

The poor of the city of Poznań in the Card Indexes of the Towarzystwo Dobroczynności Dam Polskich 1845 – 1853

“Life, misfortune, isolation, abandonment, poverty, are the fields of battle which have their heroes; obscure heroes, who are, sometimes, grander than the heroes who win renown¹” wrote Victor Hugo in “Les Misérables”. 19th-century artists often chose poor persons as characters for their works – they appeared not only in books for example, by Bolesław Prus, Stefan Żeromski and Maria Konopnicka), but also in paintings of Aleksander Gierymski, Józef Szermentowski and Józef Chełmoński.

The poor are also the main character of this project, the scientific objective of which is to analyse the group of beneficiaries of the Towarzystwo Dobroczynności Dam Polskich (Charity Organisation Society of Polish Ladies, short: Towarzystwo) in Poznań using the Card Indexes it maintained. The project will result in the preparation and creation of a freely accessible database of persons requesting aid of the said institution in the 19th century. Currently, the Card Indexes that I want to use as the subject of my research belong the collection of Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences: the twenty-two files of *Kartoteka (alfabetyczna) podopiecznych Tow. Dobroczynności Dam Polskich w Poznaniu z notatkami Celestyny Działyńskiej o zapomogach* (ref. BK 07508/1-22) and *Kartoteka podopiecznych Tow. Dobroczynności Dam Polskich w Poznaniu według obwodów* (ref. BK 07507). In total, both card indexes contain nearly 1500 cards with characteristics of the people requesting aid from the Towarzystwo. A single card from the card index contains information on the name and surname of a person requesting aid, their place of residence (unless they were not homeless) and a short description of their life and living conditions. Information on the aid provided is also recorded.

The questions posed in this project concern not only the characteristics of beneficiaries, but also the form of the aid provided and external factors, such as military conflicts (the Greater Poland uprising of 1848) or floods that plagued the city during that time and affected the poor living in Poznań.

The project will be divided into the following stages: collection of information about the source and its creator, source criticism and transcription, quantitative and qualitative analyses as well as presentation of research results in the form of three articles and an Internet database of the beneficiaries. During particular stages of work not only the traditional source analysis will be used, but also a computer data analysis that will make it possible to see the links between, for example, someone's occupation and the form of aid they received.

Currently, in Poznań there is a lack of works focusing on charitable activities and their beneficiaries in the 19th century. The research conducted as part of the project may be a contribution to more extensive research on 19th-century society, but this time taking into account all social classes. The database created as a result of the project will be put on an Internet platform and will serve as a research tool not only for historians, but also sociologists and genealogists.

¹ Cytat za: V. Hugo, *Les Misérables*, vol. 3, translated by Isabel F. Hapgood, dostęp: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/135/135-h/135-h.htm#link2H_4_0002 [31.05.2019]