB has set standards in Polish biography studies and became a model for other Polish biographical dictionaries. The concept is based invariably on the

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scientific credo of the first editor in charge of the PSB, Professor Władysław Konopczyński (1880–1921), a specialist in Polish history from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the foreword to the first volume of the *Dictionary*, he wrote:

»Designed for broad circles of intelligentsia, this *Dictionary* only seeks to inform rather than disseminate any principle or programme. Neither does it glorify nor decry; it is not a Polish ‘Plutarch’; it chases no revelation; it would not revisit and review the old views. If some of the personages lose a bit of their gloriole in light of our research, hundreds of others, forgotten or underestimated ones, will regain their position in the memory of generations, with the positive harvest of their lives. Favourites of history will no doubt lose by it, but the nation shall gain, as a team of creative generations—and so shall the historical truth«.<sup>1</sup>

The PSB, often called the »Polish national biography«, does not contain only great names, heroes or persons of merit from the political, social, or cultural Polish past, but also the biographies of traitors and criminals, or less-known individuals who operated in the so-called historical background. All of them are reliably prepared, and the entries selection was always independent of external, non-scientific criteria. It is published in the two-column form of fascicles (each contains 160 pages) that make up the following volumes. From the publication of the first fascicle in 1935 until today, 217 fascicles have been compiled in 52 volumes, as have two fascicles of volume 53. The number of published fascicles varied over time. In recent years, three fascicles have been published per year – each contains about 70–80 entries.<sup>2</sup> Biographies are arranged alphabetically. This order is common to the whole series. The PSB is an attractive publication from various perspectives. First of all, it is a source of biographical and bibliographic information. Secondly, it includes, in historiographic context, the history of the establishment of the PSB and its existence in the changing socio-political reality through the decades, which shows the sensitive nature of historical science. Getting to know the PSB’s history is an interesting historiographic journey that allows us to better understand its biographical content.

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<sup>1</sup> Władysław Konopczyński, *Przedmowa*, *Polski Słownik Biograficzny (PSB)*, Vol. I, Kraków 1932, p. X.

<sup>2</sup> For example: in the years 1935–1949, seven volumes were published (approx. 5,500 entries); in 1959, five fascicles, based on the previously collected materials, were forwarded for print, two of which were published in the same year. Three fascicles were printed in 1960 and in 1961, but only one in 1962. In 1963–1964, two fascicles were published per year and, in 1965–1969, three per year. It was only in 1970 that a four-fascicle volume was issued.

## The establishment of the *Dictionary*

The appearance of the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* in the thirties filled a historiographic gap in the terms of the lack of a national biographical dictionary that followed the 19<sup>th</sup>-century traditions of biographical dictionaries (in the form of lexicons of people who lived during the history of one nation). Although the first Polish biographical lexicon was the *Scriptorium Polonicorum Hekatonas, seu centum illustrium Poloniae scriptorum elogia et vitae* (1<sup>st</sup> edition: Frankfurt 1625, 2<sup>nd</sup> extended edition: Venice 1627, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition: Frankfurt 1644) written by Szymon Starowolski, a preacher, historian, and political writer of the Baroque period, it should not be treated as a prototype of the national dictionary as understood above.<sup>3</sup> More serious steps towards the creation of a biographical dictionary in Poland were taken in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was probably related to the loss of independence as a result of Russian, Prussian, and Austrian invasion at the end 18<sup>th</sup> century and the fear of losing national identity as a result of the anti-Polish acts of the invaders (the so-called partitions of Poland-Lithuania in 1772, 1793, 1795).<sup>4</sup> The following initiatives were taken during this period. The first was when a group of Polish political emigrants founded the Historical and Literary Society in Paris (Towarzystwo Historyczno – Literackie w Paryżu) on 29 April 1832 and started collecting materials for a Polish biographical dictionary that would cover the country's entire history. As a result of these attempts, they gathered several dozen cardboard boxes, containing information valuable even today, which is stored in the Polish Library (Biblioteka Polska w Paryżu) at 6 Quai d'Orléans in Paris. The second initiative dates back to 1858, when the Krakow Scientific Society (Towarzystwo Naukowe Krakowskie) accepted Józef Muczkowski's<sup>5</sup> project of a biographical dictionary, but it was eventually cancelled.

The first fascicle of the PSB was published on 10 January 1935 in Krakow by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. It was the result of many years of discussion, which started in connection with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Polish independence. It

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<sup>3</sup> Magdalena Rzadkowska, Pierwsze polskie słowniki biograficzne. Próba charakterystyki, *Forum Bibliotek Medycznych*, 2011, 4/2 (8), p. 243–298.

<sup>4</sup> There are many works about the history of the PSB (e.g.: Stanisław Kot, O biografii polską, *Pamiętnik Warszawski*, 1929, 2, pp. 160–173; Kazimierz Tyszkowski, Biografa i słowniki biograficzne, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 43, 1929, Vol. 2, no 1, pp. 1–13; Henryk Barycz, Pięćdziesiąt lat Polskiego słownika biograficznego. Jego narodziny, trudne początki, perspektywy rozwoju, *Biuletyn Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej*, 38, 1988, pp. 185–225; Janusz Tazbir, Szanse i zagrożenia Polskiego słownika biograficznego w przeszłości, in *Polski słownik biograficzny. Sesja jubileuszowa w sześćdziesięciolecie powstania*. Kraków 21 VI 1996 roku, Warszawa 1997, pp. 11–28; Stanisław Trawkowski, Polski słownik biograficzny w perspektywie porównawczej, in *ibid.*, pp. 29–50; Henryk Markiewicz, Dzień dzisiejszy i perspektywy Polskiego słownika biograficznego, in *ibid.*, pp. 51–64; Piotr Sierżęga, Kazimierz Tyszkowski (1894–1940). Z dziejów nauki polskiej w międzywojennym Lwowie, Rzeszów 2011, pp. 256–296.

<sup>5</sup> Józef Muczkowski (1795–1858), a professor of history at the Jagiellonian University and director of the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow.

took place in 1928–1930 among Polish historians, including a discussion at the session of the Central Board of the Polish Historical Society to create a national dictionary, as none existed in Poland.<sup>6</sup> The initiator of the present *Polish Biographical Dictionary* was the already-mentioned Konopczyński, who had advocated the need for a biographical lexicon as early as 1922, in the article »O polską biografiją narodową« [Advocating the Idea of a Polish National Biography] published in the newspaper *Przegląd Warszawski*.<sup>7</sup> He concluded: »We could, if we could, publish a *Polish Biographical Dictionary*, following the example of the whole of Europe, but it would be an immeasurably difficult undertaking«.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the 1920s, he promoted the concept of a full national dictionary, which was limited neither thematically nor chronologically.<sup>9</sup> His idea won against the concept of a biographical dictionary proposed by two historians, Ludwik Finkel and Ludwik Zakrzewski, at the session of the Central Board of the Polish Historical Society in Lviv on 2 November 1928.<sup>10</sup> They wanted to publish a *Biographic Dictionary of Post-Partition Poland*, in 12 volumes with 25,000 biographies of active professionals, to commemorate Polish activists and heroes of the post-partition period who had fought for the independence of Poland in 1918.

Konopczyński used the method of the so-called »done facts« with the support of Professor Stanisław Kot, head of the Chair of Cultural History at Krakow's Jagiellonian University. Having no money or dedicated office at their disposal, Konopczyński engaged a team of five young historians, including his students Helena Waniczek (later Wereszycka)<sup>11</sup> and Kazimierz Lepszy (1904–1964), to contribute to the initial work on the *Dictionary*. They meet at Lepszy's apartment at Bracka St and prepared a file with twelve thousand names within a year.<sup>12</sup> In October 1929, under the auspices of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU), the first session of the Temporary Editorial Committee of the *Dictionary* took place and adopted

<sup>6</sup> Elżbieta Orman, Eighty-five years of The Polish Biographical Dictionary at 17 Sławkowska St., Cracow, *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 121, 2020, p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> Władysław Konopczyński, O polską biografiją narodową, *Przegląd Warszawski*, 1, 1922, 5, pp. 161–169.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Piotr Biliński, Władysława Konopczyńskiego »boje« o kształt Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego w latach 1928–1939, *Klio Polska*, 7, 2015, p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Tadeusz Kondracki, *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne w latach 1918–1939*, Toruń, 2006, p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> Helena Wereszycka (Waniczek) (1907–1995), a historian, from 1953 head of the Biographical Section at the Documentation Department of the Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Krakow, in 1958–1976 the editorial secretary of the PSB, in 1976–1978 the deputy editor-in-chief of the PSB.

<sup>12</sup> Elżbieta Orman, Eighty-five years of The Polish Biographical Dictionary at 17 Sławkowska St., Cracow, p. 204.

the publishing rules, editorial structure, and funding matters. In view of the above, on 22 June 1930, the Central Board of the PTH in Lviv made the decision to stop all work on the dictionary of independence fighters.<sup>13</sup> Finally, on 26 January 1931, the Board of the PAU officially assumed patronage over the *Polish Biographical Dictionary*. The Editorial Committee and the Dictionary Council were set up, and Konopczyński was appointed editor-in-chief. Initially, the idea was to issue the *Dictionary* according to the Dutch lexicographical system (volumes in alphabetical order, from ‘A’ to ‘Z’) such as *The Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* (Vol. 1–10, 1911–1937) but, on 10 November 1934, the British *National Biographical Dictionary* (published 1<sup>st</sup>: 1885–1900, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1908/1909, next every ten years since 1912) was adopted as a model. It was approved by the *Dictionary’s* Council on 24 March 1935. From 1934, Konopczyński, as the editor-in-chief, began to collect biographies for the first volume of the *Dictionary*, which included entries for the letters A and B. He planned to produce 20,000 biographies in 20 volumes published over 20 years, which has not been fully implemented yet.<sup>14</sup> He proclaimed in the foreword to the first fascicles of the PSB: »The Polish nation must prove that it can afford, intellectual and material monuments as well as a publishing house similar to the ones established by other nations, not only ‘large’ ones: English, Germans, French, Italians, Russians, Americans, but also ‘small’ ones: Belgians, Danes, Dutch, Swedes, Slovenes, etc. Therefore, the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* should be found in every major state, public, local government, school, monastic, and seminar library, in all archives and museums, in every major editorial office, and in every major office.«<sup>15</sup>

The issuing of the PSB was suspended twice. The first time, during the Nazi occupation of Poland during World War II.<sup>16</sup> On 9 November 1939, Konopczyński was arrested by the Germans in the so-called *Sonderaktion Krakau*, an operation against professors and academics of the Jagiellonian University and other universities in German-occupied Krakow, which was a part of a broader plan (so-called *the Intelligenzaktion*) to eradicate the Polish intellectuals. Fortunately, the editors managed to hide files with the collected entries for future fascicles and biographies in 1939, which had been already prepared and were awaiting publication. The second time, after the resumption of work in February 1945, the publication of *Dictionary* was suspended for almost 10 years (1949–1958) during the Stalinist regime.<sup>17</sup> When, during three years of progressive Stalinisation of the humanities, Polish historio-

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<sup>13</sup> Kondracki, *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne*, p. 220.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Konopczyński, *Przedmowa*, p. X.

<sup>16</sup> Andrzej Romanowski, *Polski słownik biograficzny: przeszłość, teraźniejszość, perspektywy*, Kraków 2010, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Orman, Eighty-five years of The Polish Biographical Dictionary at 17 Sławkowska St., p. 206.

graphy was subordinated to Marxist ideology and the communist Polish United Workers' Party's (PZPR) propaganda, the PSB was accused of not meeting this official vision of history. There was an accusation about presenting a personal vision of history – rather difficult to avoid in the case of biographies – and selection of entries: it was said that too few biographies of socialist activists, communists, and workers were presented compared to, for example, clerics, intellectuals, or national activists.<sup>18</sup> In addition, in 1949, a conflict between the editorial house and communist censors broke out over the plans to publish an entry about Bolshevik revolutionary and official Felix Dzerzhinsky. This entry was written in 1939 by Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski and, despite being replaced by a new text by H. Wereszcka, was confiscated by the communist censors.<sup>19</sup> Another problem was that Konopczyński was a supporter of National Democracy, which opposed the authorities of the time, and he was forced to resign on 17 May 1949. After the *Dictionary* was discontinued according to the decision of the Ministry of Education on 12 December 1949, the editorial team survived as the Documentation Unit of the PAU, and collected material for biographical notes and biographies to be written in the future. However, in 1952, the PAU was also dissolved as a result of communist government actions.<sup>20</sup>

A new chapter in the history of the PSB started after the establishment of the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Science in Warsaw in 1953, managed by Prof. Tadeusz Manteuffel, in which the *Dictionary* still exists as one of the Academy's Departments. The publication of the PSB was resumed by issuing volume 7 in 1958, which mostly included material prepared by Konopczyński,<sup>21</sup> while the editorial office of the PSB remained in Krakow at 17 Sławkowska St. The editor-in-chief, associated with the *Dictionary* from the beginning and appointed on 9 April 1957, was Kazimierz Lepszy (volumes 8 till 10) a professor and the rector of the Jagiellonian University, also specialist in history of Poland between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also on Pomerania and the Polish military. At the same time, he was also the Chairman of the Editorial Committee, which was then founded.<sup>22</sup> Lepszy's successor was Prof. Emanuel Rostworowski (1923–1989) from the IH PAN (Institute of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> »The dictionary lived through various moments after the war. It was, as all publications, censored, its activity was also suspended, many biographies could not be published in the form in which they should have been printed due to the facts of life and activities of the subjects. It is very interesting that it was also difficult to print biographies of celebrated figures from the communist world, such as the famous Felix Dzerzhinsky«. (Józef Dużyk, *Słownikowe kłopoty z Dzierżyńskim*, *Czas*, 1995, 30, p. 2).

<sup>20</sup> Stanisław Grodziski, *Z dziejów Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności w latach 1957-1958*, *Rocznik Biblioteki Naukowej Pan i PAU w Krakowie*, 40, 2005, pp. 517–531.

<sup>21</sup> Romanowski, *Polski słownik biograficzny: przeszłość, teraźniejszość, perspektywy*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Emanuel Rostworowski, Kazimierz Lepszy i problem biografistyki narodowej, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1965, p. 498.

History, Polish Academy of Sciences; 22 volumes, from 11 to 32), a scholar of the political history and culture of 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was succeeded by Prof. Henryk Markiewicz (1989–2002) from the Jagiellonian University, who specialised in the history and theory of literature, with the particular focus on Polish literature of 1864–1939 (9 volumes under his direction, from 33 to 41),<sup>23</sup> and Prof. Andrzej Romanowski (born 1951), a Polish literary scholar, journalist, and academic teacher, since 2003 (from the 42<sup>nd</sup> volume to the present).

### **The PSB's editorial standard and rules**

To simplify the matter, it can be said that the PSB still refers to its fundamental editorial ideas from the 1930s. However, comparing entries from initial volumes (especially the four pre-war volumes) with the later ones, there are many differences. Successive editors-in-chief refined and developed the publishing instructions to raise the quality of biographies. Even Lepszy officially postulated in his publishing instructions from 1957<sup>24</sup> to limit PSB entries to encyclopaedic information, and he was more reticent about publishing biographies of revolutionary activists, radical intelligentsia, workers, and members of the peasant movement, and he maintained the erudite level of the PSB with its scientific and informative aspects.<sup>25</sup> Nowadays, the PSB is mostly based on the conceptions of his successor, Emanuel Rostworowski, formulated in 1966 and 1976, who increased the requirements for archival research (leading to the discovery of new information) and obtaining information from the subject's relatives. He also expended the criteria of selection of personages, detailed and systematised particular entries, which translated into a high substantive level of the biographies.<sup>26</sup> Of course, this resulted in a significant increase of volume and contributed to the questionable allegations of excessive details in biographies. Rostworowski's concept was further developed by Markiewicz, who introduced standardisation in the proportions of biographies from different ages and set the standards for the level of detail in biographies of artists, musicians, and writers; these biographies were less detailed than biographies of historical figures. He also established a rule that subjects who are eligible for being described in the current series of biographies must have a date of death no later than 31 December 2000,<sup>27</sup> and

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<sup>23</sup> Romanowski, *Polski słownik biograficzny: przeszłość, terażniejszość, perspektywy*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Kazimierz Lepszy, O polską biografię narodową (wznowienie Polskiego słownika biograficznego), *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1957, 3, pp. 196–208.

<sup>25</sup> Rostworowski, Kazimierz Lepszy i problem biografistyki narodowej, p. 496.

<sup>26</sup> Jerzy Michalski, Emanuel Mateusz Rostworowski (1923–1989), *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 45, 1989, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Polski słownik biograficzny: przeszłość, terażniejszość, perspektywy*, p. 16.

prepared the fascicles with supplements and corrections to volumes 1 to 40, which were published in 2000.<sup>28</sup>

Summarising, the PSB contains biographies of Poles as well as foreigners operating in Poland and people of Polish origin operating abroad, spanning chronologically from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to 2000. They represent all possible professions and activities, such as kings, princes, politicians, military leaders, painters, sculptors, architects, people involved in film, literature, and theatre, scholars, athletes, clergymen, saints. It is worth emphasising that the concept of historical Poland is taken into account, which includes historical border changes and fiefs. So, as Romanowski claims: »The PSB, in this way, is a dictionary in part Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Jewish-speaking, about the fate of people of various nationalities across the 1,100-year history of Europe«. <sup>29</sup>

The entries are prepared according to a scheme. The heading includes: surname (also other names used), first names, nicknames, years of birth and death, short description of profession or field of activity. All the entries are interrelated and they complement each other. At the end of each entry, there is information about the burial place, decorations, marriage, children, and, in some cases, different forms of commemoration. Below the biography, there is a bibliography, which consists of an iconographic section, followed by a block describing dictionaries and encyclopaedias, coverage, newspapers, printed and archival sources as well as oral information.<sup>30</sup> The bibliographical section is a very useful source of information for broader, not only biographical, research. Of course, it not always possible to stick firmly to the established model of the entry. As Emanuel Rostworowski wrote in the foreword to volume 20: »When people write about people (especially those recently deceased) and when the form of expression is not an encyclopaedic concise note, but a developed biography, emotions, likes and dislikes, and the ideological or political commitment of the writers often come to the fore«. <sup>31</sup>

Each entry has a different length. It is also worth mentioning that volume 1 consists of 480 pages and 863 biographies, which, compared to the last volume (with 640 pages and 320 biographies) shows a significant increase of the length of biographies. They are written by external authors at the request of the editing team. The PSB cooperates with the most eminent Polish and foreign specialists (over 4,500

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> The publishing instructions (15 April 2015) are available here: <http://www.psb.pan.krakow.pl/> (accessed 30 June 2020)

<sup>31</sup> Rostworowski, *Dwadzieścia tomów Polskiego Słownika Biograficznego, PSB, Vol. 20, Wrocław-Gdańsk 1975*, p. XI.



researchers), such as historians, literary scholars, musicologists, art historians, physicians, and mathematicians.<sup>32</sup> The biographies are presented in chronological order and written in the most condensed, concrete, and objective form possible, and present the role and place of the character in the past. An interesting aspect of some biographies is the presentation of so-called »life after life«, i.e. various forms of commemoration after the subject's death (e.g. monuments, street names, etc.) or the formation of a so-called black or white legend about their life.

The creation of a biography is a complicated and long process.<sup>33</sup> Although the entries are written by external experts, the final shape of a biography is created by PSB editors. The editing team of the PSB consist of 13 editors. They are divided into two sections: one for the medieval and early modern period and the second for the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which there are further chronological or subject specialisations, such as military history, literature, arts, and so on. The editor of the PSB is not only responsible for the editorial and correctional job, but first of all he or she conducts – in parallel with the author – research on the subject and is responsible for its substantive scope. The biography is checked by the editor in terms of the correctness of the facts, complementarity of the contents, bibliography, the PSB's standards, and family affinities. In practice, it means that an editor is a silent co-author, and – in a very few cases – formally signed under the biography. Each text is repeatedly verified. The text, which was checked by an editor, is then read by one of the deputy editors-in-chief, then the editor-in-chief, and all members of the so-called Editorial Board (it meets before the publication of each fascicle). Sometimes, it is sent to an external reviewer. After taking into account all corrections, the text is submitted to the author's authorisation. Finally, the correction and adjustment work begins.

Creating the *Dictionary* would not be possible without a simultaneously developed and extended database of entries. The PSB collects a so-called »file«. It is a catalogue containing the names of potential subjects, sometimes with references to archival material or books, which gives the first clues about the person in question. In addition, in the PSB's small archive, we have collected biographical materials such as biographical notes, newspaper clippings, and copies of genealogical archive materials. Every few years, a book with a list of planned entries is published and sent to

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<sup>32</sup> The list of the authors is published at the beginning of each volume.

<sup>33</sup> »[...] each written biography must be checked, sometimes given to another specialist for review, then supplemented, if necessary, in line with the standards of the entire publishing house. This is done by a team of fourteen, including three editors. There are now opportunities to enlarge it, but it is quite difficult to find people with appropriate qualifications and interests. Work in the editorial office of the PSB is tedious, not very effective, and poorly paid« (21 tysięcy życiorysów. Rozmowa Olgierda Jędrzejczyka z prof. Henrykiem Markiewiczem, *Słowo i Ludzie*, 1991, no. 22).

research centres and institutes, with a request for some comments and verifications.<sup>34</sup> Independently, everyone can send to us information about a person they consider worthy of recording in the *Dictionary*. About twice a year, there are meetings of the editors in our headquarters in Krakow, during which we discuss the selection of subjects for future fascicles and choose the authors to write them. Unfortunately, it is getting harder to find a good specialist to prepare a biographical entry, so very often the editor is obliged to do it him/herself.

### **Achievements and challenges**

First of all, the work put into the PSB encompasses the publishing of about 29,000 entries, in 52 volumes plus two fascicles of volume 53, with the size of individual volumes varying from 480 to 830 pages. The total content of the series is about 32,000 pages. Second, the creation of the PSB brand is perceived as a synonym for highest-quality historical research: it is sometimes said that, if you want to get to know something, read the PSB!<sup>35</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the PSB is free from errors, but they are corrected and supplemented in an erratum, which is published after the completion of every volume. The PSB is not only a documentary work. Also, there are many corrections and discoveries in PSB entries. Sometimes, it happens that two persons are hidden under one name, whose biographies were incorrectly merged into one. Thanks to the detailed descriptions of family affinities, the PSB is also an irreplaceable aid in research work: the largest Polish heraldic publication stops in the middle of the alphabet, but the PSB has already filled the gap to the letter T. It should not be forgotten that the model of the PSB's biographical entry goes far beyond the mentioned formula of dictionary-encyclopaedic entry, and has become a kind of microhistory, which shows a history of human life in the different socio-political conditions, through a biography. The *Dictionary* has also recorded the lives of many less-known and sometimes even just recently discovered (during editorial work) subjects, who acted in the so-called historical background but played a role in history, and getting to know their lives enriches our knowledge about the past. Regardless of historiographic trends and methodological concepts, the PSB maintains as a standard the pursuit of objectivity, avoiding the personal evaluation of a subject. It is worth emphasising that even the biographies that were published under communist censorship do not differ from the standards of scientific reliability. Of course, everything could not be written during the Stalinist regime. One of the problems were the dates of death of Polish officers who were murdered

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<sup>34</sup> The latest list of entries: *Polski słownik biograficzny: lista haseł W. Cz. 1, Waat – Wiśniuch*, ed. Agata Barzycka-Paździor, Anna Wiekłuk-Marianowska, Kraków 2020.

<sup>35</sup> A slogan from articles about the PSB in the newspaper »Gazeta Wyborcza«.

by NKVD in Kharkiv and Katyn in April 1940. In the 1960s and the early 1970s, to cover up communist crimes, the communist censors ordered the PSB to write »died in 1941« instead of »died in April 1940«. Finally, less depictive expressions, such as »died in the USSR« or »died after 1939« were introduced by the editing team in 1974. Additionally, the PSB introduced in 1981 to the bibliography the entry »List ..., A. Moszyński, London 1979«, which the readers knew referred to »The Katyn List«, containing the names of the murdered officers.<sup>36</sup> However, the PSB published many biographies inconvenient for the communist authorities, of individuals such as: the president Ignacy Mościcki; first Marshal of Poland Józef Piłsudski; marshal and military commander in World War II Edward Rydz-Śmigły; president Gabriel Narutowicz and his murderer Eligiusz Niewiadomski; Waław Krzeptowski, the creator of the Goralenvolk, hanged in 1945 by a court of the Home Army; and cavalry captain Witold Pilecki, organiser of the resistance movement in the Hitlerite concentration camp in Auschwitz, sentenced to death by a communist court in 1948.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, the PSB is facing many challenges. One of them is the completion of the current series of the PSB, which is planned for 2030 but, taking into account still extended deadline, hard to take for granted. The pace of editorial work depends not only on the amount of entries to be compiled, but on many complex circumstances. Generally speaking, the biggest threat to the compilation of the *Dictionary* is a lack of financial stability, which the IH PAN alone is not able to ensure.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, if the PSB wants to maintain the entries at the current standard, it is necessary to acquire new authors. Due to the fact that nowadays historians are mostly occupied by research on mentality and day-to-day life, fewer and fewer specialists undertake cooperation with the PSB, as they lack the necessary skills. The generation for which writing for the PSB was a kind of ennoblement is gone. Writing a biography of a less-known person is extremely time-consuming and tedious. It involves a lot of archival research, which the author runs at his or her own expense. Moreover, for writing entries in the PSB, an author does not receive the points that are needed for the obligatory evaluation of scholars and scientists. The PSB should also work on the next series of the *Dictionary*. It is a pity that so many important persons were missed in the current edition, as they were still alive at the time of

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<sup>36</sup> Orman, *Eighty-five years of The Polish Biographical Dictionary at 17 Sławkowska St.*, p. 214.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214–215.

<sup>38</sup> Since 1994, financial support has been provided by the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP), but in 2007 the FNP cut two-thirds of the PSB subsidy. In 2008–11, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

provided funding. In 2011–2016, the PSB was supported by the National Programme for the Development of Humanity, and a second time in 2020 (for 3 years).

printing the volumes. Of course, the idea has been put forward to issue a second series, consisting of supplements to the first current edition as well as a third series with biographies of people who died after 2000. Even now, we do not have in the PSB the entries of Pope John Paul II or the Nobel Prize winning poets Wisława Szymborska and Czesław Miłosz. Unfortunately, many aspects relating thereto remain at the planning stage.

And last but not least, the PSB can no longer exist without a full digitisation of the PSB and the creation a web dictionary in free, open access. It cannot be closed to »open innovation« with digitisation and development of multimedia technologies, which would lead to a digital divide. The work on this has been started, but we still have a lot to do. The first work on the digitisation of the PSB as the iPSB began in 2005, in cooperation with TV Polska, but it failed in 2009. On 8 June 2005, the project called iPSB was presented at the TVP's office with the attendance of members of the PSB editorial team and of the managements of IH PAN, Polskie Radio S.A., and TVP S.A. On 16 December 2014, a second presentation of the iPSB took place in the Warsaw office of the Society of Authors ZAiKS in Warsaw, under the honorary patronage of President Bronisław Komorowski.<sup>39</sup> From 2014, the PSB has been cooperating with the National Audiovisual Institute (FInA from 2017), which undertook to post the PSB on the web. Between December 2014 and 2021, more than 12,000 entries were published in open access, but it is still not enough. It is available on the web at [ipsb.nina.gov.pl](http://ipsb.nina.gov.pl).

And finally, the PSB is the only IH PAN publication that can be found in any important research library around the world. It is regrettable to say that its circulation is still decreasing (2,200 copies in 2004, 1,700 in 2007, and 1,200 copies as of 2019). In consequence, the PSB, which is addressed not only to scientists and researchers, but to all people interested in history, cannot reach all readers in accordance with its original assumption. This is a great pity. According to the editor-in-chief Andrzej Romanowski, the »*Polish Biographical Dictionary* is – in my opinion – an excellent read; it is just great for reading. The lives of many heroes of the »Dictionary« resemble a sensational novel or novel of manners, with amazing adventures. But with one restriction – the language of entries is not keeping with the conventions of the novel. It is a factual, specific biography which gives facts, facts, and, once more, facts. But these facts form truly fascinating stories«.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Orman, Eighty-five years of The Polish Biographical Dictionary, pp. 221–222.

<sup>40</sup> *Nie kończąca się historia*. [Włodzimierz Jurasz's talk with prof. Andrzej Romanowski], *Gazeta Krakowska*, 2003, the issue of 25th July, p. 4.

## Conclusion

The *Polish Biographical Dictionary* has an important position in Polish biographical writing. It stands out in terms of content compared to other biographical dictionaries, which are limited to field of activities (e.g. dictionaries of professional groups such as artists, musicians, political activists, etc.), place of origin, and place of activity. In the 85 years of its existence, the PSB has been incessantly creating a collective portrait of Poles, who lived in Poland as well as abroad, which is diverse in terms of religion, social status, and undertaken activities. Certainly, the PSB is not free from defects, and its paper version does not fully meet the requirements of modern scholarship. It is difficult to disagree with those voicing the need for digitising the *Dictionary* and opening it to new technologies, which offer new possibilities in terms of searching and updating information or enriching biographies with audio-visual or voice materials. The English lexicographic model of entries and the end date, which allows only biographies of people who died no later than 2000 to be published in the current series of the PSB, inexorably force the lack of many important biographies. Another matter is the need for substantive supplementation of the information in the first volumes. Also, the next series of the *Dictionary* should be issued. Now, the most important task is to complete the current series of the PSB, which is connected with overcoming various difficulties, as the article presents.

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## KONCEPT POLJSKOGA BIOGRAFSKOGA LEKSIKONA: NJEGOVA POVIJEST I UREDNIČKI IZAZOVI

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**SAŽETAK:** Cilj je ovoga rada predstaviti koncepciju *Poljskoga biografskoga leksikona* (*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, PSB), koji je izdavan u Krakovu od 1935. kao višesveščano izdanje Poljske akademije znanosti (PAN) i Poljske akademije umjetnosti i znanosti (PAU), a koje provodi Institut za povijest Tadeusz Manteuffel PAN. Dosad je u 52 sveska<sup>41</sup> izdano više od 28 000 biografija osoba povezanih s Poljskom (kao i Velikom Kneževinom Litvom te Poljsko-Litavskom Unijom i njihovim lenima) koje su živjele ili djelovale u zemlji i inozemstvu od vremena legendarnoga vojvode Popiela (IX. st.) do 2000. Koncept PSB-a predstavljen je u historiografskom kontekstu, kao i u kontekstu suvremenih problema i izazova s kojima se suočava PSB.

**Ključne riječi:** biografski leksikon; *Poljski biografski leksikon*; iPSB; Władysław Konopczyński

<sup>41</sup> Podatci od 30. lipnja 2021.



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