

## Wiktor Rudolf Ormicki (1898–1941)

Wiktor Ormicki was one of the most talented geographers of the inter-war period in Poland. He is a symbol of the martyrdom of the Polish academics persecuted by the Germans during the Second World War, a martyrdom initiated through *Sonderaktion Krakau* on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1939, when 183 academics from Cracow universities, chiefly of the Jagiellonian University, were arrested. He was born into a Jewish family on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1898 in Staroniw, today a suburb of Rzeszów. His father was Fryderyk Wilhelm Nussbaum, and mother Salomea née Ameisen. Wiktor's father was a doctor in Law and worked as a railway official. Under the Austrians he was a senior commissioner in the directorate of Austrian State Railways in Cracow and, following Poland's regaining of independence, he took the post of legal advisor within Polish State Railways. Wiktor Nussbaum was sent in 1904 to the St. Nicholas Primary School in Cracow. In 1908 he started his studies at the King Jan Sobieski 3<sup>rd</sup> State Grammar School in Cracow, choosing a classical profile for his schooling. In 1916 he was to complete his secondary education by taking the school leaving certificate, obtaining it with merit on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1916. Immediately on completing his education at grammar school, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, he was drafted into the Austrian Army. After several months of service he ended up at the officer school in Opava and was sent to the Russian Front, and later the Italian. After the end of the

war he returned to Cracow. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 he was matriculated for the winter term 1918/1919 to the Faculty of Law at the Jagiellonian University. However, in the very same month he enlisted in the Polish army, then under formation, as a second lieutenant. He considered the threat facing the newly reborn fatherland a great one, and was to take part in the battles for the defence of Lvov, as well as seeing combat in Polesia. During leave spent in Cracow in 1921 he became acquainted with a professor of Geography, Ludomir Sawicki, who travelled to Polesia on field trips, where W. Ormicki was stationed. This friendship was to change W. Ormicki's life, still known at the time as W. Nussbaum. He became fascinated with geography. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1922 he resigned his rank in the army and on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April had again enrolled as a student of the Jagiellonian University this time at the Philosophy Faculty to read Geography. From October 1922 to the end of 1923 he worked as a volunteer at the Jagiellonian University's Geography Institute. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1923 he was employed as a junior assistant to L. Sawicki at the Geography Institute. He studied simultaneously at the Pedagogical Institute, in order to obtain his teaching qualifications. During the course of his classes at the Geography Institute he studied matters connected with geology, statistics and economics thoroughly. He attended the classes of then eminent professors of the Jagiellonian University: Jerzy Smoleński and Władysław Szajnocha. Confirmation of his change of surname from Nussbaum to Ormicki comes with the rescript of the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1924. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November of that year he married Maria Irena née Czapczyński (1900–1984), a friend from his degree course. As an assistant lecturer he prepared his Ph.D. thesis. In 1926 he finished writing his Ph.D. thesis in economic geography (*Eksport drewna w górnym dorzeczu Dunajca i Popradu*) [The export of timber in the Upper Dunajec and Poprad]. Its reviewers were W. Kumaniecki and J. Smoleński. W. Ormicki's Ph.D. tutor was Prof. L. Sawicki. Following his passing of the Ph.D. examinations in philosophy and then geography, geology and statistics in front of a commission composed of Professors W. Kumaniecki, J. Smoleński and W. Szajnocha he was awarded, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1926, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. In 1926 his wife M. I. Ormicka also gained a Ph.D. in Geography. Under the tutorage of L. Sawicki she wrote the thesis *Aparat komunikacyjny województwa krakowskiego* [The Transport System in the Province of Cracow].

As an assistant to L. Sawicki, and earlier his student, W. Ormicki played an intensive part in the life of geographical circles. He was a member of the Circle of Student Geographers of the Jagiellonian University. He gave at the time papers on economic geography. In 1923 he entered into the structure of the Board of the Cracow Section of the Polish Geographic Society. L. Sawicki brought him in as co-editor of *Wiadomości Geograficzne* [Geographical

News]. Following L. Sawicki's death in 1928 he was to become *de facto* the editor of this highly valued geographic journal, being the organ of the Cracow Section of the Polish Geographic Society. In 1926 he was to organise in conjunction with Prof. J. Smoleński an expedition to the eastern borderlands of Poland (*Kresy*). His interest in the eastern lands of the Polish Republic was to result from 1927 to 1930 in the joint editing with Prof. J. Smoleński of *Rocznik Wołyński*. This journal was to arouse activity amongst local researchers as well as increase interest in this region of Poland amongst ordinary citizens. Professor L. Sawicki in 1926 organised a geographical expedition to Polesia, Wileńszczyzna, Wołyń and Podole to take place from the 20<sup>th</sup> of March to the beginning of May. It was an expedition to be called the first 'Orbis' expedition. Cracow geographers, the ethnographer Kazimierz Moszyński and the geologist Stanisław Wołosowicz set off on it in a specially designed off-road vehicle, called 'Orbis', which had been prepared by the Renault car factory. The vehicle was additionally equipped with a laboratory and a boat and W. Ormicki also took part in the undertaking. In 1927 he actively participated in the organisation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers at the side of Prof. L. Sawicki, the congress's secretary general. This congress took place in a so-called circuitous form – in several towns from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 1927. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1928 Prof. L. Sawicki died, W. Ormicki's master and closest colleague. It happened shortly after his return from an expedition in the Balkans, during which he had contracted an unidentified illness. After Prof. L. Sawicki's death, the classes he had taught at the Geography Institute were taken over by W. Ormicki and Wołodimir Kubijowicz, whose fates during the course of the Second World War were to turn out so very different. The former was to die, murdered by the Germans, the latter was to work closely with them. At the seminar in General Geography, taken over following the death of his master, W. Ormicki announced to the students that nothing in the manner or course of proceedings would change, that the seminar would be exactly as it had been under Prof. L. Sawicki. W. Ormicki worked intensely and prepared for his post-doctoral examination (*habilitacja*). On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1926 he was nominated senior lecturer at the Jagiellonian University's Geography Institute. From 1928 he worked on a geography bibliography. He prepared 3 volumes for publication of this most valuable work. *The Bibliography* covered the years 1928–1935 and was published in 1935–1936.

In 1929 there appeared in print W. Ormicki's work *Życie gospodarcze Kresów Wschodniej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [The economic life of the Polish Eastern Borderlands] as the 11<sup>th</sup> volume of works produced by the Jagiellonian University's Geographical Institute. This study was to constitute the basis for his post-doctoral dissertation. The reviewers for W. Ormicki's post-doc-

toral defence were the Professors J. Smoleński and Adam Heydl, an economist of National Democratic political sympathies. Professor A. Heydl's political views neither influenced the evaluation of the work nor the course of the proceedings, which took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1930. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July W. Ormicki gave his post-doctoral lecture *Ważniejsze zagadnienia geografii agrarnej w Polsce* [The most important aspects of agrarian geography in Poland]. Given the relations of the day the confirmation of the degree's award was to be confirmed relatively quickly by the Ministry of Denominations and Public Education, for already on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1930 he was appointed to the post of assistant professor in Economic Geography at the Jagiellonian University. He was to be only made a university lecturer in 1935. The Polish Commission for International Intellectual Cooperation was to award him a prize for his book *Życie gospodarcze Kresów Wschodnich* [The economic life of the Polish Eastern Borderlands] and for the whole of his research into the economy and geography of the Polish Eastern Borderlands. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1935 he was nominated for the position of lecturer at the Jagiellonian University's Geography Institute. At a sitting of the Council of the Faculty of Philology in 1939 on the proposal of Prof. J. Smoleński, a commission was called into being to determine the bestowing of a professorship on W. Ormicki. Jerzy Smoleński justified his motion on the grounds of the academic output, the intense involvement in the national economy, the broad geography teaching and promotional work Ormicki had undertaken. The head of the professorial commission was the then dean Prof. Władysław Konopczyński, while the commission composed Professors Adam Krzyżanowski, Jan Nowak and J. Smoleński. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June the commission unanimously appealed to the Faculty Council to have W. Ormicki nominated a professor. Unfortunately the outbreak of war did not allow the already embarked upon process to reach a close. Everything indicated that it would have been resolved to the benefit of all parties.

Wiktor Ormicki was a great populariser of geography. In 1925 at the Adam Mickiewicz People's University in Cracow he organised and gave a series of lectures on geography. In an article of 1928 *Zadania nauczyciela w szkole średniej w świetle obserwacji zebranych na proseminarium Geogr[aficznym] UJ* [The task of a teacher at secondary school in the light of observations gathered at the Jagiellonian University's Geography seminar] he pointed to the popularising role of geography amongst secondary school pupils and its role in the civil awareness of youth. In 1930 he organised a course for teachers of geography at general schools in Wołyń, on which academic teachers from the Jagiellonian University lectured on matters of the history of Polish literature, ethnography, geography, botany and zoology. Wiktor Ormicki gave a series of lectures on economic life. He was to conduct similar courses (although of a more limit-

ed scope) in Małopolska. In 1930 in *Rocznik Wołyński* he published a study – a methodological guidebook for those conducting regional research – *Samodzielne badania geograficzne na prowincji. Zarys metodologiczny i bibliograficzny* [Independent geographic research in the provinces. A methodological and bibliographical outline]. He tried to reach through his lectures and public lectures Poles living abroad. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1928 after a lecture in Bytom he was beaten up by a German group of armed thugs. He operated within a movement promoting knowledge about the country and popularised amongst those interested matters of economic geography. He gave papers and lectures for the members of the Polish Geographic Society and Tourist Society. He popularised matters connected with economic geography, and demography through the medium of radio, which was the most effective form of transfer at the time. He ran radio auditions on geographical themes.

Besides work at the Jagiellonian University W. Ormicki was connected until 1927 with the Free Polish University in Warsaw, where he lectured in Geography. For the period 1927–1931 he ran a Geographic Workshop and lectured in Geography at the Pedagogical Institute in Katowice. From 1933 he was also connected with the Higher Trade School in Warsaw, which was to transform itself into the University of Economics. He travelled and lectured at other universities. From 1936 onwards he conducted a 10-day cycle of lectures in Economic Geography every year. He lectured in Economic Geography at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lvov during the academic year 1938/1939.

The most important research field for W. Ormicki was economic geography in its varied aspects, from economic questions on the macro scale to demography on the level of small geographic areas. In the field of demography he discussed, among other things, the embarrassing question, although one extremely important at the time, of children born out of wedlock. He busied himself with the emigration possibilities for Jews from Poland and in connection with this process the changes to denominational structure against a demographic backcloth. In 1935 he gave a paper on a question completely unknown at the time, namely the demographic structure of seasonal emigration from the area around Vilnius to Latvia in the search for work. He drew attention to the role of agricultural geography in the planning of state defence, as a component linked to Poland's military possibilities. Such types of analysis are usually conducted in various areas of the economy by military commands.

It was the area of the Eastern Borderlands that was to dominate in W. Ormicki's research. He wrote among other things about the industrialisation of this part of Poland in the 1930s and the results that could arise from this industrialisation for the development of Poland. The greatest number of

works were devoted to Wołyń, lands that he visited many times together with Prof. L. Sawicki and where he carried out economic and demographic field research.

W. Ormicki was also interested in the Podhale region. He wrote about timber exports from this region, about the economic significance for industry of the Dunajec and its timber floating.

Together with matters of agricultural geography W. Ormicki was also interested in the problem of agricultural reform, resulting in his eyes from the flawed ownership structure within Polish agriculture. In 1936 together with M. Wesołowska he published the study *Struktura zawodowa ludności rolniczej w Polsce* [The employment structure of the rural population in Poland].

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1939 he was invited by the occupying German authorities to a lecture by the sturmbannführer SS Brunon Müller. The invitation was a trap. Together with 182 other academics of the Jagiellonian University and other institutions of higher education in Cracow he was arrested and placed in the prison at Montelupich Street in Cracow and subsequently imprisoned in a gaol in Wrocław. While in prison in Wrocław W. Ormicki gave two lectures. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1939 – *Kolonizacja włoska w Libii* [Italian colonisation in Libya], and on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November – *Problem kolonizacji wewnętrznej w Polsce* [The problem of internal colonisation in Poland]. The arrested academics were taken from Wrocław to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. A dozen or so of the older professors died as a result of the persecution and inhuman conditions, including the director of the Geography Institute, J. Smoleński. Following the death on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1940 of Prof. J. Smoleński at Sachsenhausen the professors organised an academia in memory of the tortured director of the Geography Institute. Recollections on the figure of J. Smoleński were then given by Stanisław Leszczycki, Michał Siedlecki, Ignacy Chrzanowski, Tadeusz Banachiewicz and W. Ormicki. At the beginning of February 1940 101 prisoners were released from the camp at Sachsenhausen. Amongst these was not, unfortunately, W. Ormicki. He was transferred to the concentration camp at Dachau, where he arrived on the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 1940. According to the accounts of fellow prisoners he enjoyed their respect and was treated with great authority. He also gained the respect of the Germans through his knowledge and attitude. He was one of only a few academics not to be freed from the camp even though he was over forty. From the notes of a representative of the Foreign Affairs office of the General Government in Cracow it results that on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1940 the Germans did not know of W. Ormicki's Jewish heritage, while at the office of Governor Frank it was not known why he had not returned to Cracow together with another nine professors. The tragic moment for W. Ormicki was to take place in the concentration camp in Dachau, when he – according

to the accounts of fellow prisoners – admitted to the Germans that he was of Jewish birth. This happened in March 1940, for already on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April that year in a note on the attempts to free Prof. Kazimierz Piwarski, W. Ormicki (with Joachim Metallmann) is mentioned as being non-Aryan together with the evaluation that ‘it is difficult to do anything for them.’ After being included in the penal company he was, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, transported to the camp at Mauthausen-Gusen. From the accounts assembled after the war from fellow prisoners he appears as a man of unshakeable attitudes enjoying immense authority amongst camp society. He was murdered by the Germans on the night of September the 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> 1941. The official version of his death which his wife M.I. Ormicka received from the Germans was that he had died of heart failure.

### Bibliography

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