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## Academic emancipation of women. Scholarly careers of Polish female historians (nineteenth and twentieth century) – case study

### Abstract

This article is an attempt to bridge the gap existing in the current scientific reflection. Unlike in the United States and Western Europe, in Poland and other countries of the region no comprehensive reflection on the historical condition of women in science, their contribution to the development of individual disciplines, or individual mechanisms that affect the course of women's careers etc. has been undertaken.

The author presents the struggles of Polish women fighting for access to higher education, outlines the obstacles that had had to be overcome before the university doors were finally opened to female-scholars (which only happened at the end of the nineteenth century). Next, the first scientific achievements of female humanists were presented in the field of history. The experience of Polish female historians could be generalized. Their careers reflected the experiences of other women in science from Central and Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

The text consists of three parts; an introductory part shows women's struggle for higher education. A second is dedicated to women – pioneers of scientific autonomy in the field of Polish history. The author presents the problem in chronological order including two epochs: the interwar period and the period of so-called real socialism. The third part contains conclusions and refers to the contemporary situation in Polish science.

**Key words:** history of science, history of historiography, history of women, gender in science

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## Introduction

The history of female students and scholars in the Polish lands is relatively short. However, it is not drastically different from other parts of Europe. Swiss women were the first to be admitted to university education, and the University of Zurich began to enroll female students as early as 1864. In the 1870s, women studied at universities in Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark. The University of London opened its doors to them in 1879. Universities in Berlin and Göttingen did not start accepting women until 1895. The oldest Polish higher education centre; Jagiellonian University did not admit female students until five hundred years after it had been established. In the last year (2019) one hundred and twenty two years will have passed since the matriculation of the first students at the Faculties of Philosophy of the re-Polonized universities in Cracow and Lviv (1897). Initially, only two faculties allowed female students to attend classes: Philosophy and Medicine (in the latter, the number of female-students was limited to 10% of the total number of students). Women's full participation in university education did not take place until after the end of the First World War.

In the lands of the former Polish Republic (First Republic of Poland), women's access to higher education had been preceded by long-term efforts undertaken on many levels (Hulewicz 1936). Of course, there were cases of male support for women's struggle, however, these were quite exceptional situations (Duda 2017). Paradoxically, women found unexpected "support" in their struggle for university education in changes that occurred in the economic and political spheres. After the defeat of the January Uprising (in the mid-1860s), which brought the economic collapse of part of the landed gentry, repressions by the occupying authorities, impoverishment of the countryside and the birth of the intelligentsia, more and more women on Polish lands were forced to look for sources of livelihood. The increase in employment of middle-class women became inevitable, however only such activities were taken into account that did not result in falling down the social ladder [*deklamacja*] (nevertheless, even taking up a position alone reduced the social status of women). Higher education was supposed to supplement the knowledge and, as a consequence, give the authority to perform certain desired professions (teachers, pharmacists, doctors, postal clerks).

The form that preceded the regular education of Polish women was university-level courses developed specifically for them. In 1868, shortly after the district of Galicia gained autonomy, Adrian Baraniecki launched Higher Courses for Women (*Wyższe Kursy dla Kobiet*), attend-

ed by 4,260 women (Kras 1972: 51). A similar institution – Academic Courses for Women (*Akademickie Kursy dla Kobiet*) – was established in 1897 by professors from the University of Lviv. Over two years, 3,200 women received an education there (Suchmiel 2004: 117). In 1886–1905 the secret Flying University (*Uniwersytet Latający*) operated in Warsaw, transformed in 1906 into a Society of Science Courses (*Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych*). This institution played an extraordinary role in Poland's scientific and socio-political life. The students of the Courses included, for example Maria Skłodowska-Curie and Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the university level of education, these courses provide no diploma, nor qualifications for the desired professions a total of 7,500 women it graduated. Earlier, in 1878, Higher Education Courses for Women were launched in Russia, under the patronage of Mikhail Bestużev-Rumin. In the following years, similar higher courses were created for women at the universities of Moscow, Kyiv, Odessa, Kharkiv and Tomsk.

While Polish universities were unavailable for women, the most determined of them decided to go abroad and enroll at Swiss or French universities that were open to them. Universities in Zurich and Geneva were the most popular, and women chose medicine, science and social sciences. They were also eager to study in Paris, Belgium and England (Mazurczak 1995: 187–188). However, few students could afford to study abroad. The scholarship system was underdeveloped. In addition, those who received diplomas (doctors) had to validate them, sitting their exams again. Women who could not afford to study in Western Europe became involved in the fight for the right to be admitted to re-Polonized Galician universities.

Once female residents of Polish lands gained the opportunity to study at Galician universities, they eagerly took advantage of this right. In the academic year 1897/8, 122 women studied at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University and this number grew steadily, reaching 393 by the outbreak of the First World War (Perkowska 1994: 36–37). In 1897, initially only one woman enrolled at the Jan Kazimierz

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<sup>2</sup> The Flying University was a secret educational organization formed in 1882/85 by a group of Warsaw intellectuals under the leadership of Jadwiga and Jan W. Dawid. At the Flying University, only women were educated at first, but over time the high level of lectures also attracted men. The university was organized in the form of self-education circles led by the then intellectual elites of Warsaw. Lectures were held in private apartments with all precautions, hence the nickname flying. The Flying University in 1905/06 was transformed into an openly functioning Association of Scientific Courses converted in the interwar period into Free Polish University

University in Lviv, but already twenty years later 515 women were studying at the Faculty of Philosophy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, both those educated entirely on Polish soil as well as graduates of foreign universities began to receive doctoral degrees in Galicia.

The subsequent stage of efforts to achieve equal academic rights was women's desire to obtain university positions, initially the so-called 'auxiliary scientific forces.' The first female assistant professors appeared at the Jagiellonian University in 1908, followed by Lviv five years later. However, the right to teach (*veniam legendi*) and scholarly independence could only be obtained once the candidate completed the *habilitacja* process (postdoctoral dissertation), for which women had to wait until the early 1920's.

The year 1918 marked a breakthrough for Central and Eastern Europe, which brought independence to many countries. In Poland, women, in addition to electoral rights, also gained access to almost all areas of study. The number of universities increased, and, in addition to Cracow and Lviv, student could enroll in Warsaw, Poznań, Vilnius and Lublin (Wittlinowa 1937). In independent Poland, university studies clearly become democratic. Educational opportunities were more determined by skills, intellectual hunger and persistence, rather than gender, occupation, social background or economic status. In the interwar era, compared to the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, women more often graduated from secondary and higher education. But there was a long way to go from graduating to a career in science. Despite the acceptance (tolerating) of female doctoral candidates (in the 1920s the ratio of women who completed their doctoral dissertations in Poland amounted to 21.9%, in the 1930s – to 31.6% of all doctorates), female professors continued to provoke objections in the patriarchal scientific community. By 1939, at the Jagiellonian University, only 15 women had completed their postdoctoral dissertations. At the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv, there were four women who completed the *habilitacja* procedure – five in Poznan and two in Vilnius. As for higher academic positions (docent, professor and ordinary professor), women did not hold them in Poland until the mid-1930s. One year before the outbreak of the Second World War, 68 women lectured at all Polish universities, nine were full professors, one Associate Professor and 35 *docents* (holders of a postdoctoral degree) (Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa 1963: 281–282).

To sum up: on Polish lands women gained the right to study at the end of the nineteenth century. To make it possible, they had been fighting in many fields. The first doctorates of Polish women were obtained at the turn of the twentieth century. The first postdoctoral degrees

were awarded after the end of the First World War. In the interwar period, women rarely held independent positions in science. The much smaller number of independent female scientists in relation to men was caused by, among other factors, the fact that they started their academic careers later, and thus had a less developed network of contacts' another contributing factor was the conservative atmosphere of Polish universities. A spectacular example of traditionalism of the scientific community was the rejection by the Warsaw University of the candidacy of the extremely competent and well-educated Józefa Joteyko as head of the local Department of Psychology. Józefa Joteyko (1868–1928) studied in Geneva, where she obtained her bachelor's degree in Physical and Natural Sciences. She then began her medical studies in Brussels and Paris, which culminated in her doctoral thesis in 1896. She worked at the Solvaya Institute, Psychological Laboratory at the University of Brussels, the head of which she was appointed in 1903. She was also a professor of experimental psychology at the University of Brussels, the first Polish woman at Collège de France (1916–8), and a lecturer at Sorbonne (Lipkowski 1968). However, when she returned to independent Poland, it turned out that all of this was insufficient to lead the department at the Warsaw University.

## 1. Scientific Careers of Polish Female Historians until 1939

Turning to the field of historical studies in Poland, it is worth noting that initially courses in that area were attended and completed mainly by female teachers wishing to broaden the scope of their knowledge and professional competence (Hulewicz 1939: 208–210). Such an incentive was also what motivated the majority of female historians later. In the interwar period more and more women were graduating from historical studies but only six female historians managed to achieve the status of an independent scholar in the interwar Poland. Before I introduce them, I would like to address some of the difficulties they had to overcome.

For formal reasons, the most difficult option was to take up studies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at Galician universities by residents of the former Kingdom of Poland. The basic requirement, namely a secondary school graduation exam (*matura*) from a state-run middle school (*gimnazjum*) or equivalent, was quite a challenge for them (due to the lack such classical schools for girls). Zofia Kozłowska-Budkowa ((1893–1986), later an outstanding medievalist, the first historian who obtained her postdoctoral degree at the Jagiellonian University, graduated from a private

middle school in Kielce in 1911, but she did not have the right to study at the Jagiellonian University. Therefore, she decided to take her *matura* exam again, this time at a private middle school in Riga, which was qualified as a government school. In 1912, however, it turned out that she was only able to obtain the status of a guest student (three categories of female 'students' attended Galician universities: *hospitantki* (guest students), as well as extraordinary and regular attendees). Thus, she decided to take the *matura* exam once again, this time at the classical *gimnazjum* in Zakopane (in 1915), which finally opened the door of the university in Kraków for her (Perkowska 2008: 222–228).

Natalia Gąsiorowska-Grabowska (1881–1964), later historian of economic history, for several years, decided to study in Western Europe (for which she paid with money she earned working as a teacher). She studied in Heidelberg (1903–1904), where she listened to lectures by Wilhelm Windelband, Karol Hampe and Georg Jellinek. A year later, she moved to Paris (1904–5), where she attended lectures by François V. A. Aulard, André Gide and Charles Seignobos. In 1905, she returned to Warsaw and then, in 1906–9, she continued her studies in Lviv (Rutkowski 2006; 336–351). Natalia Gąsiorowska was one of the first Polish women to graduate from historical studies, one of six female postdoctoral graduates and the first full professor in history.

Another pioneer of scientific independence among female historians, Hanna Pohoska (1895–1953), an educational and pedagogical historian, enrolled at the Jagiellonian University in 1913. After two semesters, the outbreak of the First World War forced her to quit the university (Żmichowska 1995: 25–53). In 1916, she resumed her studies at the University of Warsaw and, after two semesters, she had to put her education on hold again (she worked for the Military Committee of the Temporary Council of State). Then, for financial reasons, she returned to teaching. In 1921, she was finally able to return to the University of Warsaw, where she completed her doctorate two years later.

Wanda Moszczeńska (1896–1974), medievalist, methodologist and historiography historian, graduated from Włodkiewicz's private School of Commerce for Girls in Kiev before the October Revolution, and, a year later, she passed the *matura* exam as an extern at a men's classical school. She began studying history in Moscow in 1916, and from November 1918 she continued her education at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Warsaw. She was one of the first women who received doctorate there (1923) and then her postdoctoral degree.

At the University of Lviv, doctoral graduates included such scholars as Helena Polackówna (1881–1942) heraldy expert, archivist, and Łucja

Charewiczowa (1897–1943), later historian of culture and economic and social history, researcher of women's history (1924).

As has been demonstrated, it was not easy for Polish female historians as well as representatives of other fields of science to obtain university education in the era of partitions. Women had to overcome many obstacles, show great determination, diligence and resourcefulness. Many of them studied at several different institutions, had their education interrupted by warfare, involvement in pro-independence organizations (Zofia Kozłowska-Budkowa, Hanna Pohoska), health or lack of funds. After Poland regained independence, some of these problems became obsolete, more and more women completed their historical studies and prepared doctoral dissertations. However, while more female-historians dreamed of an academic career, only a select few managed to achieve habilitation.

At this point it is worth mentioning the problems that Helena Polackówna encountered at her own university with obtaining her postdoctoral degree. Despite her required and highly evaluated academic achievements, in 1926 she applied unsuccessfully to have the *habilitacja* procedure initiated at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv. The Faculty Council was very slow to respond to her request, therefore, after several unsuccessful interventions, she decided to transfer to Poznan, where in 1929 she became a docent of auxiliary sciences of history, and a year later she began to teach classes in heraldry and genealogy. The path was thus opened and eight years later, Helena Polackówna's colleague from Lviv, Łucja Charewiczowa, found it easier to obtain her postdoctoral degree.

Only two historians succeeded in obtaining scientific independence at the oldest Polish universities (in Cracow and Lviv) during the interwar period, namely Zofia Kozłowska-Budkowa (Jagiellonian University) and Łucja Charewiczowa (Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv). Compared to Galicia, more women obtained postdoctoral degrees at newly created (or re-established) universities in independent Poland. Less conservatism and thus the lack of obstacles women had to face there resulted from shortages of staff and the need to fill vacancies. Helena Polackówna paved the way for female historians at the University of Poznań. Several years later, the following scholars were awarded *veniam legendi* at the University of Warsaw: Natalia Gąsiorowska-Grabowska (1933), Wanda Moszczeńska (1934) and Hanna Pohoska (1934).

Female historians who held postdoctoral degrees in the interwar period did not always succeed in obtaining a full-time professorship. Many of them had to balance intensive research work with searching for other

sources of livelihood. And so, until 1934, Zofia Kozłowska-Budkowa was employed at the university only periodically. In the 1920s and 1930s, Wanda Moszczeńska mainly supported herself with teaching (she taught classes in middle, private and Jewish schools). Starting in 1927, she only taught contracted classes at the University of Warsaw and, after obtaining her postdoctoral degree, she gave lectures for which she did not receive any remuneration (docent's were not employed but were obliged to give free lectures). Łucja Charewiczowa, employed at the Jan Kazimierz University while still a student, was in a slightly better situation – in 1921 she was offered the position of a junior assistant, and after defending her doctoral dissertation in 1924 she was promoted to a senior post. Łucja Charewiczowa worked at the Jan Kazimierz University until 1930, then she became associated with the Museum of the History of the City of Lviv. From 1917 to 1939, Helena Polaczkówna worked at the Central State Historical Archive in Lviv (Bernardine Archives). After obtaining her postdoctoral degree she balanced that work with commuting to teach classes in Poznan. Natalia Gąsiorowska-Grabowska was a teacher in many Warsaw schools. After completing her postdoctoral studies she became a private lecturer at the University of Warsaw. She also taught at the Free Polish University (*Wolna Wszechnica Polska*) and the People's University of Warsaw. Hanna Pohoska, an active teacher, was also lucky and in 1926 became a lecturer at the University of Warsaw, where she gave lectures and classes on the history of education, pedagogical doctrines and history didactics at the Department of Education History until 1939 (Brzeziński, Fudalej 2012: 94–95).

During the interwar period in Poland, the apex of a university career of women was the extremely rarely-awarded postdoctoral degree. The real culmination of their achievements, however, was full professorship (the title of *profesor zwyczajny*), which no female historian managed to achieve prior to 1939.

It is worth to answer a question – what was the decisive factor in the success and scientific advancement of the aforementioned handful of female scholars? In addition to intellectual predispositions, determination and hard work, what was particularly important was the support of the loved ones, who came to their aid or did not prevent women from pursuing their dreams. Also important was the support of academic masters and supervisors. For instance, Łucja Charewiczowa and Hanna Pohoska received special support from their masters. The first to offer help was Jan Ptaśnik (historian of culture and cities of Poland's postpartition days, and from 1920 *profesor zwyczajny* associated with the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv, head of the Department of Medieval Uni-

versal History), the second was Marcel Handelsman (medievalist, historian of modern and recent history). The promotion, and in particular the employment at universities, was also determined by the degree of openness of the scientific community. The economic factor was also crucial; in the 1930s, due to the economic crisis, the budget for higher education was reduced, which translated into fewer university positions. The family situation also affected the academic career. It was undoubtedly easier to devote oneself to learning and advance in its structures for childless or unmarried women, with fewer domestic responsibilities. Among our six heroines, most of them had no children (only Hanna Pohoska had a daughter and a son, Zofia Kozłowska-Budkowa had a daughter). Career limiting factors were family relations and the scope of obligations attributed to the role of wife and mother

## 2. Female Historians in the Polish People's Republic

During the PRL period, far more female historians won scholarly independence than in the prewar Second Polish Republic. Before 1939, Polish historical science had "only" six researchers with post-doctoral degree from four universities. During the Polish People's Republic, their number (at the Institute of History of the seven analyzed universities; four formed just after the war and three with a longer tradition) was fifty-four.

**Table 1. Number of the female historians independent researchers in the years 1945–89 at the Institute of History of selected universities**

Tabela 1. Liczba kobiet historyków – samodzielnych badaczek dziejów w latach 1945–89 w Instytutach Historii wybranych uniwersytetów

Uczelnia	Liczba badaczek
Uniwersytet Łódzki	8
Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika	4
Uniwersytet Wrocławski	4
Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej	2
Uniwersytet Jagielloński	13
Uniwersytet Warszawski	18
Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza	6

Source: The authors own calculation.

Comparing these two periods, however, we should not forget that in the Polish People's Republic, despite the fact that the number of

female students definitely increased, these proportions did not translate into the number of independent researchers recruited from among them. In addition, after 1945, Polish science had a larger number of universities and the People's Republic lasted twice as long as the entire era of the Second Republic. Taking these factors into account, it would appear that the number of women who made a career in historical science was not at all spectacularly higher. In addition, many of them did not obtain full professorship. Out of 54 historians, only 16 (32%) became titular professors by the end of the People's Republic.

Why? In answering this question, it is good to start with the fact that cultural patterns are characterised by 'long duration.' For many decades, working at university has been seen as a typically male profession, one that required systematicity, resilience and time needed for personal development, etc. Women, who were more involved with family life, had, by their very nature, limited time at their disposal, making them seem less promising scholar (Reszke 1984: 169). It is exemplified perfectly by the bitter words of Krystyna Śreniowska, an early widowed Łódź historian, who remembered that her supervisor did not want to invest in the education of 'a hag with two children:' "It was hardly fathomable to expect me to make any serious progress in my scholarly work since I was the main breadwinner, a housewife and such," she wrote years later (Śreniowska 2018: 163–164). As in the interwar era, women making academic careers needed support and understanding from their loved ones. This was particularly true of women forced to reconcile parental responsibilities with work at university. In communist Poland, the so-called 'double burden' of women was common – they worked two shifts, having to balance professional responsibilities with maternal duties. The traditional division of gender roles was still considered 'natural.' The modernization of the professional status was not accompanied by the modernization of cultural patterns. Mothers who, for various reasons, were deprived of such support, were promoted much less often or at a much slower rate. Biological determinants continued to remain a limiting factor.

In the Polish People's Republic, political engagement in the structures of the communist party and support for the authorities were conducive to academic careers. At the beginning of the 1950s, activists occupying high positions in party structures (first the Polish Workers' Party, later the Polish United Workers' Party) held important posts and were in charge of higher education. Some of them

were historians, such as Natalia Gąsiorowska-Grabowska, Żanna Kormanowa and Celina Bobińska (all of them were appointed professors and took an active part in propagating the Marxist model of historical research). On the other hand, scholars who were associated with the anti-communist opposition, hailed from upper social classes or were close to the Catholic Church, faced many obstacles to their professional advancement. Some of them were removed from the university (e.g. Irena Janosz-Biskupowa) and/or waited much longer for new positions or academic degrees despite positive opinions about the achievements (the case of Krystyna Śreniowska).

In the People's Republic of Poland it was much easier to stand out for independence in areas for which there was a demand among the authorities (such as economic history, history of the workers' movement) or in a new/original/niche areas, where female scholars did not have to face unequal competition with men (e.g. the history of South America, history of Armenia, history of Byzantium, history of historiography, history of peasants, etc.). It was not until the 1970s that Polish female historians began to enter more boldly into fields that had been the domain of men (history of ideas, history of political doctrines and diplomacy). The passage of time and the growing proportion of studying women gradually 'familiarised' the academic community with the notion of the potential career advancement of the fairer sex. The number of mentors and masters supporting women's careers also increased.

## Conclusions

By going to the conclusions, scientific careers of Polish female historians perfectly illustrate the situation of women in science in general. Despite the fact that women have travelled a long path strewn with obstacles to the academy, the dominant position in the world of science still belongs to men. The number of women with scientific census is on the increase however, the situation remains the same: the higher the level of a scientific career, the less women there are. At the beginning of the twenty-first century (in 2003) in Poland, women accounted for 47% among doctors, 32% – post-doctoral studies, full professors – only 27% (Siemieńska 2007: 246). Among Polish historians in 2015 women with PhD degrees represented 34%, postdoctoral – 24% and full professors – 16.8%

**Table 2. Percentage of female historians among employees at Institutes of History in 2015**

Tabela 2. Procentowy udział kobiet wśród zatrudnionych w instytutach historii w 2015 roku

<b>PhD</b>	<b>Post-doctoral studies</b>	<b>Full professors</b>
34%	24%	16.8%

Source: Baza Nauka Polska 2015; the authors own calculation.

Climbing the ladder of prestige and power, we see a reduction in the number of women. While there are many of them at the middle levels (PhD level), there is a lack of higher attainment. There are still disproportions in the number of women and men in the teaching and managerial staff of institutions in the higher education sector. The percentage of women managing institutions in the higher education sector in Poland in 2007 was 13%. Participation of women in various bodies managing science and research – 7% (last place among EU countries). Comparing with the Nordic countries, it is 25%. On the other hand, in Germany it is only 8% and the data is similar in Romania and Austria. Women who occupy prestigious positions in scientific fields are still a scarcity. Women still constitute a minority in the areas considered as masculine (technology, industry, agriculture etc.) and most of them represent the ‘soft’ ones (education, health care, humanities, arts). Women are not represented in technical sciences; among professors in 2007 they constituted only 7.2% (Gałkowski 2011: 52).

In order to understand why women are still not represented in the scientific establishment, one should look into the past, think about social norms, organization of education and science structures. The situation of women in science seems to reflect their status in society. The multitude of social roles in which women perform imposes a lot of additional obligations requiring effort and determination in reconciling professional career with family life (Krauze 2016) Patterns of academic careers were formed in the limited women’s professional activity and the widely accepted traditional division of roles (enabling men to start a family and at the same time mobility, long hours of work). Women pay a higher price for professional success; it takes them a little more time to reach the next career level than men. The male exclusivity of the academic community is still well established. I agree with Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik, who wrote: “there are no legal or formal blockades on the path to full equality of women in the sphere of education. And yet it is difficult to talk about full equality. The existing forms of inequality are, to a large

extent, the result of traditions and stereotypes in the perception of the social roles of men and women and the different genial socialization. (...) Women more often perceive their success in terms of a successful family life, and most men are aware of the success associated with the public sphere of social life. Men are socialized mainly to perform professional functions” (Gromkowska-Melosik 2011: 246–247).

In Poland there is lack of institutional support for women who want to devote themselves to science (especially for those who want to combine it with motherhood). Apart from several initiatives, there are no systemic solutions that would improve the working conditions of women (A glorious example – the Polish Science Foundation launched the "Bridge" program, which takes into account the fact that pregnancy and the birth of a child constitute a break in the career of women. The program provides support for researchers of both sexes, who after a period of care for young children return to full scientific and research activity, as well as support for women carrying out scientific projects during pregnancy). Promotion in science is not sexually conditioned but personnel policy is more conducive to men. Perhaps this world would evolve further if the European Union's directives promoting gender equality in science, were treated more seriously in Poland.

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### Akademicka emancypacja kobiet. Kariery naukowe polskich kobiet-historyków (XIX–XX wiek) – studium przypadku

#### Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi próbę uzupełnienia luki w polskiej refleksji naukowej. W przeciwieństwie do Stanów Zjednoczonych i Europy Zachodniej w Polsce i innych krajach regionu brak kompleksowego historycznego namysłu nad kondycją kobiet w nauce, ich wkładem w rozwój poszczególnych dyscyplin lub indywidualnych mechanizmów wpływających na przebieg akademickiej kariery kobiet itp.

Autorka w sposób syntetyczny zarysowuje zmagania Polek walczących o dostęp do szkolnictwa wyższego; wskazuje przeszkody, które musiały zostać pokonane, zanim drzwi akademii zostały otwarte dla kobiet-uczonych (co miało miejsce w Galicji w 1897 r.). Następnie zaprezentowane zostały losy oraz pierwsze osiągnięcia naukowe humanistek na przykładzie nauki historycznej. Doświadczenia polskich historyczek można uogólnić. Ich kariery odzwierciedlały bowiem to, co było udziałem kobiet w nauce krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XIX i XX wieku.

Tekst składa się z trzech części. W partii wprowadzającej autorka pokazuje walkę kobiet o dostęp do szkolnictwa wyższego. Część zasadnicza poświęcona została kobietom – pionierkom naukowej autonomii w dziedzinie historii. Przedstawia problem w porządku chronologicznym obejmującym dwie epoki: okres międzywojenny i czasy PRL-u. Trzecia część zawiera wnioski i odnosi się do współczesnej sytuacji kobiet w polskiej nauce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** historia nauki, historia historiografii, historia kobiet, pleć w nauce