

# **The history of the Turawa land within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic parish in Kotórz Wielki near Opole from the Middle Ages to the present day**

## **Summary**

This study is a historical panorama of the Turawa land within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic parish in Kotórz Wielki near Opole from the Middle Ages to the present day.

It is mainly a picture of the everyday life of the inhabitants of individual towns located in this small part of the Opole region, life subject to civilization changes that took place over several consecutive historical periods. These periods, approximately two hundred years old, were marked by the changing state affiliation of the Silesian lands - these were: the times of the Silesian Piast dynasty, then the period of affiliation to the lands of the Czech Crown, then the period of affiliation to the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy, and finally to the Kingdom of Prussia under the rule of the Hohenzollerns and remaining within the framework of statehood German until 1945, since Opole Silesia - as part of the Western and Northern Lands, which after World War II, by the decision of the leaders of the victorious powers of the anti-Hitler coalition, were assigned to Poland - is an integral part of the Polish state.

The work particularly highlights the religious and church sphere, the most important in the lives of the inhabitants of this land, because the Church and the Catholic faith in Opole Silesia, in view of the changing state affiliation of this region, were the main constant and stabilizing factor - the Church gave the Silesians a sense of institutional belonging, and faith Catholicism was the religious, ideological and axiological bond that united the inhabitants of this land into a community.

Settlement in the Turawa region dates back to ancient times, which was confirmed by the results of archaeological research carried out here in the interwar years. For centuries, Silesia was sparsely populated, so in order to change this, Silesian princes began colonizing it in the 12th and 13th centuries, attracting settlers from near and far on a large scale. The villages founded at that time on Turawa land: Kadłub Turawski, Kolanowice, Kotórz Mały, Kotórz Wielki, Węgry first belonged to the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross in Opole, and from the beginning of the 14th century to the parish church in Kotórz Wielki. As a result of progressing colonization, the socio-economic life in the lands of Silesia improved in terms of civilization. In the era of belonging to the lands of the Czech Crown and the Habsburg Monarchy (from the 15th century to 1740), the land of Turawa did not directly experience the Hussite wars that swept through other parts of Silesia in the 15th century. However, the Thirty Years' War had a more pronounced impact on the Turawa land - then towns and villages located around Opole, including the Turawa land, were severely plundered and some were even destroyed.

The two-hundred-year period of German statehood in the Turawa region (1740–1945) began with the three Silesian Wars fought by King Frederick II of Prussia and the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa von Habsburg in 1740–1742, 1744–1745 and 1756–1763. These wars were started by the Prussian king in 1740, when he invaded and occupied most of the territory of Silesia, including the Turawa land. Half a century later, the Napoleonic Wars began in Europe, which also covered the lands of Silesia. The events of the Springtime of the Peoples at the end of the first half of the 19th century also covered the Turawa lands. After the unification of Germany in 1871, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck sought to limit the influence of the Catholic Church in the German state, which is why the central government supported Protestants - so several anti-Catholic laws were created. Since the inhabitants of the Turawa region were almost exclusively Catholics, they felt the pain of Bismarck's Kulturkampf even more.

Most of the inhabitants of the Kotor parish were farmers. However, farming was hampered by the epidemics of cattle and pig diseases that occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Animal disease outbreaks were regularly reported in the district press. However, farmers received compensation from the state for their losses. Already in 1839, it was reported in the district press that injured farmers were paid compensation for animals that died due to anthrax.

The lives of the inhabitants of the Turawa region changed after the outbreak of World War I, because many men were drafted into the army and fought on the battle fronts. Many of them died. After four years, the Great War ended with the defeat of the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary and the Second German Reich) and the peace treaty signed in Versailles at the end of June 1919.

It was also a time when, after Poland gained independence in November 1918, the statehood of Upper Silesia became a problem of great importance. Hopes for the incorporation of Upper Silesia into Poland were alive both in Polish society and in the Upper Silesian region, also in Opole, where since the Kulturkampf Polish national awareness among many Polish-speaking Silesians was deepening, and the number of activists opting for Polishness was also growing.

During the peace conference in Versailles in June 1919, the states of the victorious Entente decided that the statehood of Upper Silesia would be decided by a plebiscite of inhabitants held in this area (Article 88 of the Treaty of Versailles). On March 20, 1921, a plebiscite was held in Upper Silesia. 40.3% of all voters voted for belonging to Poland. However, the final effects of the Upper Silesian plebiscite of March 20, 1921 were determined by an armed act, namely the Third Silesian Uprising in May-June 1921, which, in Korfanty's intention, was to be an armed demonstration of the Polish cause on the international forum. As a result, pursuant to the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris of October 20, 1921, Upper Silesia was divided into two parts - Poland received a large part of the industrial district, and Germany remained the entire western part of historical Upper Silesia, i.e. Opole Silesia, definitely agricultural, together with the Turawa land.

In the 1930s, the political situation in Germany began to change for the worse. The influence of national socialism, which had increasing support among the population, could also be felt in the Turawa region.

An important event for the inhabitants of the Turawa land was undoubtedly the construction of a large retention reservoir on the Mała Panew River called Turawskie Lake in the years 1933–1938, the construction of which was planned already before World War I. During five years of construction, a large retention reservoir was created near Turawa, with a capacity of 108 million m<sup>3</sup> and an area of 24 km<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to this investment, the waterway on the Odra River regained a sufficiently high water level and it was again possible to transport bulk goods on a large scale, using barges with a displacement of up to 1,000 tons. Mainly hard coal was transported from Silesian mines to the ports in Szczecin and Świnoujście. Turawskie Lake has also become a famous reservoir, providing recreation for the inhabitants of the Opole region. Thanks to the construction of the Turawa reservoir in the 1930s, the villages around Turawa were electrified, and the financial situation of the inhabitants of the Turawa land improved again as they found well-paid work in the construction of the Turawa Lake.

In Opole Silesia, after the expiry of the Geneva Convention (on July 15, 1937), the Nazi authorities began to eradicate on a large scale all manifestations of Polishness. Under the slogan "Down with the Polish facade!" (German: "Fort mit der polnischen Fassade!"), the action (which had already started a little earlier) was intensified and completed to rename the existing, centuries-old town names of Slavic origin into new German names with a purely Germanic root, even going so far as to remove Polish surnames and inscriptions from cemetery gravestones, and the Silesian population was pressured to change their Polish-sounding names

and surnames to purely German ones with a Germanic sound; this last action was handled by the Association of the German East (Bund Deutscher Osten - BDO). Anti-Polish incidents and persecution of Polish activists and organizations began to intensify. Shortly before the outbreak of the war, the Polish language was completely eradicated, also from church life in Opole Silesia. This was carried out in an extremely drastic way, exerting various, often brutal pressure, including physical, on priests and believers.

The last years before the outbreak of the war brought increasing militarization of social and economic life, which was particularly felt in Opole Silesia, which - due to its strong economy and strategic location - played an important role in the war plans of the Third Reich.

For the inhabitants of Opole Silesia, the war in its beginnings was something distant, because apart from the euphoria of the victories, the feeling of war consisted primarily in the increasingly acute difficulties of everyday life, such as: rationing of most goods, as well as the presence of forced laborers, and above all, painful information about the death of loved ones who died at the front.

In the following years of the war, as a result of the increasing shortage of own labor force, an increasing number of forced laborers (men and women), brought from the territories of occupied Poland, worked in many farms in the agricultural regions of Opole Silesia, and in industry, especially in the areas of Bytom, Zabrze and Gliwice (the so-called coal basin), women were increasingly exploited, as well as large numbers of foreign forced workers, prisoners of war and prisoners of the KL Auschwitz-Birkenau and KL Groß-Rosen concentration camps (Rogoźnica near Jawor in Lower Silesia) and their branches scattered throughout Silesia.

Since the defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943, since hostilities began to approach the borders of the Third Reich, the tragic truth about the war began to reach the awareness of ordinary citizens more and more.

Despite the great exodus of people who fled in panic to the west from the offensive of Soviet troops in the extremely frosty days at the turn of 1944 and 1945 and the depopulation of some areas, especially cities, the civilian population also suffered severe losses related to the capture of Opole Silesia by the Red Army. Soviet troops treated Opole Silesia as an enemy area, and their operations lasting over four months in this area - from January to May 1945 - had nothing to do with the liberation with which communist propaganda identified them in the times of the Polish People's Republic. It must be remembered that in Poland the Red Army soldiers were kept under certain restrictions, but in the lands that belonged to the Reich before the war, all restrictions disappeared. Therefore, the inhabitants of Opole Silesia experienced from their side (the armies of the 1st Ukrainian Front under the command of Marshal of the USSR Ivan Konev operated here) all possible manifestations of barbarism. As a result, the Silesian population suffered enormous suffering from their "liberators" - rapes and other atrocities, and even bloody pacifications, not to mention widespread robbery and requisitioning of property. In addition, several dozen thousand Silesian men were deported by the Soviet occupation authorities right after the front to forced labor deep inside the USSR, from where few returned home after years of hard hard labor.

Although these were tragic circumstances accompanying the annexation of Opole Silesia to post-war Poland, - and this should not be forgotten - there were no Polish soldiers among those who conquered Opole Silesia and recorded "memorable" exploits of the Red Army during its conquest.

The Polish administration began to cover Opole Silesia only two months later - from the end of March 1945 - when it began to take over the entire area from the Soviet war commands.

The purpose of demonstrating the survival of Polishness among the Opole Silesians (autochthons), Polishness treated in a clearly mythologized and simplified way, without taking

into account the complex context of the borderland and historical conditions, was the nationality verification in Opole Silesia carried out in the post-war months.

The native Silesian population was faced with a dramatic choice - to leave their "small homeland", abandon their homes and the graves of their ancestors and go to the very war-damaged occupation zones of Germany, or stay and try to live in a new, foreign country and surroundings, but still in own fatherland. People, fearing forced displacement, tried to avoid it at all costs. And since only obtaining a positive result of nationality verification could protect against displacement, in verification applications people applying for Polish citizenship referred primarily to their Polish roots, the use of the Polish language at home and in prayer, the ability to read and write in Polish, and attending Polish courses or trips to Poland. However, their stay in place meant, above all, choosing their own family land and life achievements, and especially religious freedom, which they identified with Poland.

However, separating Poles from Germans was not easy at all, because many Germans also spoke Polish. Moreover, a neighbor's denunciation or someone's vague suspicion was enough to recognize someone as a German and condemn him to deportation to the occupation zones of Germany, and sometimes even throw him into prison or a camp. Many innocent people fell victim to false denunciations at that time.

Most residents of the Kotórz parish passed the nationality verification positively - after all, they spoke the Silesian dialect. However, almost all of the German population left Turawa before the arrival of the Eastern Front - fleeing from the Red Army, while the last Germans left as part of the post-war displacements. The Polish immigrant population, mainly displaced from the Eastern Borderlands, settled in their houses in Turawa. In the first years, relations between locals and immigrants were not good - they were filled with distrust and mutual prejudice. However, over time, the mutual relations of both groups gradually became normalized.

For the Silesians of Opole, a significant problem was the reluctance to identify with communist Poland. The communist system was contrary to the traditional values of the Silesian community, not to mention the fact that the Silesian ethos of solid work was in stark contrast to socialist waste and mismanagement. For example, when attempts were made to introduce collectivization in agriculture after the war, it turned out to be ineffective in the parish in Kotórz Wielki. The inhabitants did not want to get involved in the creation of a socialist state in any way. In the fall of 1946, a nationwide referendum was held, which was supposed to be free, but in fact was rigged.

The policy of the communist state, aiming at the "moral and political unity of the nation" by incorporating the Opole Silesians into the Polish nation using assimilation pressure, ignoring and eliminating different cultural features, however, encountered strong social resistance. Discriminatory practices, deprivation of the possibility of association, humiliation of Silesian culture as contaminated with German, prohibition of using the German language, eliminating the remnants of German heritage in response increased group cohesion, strengthened the division into "our own" and "outsiders", intensified the processes of identification with one's own community, evoked German resentments and deepened their distance from Polishness. The mood of discouragement among the Silesian population became more and more common over the years. Traditional Catholic Silesians were discouraged by the intrusive atheism of the people's authorities and their bad relations with the Church and religion. The deep religiosity and special position of Catholic priests and nuns in the Silesian community meant that the repressions applied against the Church in the Opole region in the 1950s deeply alienated the Opole Silesians from the people's authorities.

In 1980–1981, the establishment of "Solidarity" awakened social hopes for a better future. This enthusiasm collapsed when martial law was introduced in Poland on December 13, 1981.

The most important event for the inhabitants of the Opole region at that time was the visit of John Paul II to on Tuesday, June 21, 1983. This event gathered almost a million people on the Saint Anne's Mountain meadows, who came from all over Opole Silesia.

The year 1989 was a breakthrough moment in Poland's recent history. The political and social changes initiated at that time led to the collapse of the communist system. The subsequent period of political and economic transformation also had multiple effects on the lives of the inhabitants of the Turawa land. Many necessary investments have been started in towns within the commune, including: water supply, construction of a sewage system and a sports hall in Turawa. On the other hand, Turawa towns were not spared from the wave of emigration of young inhabitants to Germany, which affected the entire Opole region, especially in the last two consequences for family life, which has been strongly present since then it still continues, not only in the local community of the Turawa land, but requires research and a separate, deeper historical analysis.

Keywords: history, Turawa land, parish in Kotórz Wielki, Roman Catholic parish, Opole