

Silesia, a region located in the upper and middle parts of the Odra River, has seen frequent changes in its national affiliations throughout history - it belonged to the Piast state, the Crown of Bohemian Kingdom, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, and Germany. For this reason, three different historiographical traditions have developed around the history of Silesia, which can be simplistically described as Czech, Polish, and German traditions.

Each of these traditions centered around either a nationalist paradigm, which presumed individual nations as the primary actors in Silesian history, or a statist paradigm, which prioritized the state as the chief agent of historical events. In the 20th century, these national historiographical traditions often clashed with each other. Their divergence became particularly pronounced when historians found themselves in the role of expert advisors in border disputes arising from successive wars. Moreover, this gave rise to escalating historiographical debates.

In the early 1950s, however, historians from Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic began to break with nationalist and statist paradigms in search of a new approach to the study of Silesian history. Polish and Czech historians leaned toward Marxist interpretations, while their German colleagues experimented with social history. The historiographical period preceding this change has been rather contemptuously characterized as a barren era of the "fencing of nationalisms."

What caused this transformation? The most straightforward explanation is the governmental intervention in the academic affairs of these countries. The "fencing of nationalisms" began in the late 1910s with the appearance of new countries on the map of Europe. In turn, it ended when Polish and Czech historians were explicitly directed by the state toward a Marxist interpretation of history. Although no compulsory methodology was imposed in West Germany, the state influenced historians by funding research. Consequently, research on Silesian history adjusted to fit within the broader context of German history, shifting the focus away from Silesia alone.

Nevertheless, it is likely that the influence of power was not the only driving force behind the paradigm shift and the abandonment of the "fencing of nationalisms." Historians, eager to "prevail" in the ongoing debate since World War I, may have actively sought to transcend the barriers of nationalist and statist discourses on Silesia. The new methodology could potentially give them an edge in the aforementioned debates. Moreover, it's noteworthy that among Polish and Czech historians, the generational shift coincided precisely with the initiation of the rejection of the "fencing of nationalisms", which is earlier than one would typically expect based solely on chronological grounds. The younger generation of historians (Maleczyński in Poland, Macůrek in Czechoslovakia, and their disciples) used the criticism of "nationalist fencing" to secure a higher position in the academic hierarchy. In contrast, in Germany this generational exchange did not occur as predicted. The older generation of historians (including Aubin and his colleagues) maintained their hierarchical position, adopting a critical stance toward earlier methods in Silesian historiography.

How can we test this hypothesis? Through a particular holistic historiographical study of the period of the "fencing of nationalisms," especially its final phase. The first step will involve an analysis of Silesian historical bibliographies, which will elucidate the scope of specific Silesian topics discussed at the time and discern the changes that followed the rejection of "fencing". Historians who frequently dealt with Silesian topics (both supporters and critics of "fencing") will be subjected to prosopographical analysis to draw a collective portrait of historians participating in "fencing." Traditional historiographical analysis will then be applied to selected "typical" texts by "typical" historians. This will facilitate an understanding of whether a radically new approach to Silesian history was indeed adopted, the extent to which the new texts sought to criticize the previous tradition, and how significantly state policies and generational dynamics have altered the writing of Silesian history.