



COPERNICANA

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Commemorating the figure of Nicolaus Copernicus in the Polish People's Republic period as an element of historical policy pursued after 1945*

Upamiętnianie postaci Mikołaja Kopernika w okresie PRL elementem polityki historycznej prowadzonej po 1945 r.

Das Gedenken an die Figur Nikolaus Kopernikus in den PRL (Polnische Volksrepublik) Zeiten, ein Element der Geschichtspolitik nach 1945

Keywords: Historical/memory policy; propaganda of the Polish People's Republic period; celebration of anniversaries related to the figure of Nicolaus Copernicus; Olsztyn; Frombork

Słowa kluczowe: polityka historyczna/pamięci, propaganda okresu PRL, obchody rocznic związanych z postacią Mikołaja Kopernika, Olsztyn, Frombork

Schlüsselwörter: Geschichts-/Erinnerungspolitik, Propaganda der kommunistischen Zeit, Feierlichkeiten zu den Jahrestagen von Nikolaus Kopernikus, Olsztyn; Frombork

ABSTRACT

In the post-1945 politics of memory, the figure of Copernicus was used in the context of the anti-German narrative to confirm the eternal ties with the Polish state of the lands annexed after the war. There was a specific pattern to it. While marginalising the fact that he was a clergyman, his contribution to world science was praised, and his Polishness and his ability to oppose the Teutonic Knights, identified with the Germans, were emphasised. Therefore, he was men-

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tioned next to the defeaters of the Teutonic Knights from Grunwald, the Red Army, and the Polish Army, which defeated the Third Reich as a united Slavic world. The conclusion was that both Copernicus centuries ago and during World War II, allied troops led by the USSR were fighting with Germany for the same goals, including restoring areas with Piast origins to Poland. Despite using the figure of Copernicus in the implemented memory policy, the astronomer invariably enjoyed great sympathy in Polish society.

STRESZCZENIE

W prowadzonej po 1945 r. polityce pamięci postać Kopernika wykorzystywano w kontekście prowadzonej narracji antyniemieckiej oraz potwierdzając odwieczne związki z państwem polskim pasa ziem przyłączonych po wojnie. Towarzyszył temu pewien schemat. Marginalizując fakt, że był osobą duchowną, chwalono zasługi dla nauki światowej, podkreślano jego polskość i to, że potrafił przeciwstawić się Krzyżakom, utożsamianym z Niemcami. Zatem wymieniany był obok pogromców Krzyżaków spod Grunwaldu, ale też Armii Czerwonej i Wojska Polskiego, które, jako „zjednoczony świat słowiański”, pokonały III Rzeszę. Wniosek był taki, że zarówno przed wiekami Kopernik, jak i w czasie II wojny światowej wojska sojusznicze pod wodzą ZSRR w istocie walczyły z Niemcami o te same cele, wśród których było m.in. przywrócenie Polsce terenów o piastowskim rodowodzie. Mimo wykorzystywania postaci Kopernika w realizowanej polityce pamięci, astronom niezmiennie cieszył się dużą sympatią polskiego społeczeństwa.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In der nach 1945 betriebenen Erinnerungspolitik wurde die Figur des Kopernikus im Rahmen eines fortlaufenden antideutschen Narrativ verwendet, die die jahrhundertealten Verbindungen des Landstreifens, der nach dem Krieg annektierten Gebiete mit dem polnischen Staat bestätigte. Dies wurde von einem bestimmten Muster begleitet. Unter Vernachlässigung der Tatsache, dass er eine geistige Person war, wurden seine Beiträge zur Weltwissenschaft gepriesen, sein Polentum hervorgehoben und die Tatsache, dass er sich gegen den Deutschen Orden behaupten konnte, die mit den Deutschen identifiziert wurden. So wurde er zusammen neben den Bezwingern des Deutschen Ordens aus Grunwald, aber auch der Roten Armee und der polnischen Armee erwähnt, die als „vereinte slawische Welt“ das Dritte Reich besiegten. Die Schlussfolgerung war, dass Kopernikus, sowohl vor Jahrhunderten als auch während des Zweiten Weltkrieges, die von der UdSSR (Sowjetunion) angeführten alliierten Streitkräfte tatsächlich gegen die Deutschen kämpfte, um u.a. die Rückgabe von Gebieten mit piastischem Ursprung an Polen. Trotz der Instrumentalisierung der Figur des Kopernikus in der betriebenen Erinnerungspolitik genoss der Astronom stets große Sympathie in der polnischen Öffentlichkeit.

The politics of memory, interchangeably called historical politics, was associated with the need to legitimise the acquisition and maintenance of power. Finding justification for the foundations of the present in history went hand in hand with recalling selected historical figures and events from the state's past. A researcher of this issue, historian Marcin Zaremba, pointed out that the “cult of heroes under the leadership of the party” began in the first post-war years, and a characteristic sign of these activities was the “adaptation” of the biographies of worshipped figures to the needs of those in power¹. In the realities

¹ M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warszawa 2005, p. 213.

of the Polish People's Republic, among many factors determining the historical policy pursued, it was also about warming the authorities' image and showing the state's development under the responsible leadership of those in power who care about Polish affairs. Situations were not uncommon in which historical truth was manipulated for this purpose, interpreting it in such a way as to show the past of the state/nation only in a favourable light for those currently in power. The propaganda system served this purpose, creating and perpetuating the image of the past expected by those in power. The direction of the historical policy and its intensity depended on the current situation in the country, including recurring socio-political and economic crises and the international situation.

When shaping the policy of memory, including that relating to the strip of annexed lands, all possible past elements that could confirm these areas' connection with Poland were presented. Seeing such events, shifting the state's borders westward was justified. Although this involved the annexation of areas previously belonging to the Third Reich, which was to be a form of compensation for the war, it also meant the loss of the Eastern Borderlands. In the background, the critical role of the Red Army/Soviet Union in the victorious end of the war was shown, preceded by a march "to Berlin" together with the "people's" Polish Army, and as a result, the recovery of lands in the north and west for Poland. An equally important goal of the state's historical policy was to make Poland's right to these areas credible in the international arena and to show that those in power are perfectly coping with their development and settlement, mainly with displaced persons from central Poland and the Borderlands (in the case of Warmia and Mazury, mainly from the Vilnius region and Volhynia) and that the process of incorporating these areas into the nationwide socio-economic organism is progressing successfully.

At the same time, the "Germanness" found here was erased from the public space, making it clear that only after 1945 these areas began to develop. The possibilities for this varied in individual parts of the Recovered Territories, related to their diversified historical past and cultural, social and economic differences. Also, the past political affiliation of individual parts of these lands did not always facilitate the creation of a historical narrative about their "eternal Polishness".

Warmia and Masuria were part of the Recovered Territories, as the area annexed to Poland in 1945 was officially called (later, it was referred to as the Western and Northern Territories). Initially, administratively, it was the Masurian District, from mid-1946, officially named the Olsztyn Voivodeship. In the past, Masuria was only a Polish fief in the years 1466–1657. The situation was much better – it might seem – in Warmia, so close to Copernicus (it should be emphasised here that Copernicus was always associated with Warmia, regardless of whether Polish or German

researchers mentioned him²). These lands belonged to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth for a little over 300 years (until the First Partition), which, in the course of its historical policy, could be considered the ultimate proof of their Polishness. There was a problem, however, because it was an ecclesiastical state managed by bishops. In the political realities after 1945, this fact made it difficult to refer to the former Polishness of this part of the Olsztyn Voivodeship³.

The figure of Nicolaus Copernicus was often and willingly used in the historical policy pursued since the war's end. He was considered among the particularly distinguished. In the "Yearbook of the Western and Northern Territories" from 1960, he opened the list of "distinguished sons of Poland from the Western Lands": "The great astronomer Copernicus and the shoemaker Colonel Kiliński, co-creator of the Constitution of May 3 Wybicki and the village teacher Lompa, professors Jan and Jędrzej Śniadecki and the peasant revolutionary Marek from Jemielnica, the famous lutenist Groblicz, the historian Kętrzyński and the creator Bogusławski national theatre, [...] dozens and hundreds of others, outstanding and distinguished in the history of Poland, learned and simple people, came from our Western Lands or connected their lives and work with them"⁴. He was presented as an outstanding Polish scientist, astronomer, mathematician, lawyer, economist, doctor, and resident of Polish Warmia. The message was supposed to indicate that the Polish state had once again taken over the lands (once Polish) where the Polish scientist Nicolaus Copernicus lived and made a momentous discovery. This was invariably reminded on the occasion of subsequent anniversaries of his birth. The astronomer's life and achievements were the subject of publications, exhibitions and lectures. People talked about it in schools, during academies, and in workplaces. There were awards named after Copernicus, postage stamps, and a 1,000 banknote with his image. As a side note, it should be added that with the increasing focus on memory policy, the exposure of figures associated with political activity in the past was significantly limited. The focus was more on people related to culture and science, so Copernicus's position was unshakable.

Similarly to the Grunwald victory, the memory of Copernicus, in the context of propaganda activities, had been maintained since 1945, although this figure was also recalled earlier, during the occupation. In the Polish Workers' Party program

² M. Karkowska, *Pamięć kulturowa mieszkańców Olsztyna lat 1945–2006 w perspektywie koncepcji Aleidy i Jana Assmannów*, Warszawa 2014, p. 284

³ More on the historical policy pursued towards Warmia and Mazury after 1945, see – R. Tomkiewicz, *Polityka historyczna na Warmii i Mazurach w latach 1945–1989*, in: *Region czy regiony? Ziemia Zachodnie i Północne 1945–1989*, ed. sciences volume W. Kucharski, ed. sciences chapters W. Kucharski, A. Makowski, A. Sakson, B. Solga, G. Strauchold, R. Tomkiewicz, Wrocław 2022, p. 533–549.

⁴ R. Hajdur, S. Ziemia, *Krew z krwi i kość z kości...*, in: *Od Sudetów do Bałtyku*, „Rocznik Ziem Zachodnich i Północnych” 1960, p. 63.

proclamation from the beginning of 1942, in the content – as Marcin Zaremba emphasises – talking about the Polish face of this group, Nicolaus Copernicus also appears as one of the most important representatives of the Polish nation, also known abroad⁵. The Nicolaus Copernicus monument in Warsaw, founded by Stanisław Staszic, became “one of the central Polish places of memory” for years. It was unveiled, with a Polish-language plaque, on May 11, 1830. During the German occupation, the plaque was changed. The new one was written in German and indicated the non-Polish origin of the astronomer. During the activities carried out on February 11, 1942, this plaque was destroyed by a unit of the Polish underground⁶.

Also, during the war, in the Memorial prepared by the Masuria Union, Copernicus was mentioned among several postulates regarding the post-war future of Masuria. Writing about the need to protect all traces of Polishness, it was added that the astronomer's monument in Olsztyn should remain with a Polish plaque⁷. Naturally, not all the demands were fulfilled, although, in this case, in 1916, a memorial to Copernicus remained next to the castle. During a joint reconnaissance of the city, carried out by President Tadeusz Pałucki and Voivode Zygmunt Robel, a decision was made about a new location for this monument (the unveiling ceremony was to take place in October 1946). The local press reported that the 430th anniversary of the astronomer's stay at the Olsztyn castle (he lived here from 1516 to 1520) would be celebrated this way⁸. Ultimately, the monument was unveiled slightly more modestly, without the neo-Gothic chapel. The new place turned out to be a park on the western side of the castle, near the Łyna. The following inscription can be seen on the pedestal: “Defenders of the Olsztyn stronghold against the Teutonic invader. The great Pole Nicolaus Copernicus. “Thankful Compatriots”⁹.”

In the context of the significantly anti-German historical policy pursued after the war, Copernicus's stay in Warmia and his involvement in defending the Olsztyn castle against the Teutonic attack at the beginning of the 16th century were particularly eagerly recalled, treating it as a symbol of Copernicus's unfriendly attitude towards the Germans. In fact – what was known at the time but not always said – turned out to be a half-truth. Copernicus could not lead the active defence of the castle and repel the Teutonic attack because there was no direct attack. Without a doubt, as the manager of the Olsztyn castle, he duly prepared it in case of a possible Teutonic attack and siege. These circumstances were recalled by historian Marian Biskup, who

⁵ M. Zaremba, op. cit., p. 125.

⁶ L.M. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny*, Warszawa 2008, p. 76; R. Traba, *Historia – przestrzeń dialogu. Pamięci Jerzego Giedroycia i spadkobiercom spuścizny paryskiej „Kultury”*, Warszawa 2006, p. 151.

⁷ R. Tomkiewicz, *Polityka historyczna...*, p. 537–539.

⁸ [I], *Zaludnienie Kortowa i pomnik Kopernika. Wojewoda i prezydent miasta objeżdżają Olsztyn*, “Wiadomości Mazurskie” 1946, no. 218 of September 21, p. 3.

⁹ R. Gross, R. Tomkiewicz, *Obchody pięćsetnej rocznicy urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika w województwie olsztyńskim w 1973 roku*, Olsztyn 2023, p. 12.

also recalled the source of information about the alleged defence of the castle. However, the “defence of the castle against the Teutonic Knights” was often mentioned anyway, especially during occasional speeches, because it perfectly fits the anti-German narrative in the ongoing memory policy¹⁰.

Changing the names of towns, streets, and other physiographic features was also an element of the historical policy¹¹. In the case of Warmia and Mazury, references were made to historical figures associated with this area (Gizewiusz, Mrongowiusz, Kętrzyński, Pieniężny) or to heroes of national history. There were some regrettable name changes. This was the case with nearby Olsztyn Barczewo, which – due to the place of birth of the composer Feliks Nowowiejski – was intended to be called Nowowiejski, which did not sound the best. Frombork was also planned to be renamed Kopernikowo, but ultimately, this idea was not implemented¹².

Erasing the traces of the German past of these lands also involved changing the names of streets. First, settlers gave names associated with the places they came from. “Pionierów” streets also appeared in many towns. Then there were names given officially, referring to Polish (and Slavic) origins, including historical figures: Mieszko I, Bolesław the Brave, Tadeusz Kościuszko, Kazimierz Pułaski, Józef Bem. “Piastowskie” and Jagiellońskie streets appeared many times in cities located in the Recovered Territories. There were also names related to Polish writers and characters from historical novels, naturally primarily from Henryk Sienkiewicz’s “Teutonic Knights”. However, street names appeared to indicate the connection and unity of the lands annexed to the Motherland, referring to cities in other parts of the Recovered Territories and the former lands. “Warsaw streets” dominated. There were also streets “Gdańskie”, “Bydgoskie”, “Tczewskie”, “Lubelskie” and others. The figure of Copernicus was also not ignored; in every city, there was a street named after him, and these were usually more prominent streets, usually located in city centres (Copernicus was also a patron of many educational and cultural institutions). In the case of Olsztyn, the post-war, comprehensive change of street names in the annexed lands did not concern Kopernika Street. It has remained in the same place since pre-war times.

¹⁰ M. Chomin, 1353–1953, “Głos Olsztyński”, 1953, no. 261 of October 31–November 1 [Supplement: “Świat i My”], p. 1; R. Hajdur, S. Ziemia, op. cit., p. 81; M. Biskup, *W sprawie zagrożenia Olsztyna przez wojska krzyżackie w początkach 1521 roku*, in: *Kopernik na Warmii. Życie i działalność publiczna. Działalność naukowa. Środowisko. Kalendarium*, ed. J. Jasiński, B. Koziello-Poklewski, J. Sikorski, Olsztyn 1973, p. 176 et seq.; M. Karkowska, op. cit., p. 171, 175, 289; R. Sierocki, R. Kleśta-Nawrocki, J. Kowalewski, *Praktykowanie pamięci. Olsztynianie – rekonesans antropologiczny*, Olsztyn 2014, p. 344, 360; R. Tomkiewicz, *Polityka historyczna...*, p. 534–535.

¹¹ For more information, see: R. Tomkiewicz, *O działalności Komisji Ustalania Nazw Miejscowych i Obiektów Fizjograficznych na terenie Warmii i Mazur*, “Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie” 2004, no. 4, p. 539–547.

¹² R. Tomkiewicz, *Polityka historyczna...*, p. 542–543.

In the report on June 1945, the Government Plenipotentiary, Col. Jakub Prawin, informing the Ministry of Public Administration about the destruction and looting that affected Frombork, also mentioned that works of art had been taken away from the Cathedral and that "Copernicus's manuscripts were lost"¹³. Only in September 1945 did work on securing the surviving collections related to Copernicus' stay in this town start. Previously, there was no consent from the Soviet authorities stationed in the town. Historian Tadeusz Baryła pointed out that the work was intensified only when the Masurian Museum in Olsztyn began preparing an exhibition devoted to Copernicus, the opening of which – with the participation of journalists invited from all over the country – was planned for the following year. Ultimately, the exhibition was opened on May 24, 1946, recalling the 403rd anniversary of the astronomer's death. The importance attached to the figure of Copernicus was evidenced by the fact that voivode Zygmunt Robel personally patronised it¹⁴. Recalling that event, the editor of the "Communications of the Scientific Information Department" of the Masurian Institute in Olsztyn, Emilia Sukertowa-Biedrawina, wrote that "it was the first exhibition in the country dedicated to the Great Astronomer"¹⁵. According to this report, the exhibition was viewed by approx. 9 thousand people, and the "Catalogue" prepared for this occasion "was sold to the last copy." The display cases contained old prints related to Copernicus, but also to the era in which he lived. Fifteen of the priceless prints were donated by the Masurian Institute, which opened on September 5, 1948. Nicolaus Copernicus Museum in Frombork.

In 1953, celebrations were organised to celebrate the 480th anniversary of Copernicus's birth¹⁶. Especially then, during the peak period of Stalinism, attempts were made to use his figure and achievements as a "great Polish astronomer and scientist" in the historical policy pursued, especially against Germany. The celebrations were organised in the theatre in Olsztyn¹⁷. In the "Speaker's Notebook" from that period, containing samples of the propaganda content of speeches, it was written that Poles should be proud of Copernicus, along with other "brilliant representatives of our nation", including several figures recognised as carriers of the idea of progress and civilisational development¹⁸. In one of the documents addressed to the activists

¹³ Jakub Prawin's report for the Ministry of Public Administration and the General Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Republic of Poland for the Recovered Territories, Olsztyn, July 16, 1945, in: *Okręg Mazurski w raportach Jakuba Prawina. Wybór dokumentów*. 1945. Prepared for printing by T. Baryła, Olsztyn 1996, p. 128.

¹⁴ *Okręg Mazurski w raportach Jakuba Prawina ...*, p. 131, note 20.

¹⁵ E. Sukertowa-Biedrawina, „Ze wspomnień redaktora „Komunikatów”, „Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie” 1968, no. 2, p. 324.

¹⁶ M. Karkowska, op. cit., p. 167.

¹⁷ Ibidem. On the occasion of the General Meeting of Delegates of the Polish Historical Society, which took place in Olsztyn in 1954, the participants laid flowers at the monument of Nicolaus Copernicus.

¹⁸ M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm...*, p. 218.

of the Polish Youth Union, Copernicus was called “the greatest genius of human thought of the Renaissance period”¹⁹. The appeal, addressed to the indigenous people who increasingly doubted the People’s Poland, read: ‘Here in Warmia and Masuria, one of the most famous sons of the Polish nation, Nicolaus Copernicus, lived and created his immortal work. [...] He is not only a great scientist, about whom the proverb says that he stopped the sun and moved the earth – he is also a fighter for maintaining Polishness in these lands [...]. Today, his name is praised worldwide’²⁰. Copernicus was placed among the “fighters for the Polishness of Warmia and Mazury”.

The words spoken in 1964 were significant for implementing the memory policy pursued by the People’s Republic of Poland authorities, with Copernicus in the background. They were spoken in the Copernicus Halls of the Olsztyn castle by Juliusz Malewski, who was then the chairman of the Provincial Committee of the Front of National Unity in Olsztyn. He combined the most essential elements of his historical policy in his statement. Referring to the figure of the astronomer, he said that he was an extraordinary Pole, a scientist, a humanist, and a patriot because “he once defended the castle against the Teutonic onslaught.” Malewski continued, “This historical fact, among other things, symbolises our legitimate rights to these lands and our economic position towards them.” He also added that “20 years ago, the heroic Soviet Army [then the Red Army] and the allied Polish People’s Army fought victorious battles for these lands in the east. Thanks to them, our homeland was liberated, our western lands settled by Germans returned to the Motherland, and Warmia and Mazury returned”²¹.

The most remembered were the 500th anniversary celebrations of the anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus, which covered the entire year 1973. The main celebration was divided into two stages. In February, on the occasion of the astronomer’s birth anniversary, celebrations took place in Olsztyn, while in August they met in Frombork, with an extensive participation of young people, mainly scouts, about whom it was later written in “Gazeta Olsztyńska”: “They walked and walked, danced. They sang and cheered for the guests present at the tribune” (in the year of Copernicus, the Olsztyn Voivodeship was visited by people from the highest management of the state, including the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party – Edward Gierek, the Prime Minister – Piotr Jaroszewicz and the Chairman of the Council of State – Henryk Jabłoński. It was written about the involvement of young people in Frombork: “These objects are a testimony to work done by the scouts, an exemplary act of young people, a testimony to their will to participate in the implementation of the program put forward by the 7th Plenum

¹⁹ R. Gross, R. Tomkiewicz, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 14.

of the Party Central Committee”²². This somehow confirmed that the anniversary of Copernicus had become a perfect excuse to show the achievements of those in power and express support for them. Representatives of the Troop authorities assured that “In this city, [i.e. Frombork] our scout hearts, thoughts and deeds were united into one, with the implementation of the noblest ideals of socialism”²³. The ideological dimension of the state anniversary celebrations was beyond doubt.

The authorities also wanted the celebrations to take on an international character, to show off the great astronomer and show that the People's Republic of Poland, as a mature country, is excellent at organising multi-dimensional celebrations. In one of the documents from 1967 prepared by the Council of Ministers, it was written that: “Polish representatives in UNESCO and other international organisations, in their speeches and unofficial contacts, signal the upcoming anniversary and the right of our country to concentrate the main celebrations related to it in Poland.” A number of institutions and associations were to take care of foreign promotion in the country, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Peace Committee, Polish Academy of Sciences, Society for Liaison with the Polish Diaspora Abroad “Polonia” and the Polish Committee for UNESCO (UNESCO ultimately declared 1973 the Year of Copernicus). It was also intended to establish cooperation with Italian universities, the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science, the National Academy of Sciences in Rome, and its Astronomical Observatory²⁴.

The preparations for the 500th anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus were relatively long²⁵. The process was not stopped by the political breakthrough in the country in December 1970, but on the contrary, from 1971. they have gained momentum. It began on January 4, 1965, with a study prepared in the Propaganda Department of the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in Olsztyn (together with the WK FJN Office), containing a preliminary sketch of the celebrations planned for 1973²⁶. In the following years, a working team was established – the Provincial Organizing Committee of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus and a “representative” team called the Honorary Provincial Copernicus Committee. The importance of the event was reflected in the number

²² D. Kołodziej-Głuchowska, T. Ostaszewski, *Frombork przywrócony narodowej kulturze*, „Gazeta Olsztyńska” 1973, no. 167 of July 16, p. 1, 3.

²³ The text of the scout report, published in “Gazeta Olsztyńska” (1973, no. 167 of July 16, p. 1) was read on July 15, 1973 by a delegation of “young builders of Frombork”, see – R. Gross, R. Tomkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 147–148.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 29–30.

²⁵ According to the findings of Roman Hryciuk and Antoni Sołoma, preparations began only in 1967, cf. R. Hryciuk, A. Sołoma, *Pokłosie wielkiej rocznicy*, „Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie”, 1985, nr 1–2, p. 219.

²⁶ Archiwum Państwowe w Olsztynie (State Archive in Olsztyn), KW PZPR, ref. no. 1141, vol. 2417. Resolutions and programs of celebrations. Provincial Copernicus Committee. Notes and activity information. Minutes of meetings, p. 4–7. Assumptions for the program of the 500th celebration of the anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus, Olsztyn, January 4, 1965.

of people responsible for direct supervision of the preparations and celebrations. These were the next first secretaries of the PZPR National Committee in Olsztyn (Stanisław Tomaszewski, Tadeusz Białkowski, and Józef Buziński) and the chairman of the WRN Presidium in Olsztyn (Marian Gotowiec and Sergiusz Rubczewski, who only after the country's administrative reform, from 1973 served as voivode). Among the people responsible for preparing the ceremony were: incl.: prof. Mieczysław Koter, rector of WSR in Olsztyn, Jerzy Szymański, editor-in-chief of "Głos Olsztyński", Eng. Władysław Hepke, provincial architect, and Walter Późny, then deputy chairman of the WRN Presidium²⁷.

It was assumed that several main lines of action would be implemented directly, although sometimes only indirectly, referring to the Copernican anniversary because the expenditure estimates also included investments unrelated to the celebrations. It was a coincidence that the planned "mass events of the Copernicus Year" contained a "star rally of patrols of factory self-defence units of the furniture industry in all voivodeships of the country". However, it had no particular connection with the past (including the figure of Copernicus). The event was organised in Grunwald, and its purpose – as it turned out – was to "pay tribute to the heroes of the Battle of Grunwald and the fight for the liberation of the country" and "demonstrate the efficiency of the Company Self-Defense Units"²⁸.

The Copernican anniversary, prepared on a grand scale, was to become "a symbol of Poland's growing role in the world." Although the plans for Poland's internationally important economy quickly ceased to be realistic, celebrating the 500th anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus left a lasting mark for years. Renovations of historic buildings were carried out, cities were cleaned, especially the old towns, roads and streets in cities were modernised, and the condition of local infrastructure was improved, especially sports and tourism, as well as gastronomic and commercial infrastructure, which also resulted in a temporary improvement in supply²⁹. The appearance of the towns improved – as it was later written "from Kurzętnik to Frombork", i.e. located on the Copernicus Trail³⁰. The work was carried out not only in the Warmia region, with which the figure of the astronomer was traditionally associated. Naturally, also in Toruń, where nationwide anniversary celebrations began, preparations were being made³¹. Among others, the University was expanded (an academic town

²⁷ R. Gross, R. Tomkiewicz, op. cit., p. 30–31.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 38, 47.

²⁹ R. Tomkiewicz, *Polityka historyczna na Warmii i Mazurach...*, p. 543–544.

³⁰ J. Karczewska, D. Karczewski, *Szlak Kopernikowski – zapomniany turystyczny klasyk*, „Turystyka Kulturowa” 2019, no. 2 (March–April), p. 7–20; L. Czubieli, *Konserwacja zabytków na Szlaku Mikołaja Kopernika*, in: *Olsztyński kalendarz na rok 1970*, Olsztyn [1970], p. 154–157.

³¹ W. Polak, *Obchody pięćsetlecia urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika w 1973 roku w Toruniu*, „Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie” 2013, no. 3, p. 583.

was established in Bielany), and the tenement houses in the Old Town were renovated, including the place where the astronomer was born. In turn, the social work of scouts in Frombork, as part of "Operation 1001 – Frombork", consisting mainly of clearing rubble and carrying out renovations in the city, establishing squares, and cleaning neglected alleys, to some extent, improved the image of this town³².

Although the effects were visible, it is now known that many tasks were carried out in a hurry and carelessly. Wincenty Chełchowski, from November 1970 deputy chairman of the WRN Presidium in Olsztyn, responsible for Frombork's investment preparations, wrote in his memoirs that during the first years of implementing the program to prepare for the 500th anniversary of Copernicus' birth, only approx. 40 million PLN, which – according to his estimates – was only approx. 15% of the total tasks to be completed³³. Therefore, the process had to be completed by 1973 – as he wrote – "with great effort". He recalled that it was a difficult task, because 25 years after the end of the war, rubble could still be found in Frombork.

The central and local authorities attached no less importance to promoting the 500th anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus than to the preparations themselves. Among the tasks, the "popularisation of Copernicus' life and work, with particular emphasis on the secular nature of Copernicus' thought, against the broad background of the Polish society, Polish political thought, Polish science, culture, Polish customs and customs that was shaping in that era in Warmia and Mazury" was of significant importance – as it was written in one of the documents prepared by the Presidium of the MRN in Olsztyn³⁴.

In the background, there was a kind of competition for Copernicus between the Church and the party and administrative authorities³⁵. The figure of Copernicus was eagerly used in the memory policy, despite specific limitations resulting from the fact that he was a clergyman. In 1953, during the celebration of the 480th anniversary of the astronomer's birth – as Marta Karkowska noted – "attempts were made to present Copernicus as a person loosely associated with the Church." His connections with the clergy were "of little importance"³⁶.

³² For more on this topic, see – M. Gałęziowska, *Funkcjonalność organizacyjna Operacji 1001 Frombork (1966–1973). Struktura zarządzania, uczestnictwa i działania*, "Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie" 2023, no. 3, p. 410–433; see also materials with contradictory meaning from the time of "Operation Frombork 1001", e.g., S. Połom, *Harcerze na wzgórzu*, in: *Olsztyński kalendarz na rok 1970*, Olsztyn [1970], p. 132–133; H. Leśniowski, *Pięć lat „Operacji 1001 – Frombork”*, „Komentarze Fromborskie”, 1973, Issue 5, p. 115–127.

³³ W.W. Chełchowski, *Z ogrodu wspomnień*, Olsztyn 2004, p. 204.

³⁴ R. Gross, R. Tomkiewicz, op. cit., p. 36–37.

³⁵ On the anniversary celebrations prepared by the Church, see: M. Borzyszkowski, *Kościelne obchody 500-lecia urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika w diecezji warmińskiej*, „Studia Warmińskie” 1974, no. 11, p. 491–510; J. Obląk, *Kościół katolicki w Polsce w hołdzie Mikołajowi Kopernikowi z okazji 500-nej rocznicy jego urodzin*, „Studia Warmińskie”, 1974, no. 11, p. 537–548 and the most recent work: A. Kopiczko, *Obchody kościelne 500-lecia urodzin*, in: *Mikołaj Kopernik i Warmia. O pamięci regionalnej w 500. rocznicę urodzin i 480. śmierci*, ed. A. Kopiczko, Pelplin 2023, p. 385–494.

³⁶ M. Karkowska, op. cit., p. 168 et seq.

Church celebrations were significantly different. The fact that the astronomer was a clergyman, a canon of the Warmian Chapter, and the administrator of the Warmian bishopric was not marginalised (naturally, without diminishing his scientific achievements). There was no mention of the achievements of the People's Republic of Poland.

Trying to rally society around the ruling party, three days before the Olsztyn celebrations, the local press wrote on the front page, among other things, that Copernicus, creating his most important work in Frombork, "found a climate favourable to rational thought of enlightened people who helped him get through to the truth" through the thicket of traditional ideas³⁷. Paradoxically, the government's attempts to win over society were aided by the astronomer's work being on the index of prohibited books³⁸. This made it possible to emphasise even more clearly the "progressive character of the socialist state".

Activities popularising knowledge about Nicolaus Copernicus also included publications (including publications prepared by the Olsztyn Publishing House of the Socio-Cultural Association "Pojezierze"), scientific conferences and lectures with the participation of Copernican researchers. Particularly remembered was the extensive work entitled *Copernicus in Warmia. Life and public activity. Scientific activity, environment, calendar*, edited by Janusz Jasiński, Bohdan Koziello-Poklewski and Jerzy Sikorski, as well as a book by the last of the mentioned – Jerzy Sikorski – titled *The Private Life of Nicolaus Copernicus*. Literary and journalistic activities also turned out to be interesting. Open-air painting workshops related to Copernicus themes were organised. A competition was announced for the creation of a monument to Nicolaus Copernicus in Frombork, and the astronomer's promotion took place under the patronage of SSK "Pojezierze" over the PLL "LOT" "Mikołaj Kopernik" aircraft. Moreover, the feature film "Copernicus" and the Olsztyn "Planetarium", probably most associated with celebrating the 500th anniversary, remain a permanent effect of the Copernicus Year.

The institutions and organisations involved in popularisation and promotional activities included the Office of Artistic Exhibitions, the Masurian Museum, and the Scientific Research Center. Wojciech Kętrzyński, the State Symphony Orchestra, the Provincial State Archives, the "Filmos" Headquarters, the State Enterprise of Artistic Events "Estrada", the Polish Philatelic Association (two series of stamps related to the anniversary were issued), the Stefan Jaracz Theatre, the Society of Common Knowledge, the Provincial Cultural Centre, the Socialist Youth Union,

³⁷ (jer), *Mieszkańcy ziemi braniewskiej złożyli hołd Wielkiemu Uczonemu*, „Gazeta Olsztyńska” 1973, no. 40 from 16th of February, p. 1.

³⁸ M. Zaremba, „Dla wzmocnienia socjalistycznego rozwoju Polski”. *Wielki spektakl władzy w roku kopernikańskim* 1973, in: *Kopernik nieznanym. Biografie (1473–1543)*, „Polityka. Pomocnik Historyczny” 2013, no. 3, p. 85.

the Polish Scouting Association and the Polish Writers' Association. Naturally, employees of Olsztyn libraries were also involved in the preparatory work³⁹.

The celebration of all historical anniversaries in the post-war forty years became an opportunity to show Poland's achievements, raising the country from ruins, industrialisation (naturally associated mainly with heavy industry), development of the annexed lands, popularisation of social welfare and education, and increasing the standard of living of citizens. Success in the international arena was also boasted. Both the Copernicus celebrations in 1973 and the earlier celebration of the anniversary of Grunwald⁴⁰ (in 1960) and the Millennium of the Polish State/Millennium organised six years later⁴¹ (1966) were some of the most important elements of the historical policy pursued after the war⁴².

While carefully cultivating the memory of Copernicus, his Polishness, which naturally fits into the anti-German narrative, was recalled. This was justified by the fact that he was born in Toruń, Poland, and then lived for many years in Warmia, Poland. Marta Karkowska, recalling the researchers' findings, also pointed out that in the 1950s, it was written that Nicolaus Copernicus "undoubtedly felt Polish" and that he "acted in the Polish spirit"⁴³. He was even presented as a person seeking "the annexation of Warmia (and other northern districts) to Poland"⁴⁴. This fact was also transformed into propaganda for Poland's full right to regain (and not take back or take away) the area plundered by the Germans.

Especially in 1973, Copernicus became part of a propaganda show praising the Polish People's Republic period, especially the ruling team at that time. Historian Marcin Zaremba noted that with the change of party leader from the beginning of the 1970s, jubilee celebrations in the country ceased to be "celebrated against someone" and took on an "educational purpose"⁴⁵. The Poland of Gierek's times was to be perceived as a country of progress, science and youth, and the anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus, a figure characteristic of the progress of the Renaissance, was to match and emphasise the image of Poland as a modern country

³⁹ R. Gross, R. Tomkiewicz, op. cit., p. 37, 55, 68.

⁴⁰ R. Tomkiewicz, *Rocznice bitwy pod Grunwaldem w Polsce Ludowej*, Olsztyn 2011.

⁴¹ R. Tomkiewicz, *Obchody 1000-lecia chrztu Polski na Warmii i Mazurach*, „Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie”, 2016, no. 3, p. 541–562.

⁴² Greater importance was attached only to consolidating the belief in society about the key role of the Soviet Union in granting Poland a strip of land in the west and north and this country's involvement in the reconstruction of Poland after 1945. R. Tomkiewicz, *Polityka historyczna na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych w latach 1945–1989. Wprowadzenie*, in: *Region czy regiony?...*, p. 467–477.

⁴³ M. Karkowska, op. cit., p. 288–289.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 172 et. seq.

⁴⁵ M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm...*, p. 364.

of young people. It was not without reason that scouts present in Frombork were to be one of the elements of these activities.

The claim about the modern Poland of the 1970s was supposed to have solid foundations, and it was Copernicus who became the figure connecting the old world of science with the present of the modern "Gierek era". Recalling this situation, the historian Marcin Zaremba, quoted earlier, wrote that by adequately manipulating the message, "using historical myth, it was straightforward to demonstrate that the path followed by Copernicus was followed by Gierek's team almost simultaneously and that they were guided by these the same ideals and the same goals as the astronomer once had⁴⁶. Copernicus, therefore, became a role model identified with "modern Poland of the 1970s". Confirmation of this could be found, for example, in the statement of Andrzej Werblan, secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, quoted by historian Andrzej Friszke, who, speaking about the astronomer's merits, pointed out that the ideas guiding Copernicus perfectly fit Poland in the 1970s. He stated that in the figure of Copernicus, "scientific and technical progress, economic dynamics, high humanistic values and civic attitude came together"⁴⁷. As a result, Canon Copernicus became a leading historical figure, even a "prime national hero"⁴⁸ at least around 1973. Historian Robert Traba aptly noted that "Nicholas Copernicus, coming from a German family and knowing almost no Polish language, could have been a patriot of the Republic of Poland," joining the pantheon of great Poles⁴⁹. It is significant that among the dozen objects taken into space by the first Polish cosmonaut, there was also the "first book" of Copernicus' work "On the Revolutions of Heavenly Bodies"⁵⁰.

Presenting the figure of Nicolaus Copernicus in the post-war 40 years was often accompanied by mental shortcuts. While praising his services to world science, his Polishness and the fact that he could oppose the Teutonic Knights, who were openly identified with Germans, were emphasised. Therefore, he was mentioned in the same row as the conquerors of the Teutonic Knights from Grunwald, but also with the Red Army and the Polish Army, which, as a united Slavic world, defeated the Third Reich. In addition, by marching on Berlin, the united troops contributed to taking over (partly) the former Polish lands, i.e. the Recovered Territories. Naturally, the conclusion was supposed to be obvious: "centuries ago, Copernicus and the Red Army during World War II were, in fact, fighting with the Germans for the same goals, including: incl. restoring to Poland areas with Piast origins.

⁴⁶ M. Zaremba, „Dla wzmocnienia socjalistycznego rozwoju...”, p. 85.

⁴⁷ A. Friszke, *Polska Giereka*, Warszawa 1995, p. 39.

⁴⁸ M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm...*, p. 364.

⁴⁹ R. Traba, op. cit., p. 73.

⁵⁰ M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm...*, p. 381.

Despite the use of the figure of Nicolaus Copernicus in the policy of memory in the post-war period, the astronomer invariably enjoyed great sympathy among the public. The political, economic and social changes of 1989 had no significance here. Poles had a positive attitude towards him and were simply proud of the astronomer⁵¹, and currently – in the 2014 publication. It was written that “The figure of Nicolaus Copernicus – next to the city’s patron saint, St. Jakub – is one of the intensively and effectively promoted “signs” of the city’s identity in contemporary Olsztyn⁵². Its connection with Olsztyn and Warmia became one of the pillars identifying the Recovered Territories with Poland, and recalling the findings of Prof. Andrzej Sakson, it should be added that in the past, historical anniversaries related to this area, also referring to Nicolaus Copernicus, played an essential role in creating a new Polish identity of these lands⁵³. The issue of Copernicus’s national origin, which in the past had been one of the key arguments for the Polishness of Warmia, no longer aroused emotions. In the event organised in the 2003 competition celebrating the 650th anniversary of the city, Nicolaus Copernicus was recognised as the most important historical figure associated with Olsztyn.

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⁵¹ See also findings on the perception of Nicolaus Copernicus by Polish youth: I. Lewandowska, *Historyczna świadomość regionalna. Z badań nad młodzieżą licealną Warmii i Mazur*, Olsztyn 2003, p. 98 et seq. and the image of Copernicus in contemporary textbooks: *Ziemie pruskie w podręcznikach Polski, Niemiec, Litwy i Rosji. Porównawcza analiza regionalnych konstrukcji tożsamości w XX–XXI wieku*, ed. I. Lewandowska, S. Zloch, Olsztyn 2013, p. 217–239.

⁵² R. Sierocki, R. Kleśta-Nawrocki, J. Kowalewski, op. cit., p. 197, also p. 342 et seq.; About Copernicus’s place in regional memory, see *Mikołaj Kopernik i Warmia. O pamięci regionalnej w 550. rocznicę urodzin i 480. śmierci* ed. A. Kopiczko, Pelplin 2023.

⁵³ A. Sakson, *Spółczesność i kultura na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych w latach 1945–1989. Wprowadzenie*, in: *Region czy regiony?*, p. 573.

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