

A note on biography

Ludwik Nikodem Widerszal was born on 24 April 1909 in Warsaw, in an educated Jewish family, as the son of Adam Stanisław, a bank employee, and Regina Eugenia Krakowska. Even as a child, he showed an inclination for history and a great gift for languages. He mastered several of them already in secondary school. Between 1919 and 1921, he attended the Adam Mickiewicz Secondary School, which he successfully completed in 1925, at the age of 16, owing to his unique talents. As soon as he passed the school leaving exams, he was admitted to the University of Warsaw as a History student, where he enjoyed an excellent reputation. Apart from attending lectures, he worked at the Institute of History as a volunteer research assistant. After 1932, he was offered an official post of research assistant. Widerszal initially attended professor T. Manteuffel's seminar, where he took an interest in the general history of the Middle Ages. After he moved to professor M. Handelsman's seminar, he changed his scientific plans and pursued his scientific career in 19th-century history. In 1930, having successfully submitted his master's thesis entitled *Napoleonizm we Francji i Polsce w latach 1840-1848* [The Napoleonic times in France and in Poland between 1840 and 1848], he was awarded a master's degree, and in 1932 a doctoral degree, based on his dissertation *Sprawy kaukaskie w polityce europejskiej w latach 1831-1834* [Caucasian issues in the European politics between 1831 and 1834].

From 1935 to 1939, he was employed at the Military Archives, and just before the outbreak of the Second World War he took up employment at the Archive of New Files (AAN) in Warsaw. In 1937, he published the book *Bułgarski ruch narodowy 1856-1872* [The Bulgarian national movement 1856–1872], which helped him successfully complete his post-doctoral (habilitation) dissertation in the same year. Immediately after completion, Widerszal left the Military Archives and was employed at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw.

In 1937, Widerszal joined the Democratic Club in Warsaw and a year later was a co-founder of the Alliance of Democrats [SD]. The party was strongly committed to fighting the

rising tide of nationalism and chauvinism in Poland. Two years later Marcei Handelsman involved Widerszal in conspiratorial activity (the underground resistance movement) and made him responsible for the Home Army Office of Information and Propaganda. Widerszal was in charge of the office and political affairs, and subsequently, due to his excellent command of English, also of international relations.

During the Nazi occupation, in spite of the risk that he faced, Widerszal was actively involved in the resistance. He continued his research, which he regarded as leisure that helped him distance himself from reality. All this time, he lived in the Mokotów district with his wife. This is where he taught his students. The Widerszals also taught tutorials to make ends meet in this difficult period. At professor T. Manteuffel's request, from 1942 Widerszal taught Modern History, held a seminar in Auxiliary Sciences, a seminar in Modern History and lectured on the History of the 19-th century Europe at the clandestine University of Warsaw. He also liaised with underground resistance publishing houses, which were already developing publishing plans for the postwar period. He attended meetings of the Society of the Friends of History. It is also known that he was working on the Polish–English relations, but the book that he wrote on the topic has not survived the war.

Ludwik Widerszal was murdered on 13 June 1944. The family was terrorized, the intruders confirmed the identity of Widerszal, and then he was taken to the bathroom and shot. He only managed to ask his executioners not to hurt his wife, who was heavily pregnant, and to say a brief prayer. Jerzy Makowiecki and his wife were murdered on the same day. Owing to professor T. Manteuffel's efforts, Widerszal was buried in the Powązki Cemetery. The background of the murder has not been fully explained. It is assumed that Widerszal fell victim to internal political conflicts in the Polish underground resistance.

About the book

The author discusses the diplomatic activity of the European states in the conflict which occurred in the western part of the Caucasus called Cherkessia. Starting with the genesis of the conflict between Russia and the highlander tribes of the Caucasus, he outlines the role of Great Britain, France, Russia, Turkey, and Poland in the rift. Russia's expansion and the annexation of Georgia entailed the need to maintain contacts with Russia and its new acquisition. Hence, the Russians made an attempt to pacify the Caucasus tribes. Russia's efforts ended in partial success, which was a cause of concern for Great Britain and led to liaising with Hotel Lambert immigrants. The author expands on the Polish–English relations and a number of efforts aimed at preventing Russia from the accomplishment of its goals. He discusses in detail the declarations made by England, Poland, and Turkey as regards the peoples of the Caucasus, which were reflected in the politics of the Caucasian highlanders.

Further on, he focuses on the activity of Hotel Lambert and the cooperation of this movement with individual states. Hotel Lambert's aim was to regain Poland's independence in the aftermath of war between the European powers. As a result of this cooperation, Hotel Lambert expected a war that could weaken Russia; hence, the Polish state might be rebuilt within the pre-partition borders. This is why a search was launched for allies among the European states and the peoples of the Caucasus to put the plan in practice. A network of diplomatic agents was organized; they liaised with the English and French diplomacies, with a focus on fighting the Russian influence. The main purpose of the efforts was to organize the Polish army and establish contact with the peoples of the Caucasus and the Kozaks to enable an invasion of Russia. The area of diplomatic activity comprised Istanbul, the Balkan States dependent on Turkey, Afghanistan, and Persia. The author also refers to the Crimean War (1853–1856) and its international importance. The Crimean War, which ended in Russia's defeat, weakened Russia's role in the Middle East and deprived Russia of its political influence.

Impact on historiography

Sprawy kaukaskie w polityce europejskiej 1831-1864 [Caucasian issues in European politics between 1831 and 1834] is Ludwik Widerszal's doctoral dissertation, written in Marcelli Handelsman's seminar at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw, and successfully submitted in 1933. Widerszal was Handelsman's pupil and his work fitted perfectly into Handelsman's historical school, very much opposed to the separation of general history from the history of Poland. The central theme of the dissertation was the Western Caucasus and Hotel Lambert's endeavours to restore Poland's international significance. Before the publication of the book, the topic had been raised only incidentally, in literature dedicated to the history of the European diplomacy or to the studies on the 19th-century Caucasus. Ludwik Widerszal was the first scientist to carry out extensive research at that time, not only in Polish, but also in British and French libraries and archives. As a result, he was able to provide abundant source material. As regards Polish research into the 19th-century Caucasus, new scholarly publications are missing, and there have been no updates and no literature to complement the issues contemplated by Widerszal. In general, there is no one to resume this topic. Hence, as more recent papers have not been published, researchers continue to refer to this publication. Widerszal's dissertation thus remains a novel and pioneering work in many respects.