

Ewelina Tarkowska, *Wielka Emigracja we Francji: Polacy w bretońskim departamencie Côtes-du-Nord* [The Great Emigration in France: Poles in the Breton Department of Côtes-du-Nord], Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 2022, 546 pp., 23 plates/tables

The historiography of the Great Emigration has been expanded in recent years by the addition of both solid monographs¹ and syntheses.² Their authors' research into hitherto little known aspects of the history of the post-uprising emigration (to mention only studies of the language and political imagination of the émigrés) has made a substantial and interesting contribution to scholarly reflection on the subject. Published in Olsztyn in 2022, Ewelina Tarkowska's book is part of this trend of original research into the Polish political emigration after the November Uprising.

¹ Idesbald Goddeeris, *La Grande Émigration polonaise en Belgique (1831–1870): Élités et masses en exil à l'époque romantique*, Frankfurt am Main, 2013; Piotr Kuligowski, *Radykałowie polistopadowi i nowoczesna galaktyka pojęć*, Cracow, 2020; Jerzy Kuzicki, *Nieść wiarę i nadzieję na obcej ziemi: Polskie duchowieństwo katolickie w życiu religijnym i polityczno-społecznym Wielkiej Emigracji we Francji (1831–1863)*, Rzeszów, 2014; Piotr Wierzbicki, *Dywizja Kozaków Sultańskich: Polityczno-wojskowe koncepcje stronnictwa Czartoryskich w okresie wojny krymskiej (1853–1856)*, Cracow, 2013.

² Radosław Żurawski vel Grajewski, 'Polskie emigracje 1831–1918', in *Historie Polski w XIX wieku*, 4 vols, Warsaw, 2013–15, vol. 4: *Narody, wyznania, emigracje, porównania*, ed. Andrzej Nowak, 2015, pp. 115–276.

The author precisely defines the framework of her scholarly analysis. Her attention is focused on the fate of those members of the Great Emigration who in the 1830s found themselves in the Breton department of Côtes-du-Nord. It is impossible not to notice that they made up a tiny part of the Polish community in France, estimated at 5,000 or so in total. As Tarkowska has established, 119 Poles settled in the Côtes-du-Nord department for longer or shorter periods. The group was at its most numerous in the summer of 1833, when 69 Polish refugees resided there (p. 9). Drawing on Polish and French archive resources and the émigré press and literature on the subject, the author has carried out a comprehensive analysis of various dimensions of their existence in exile.

The book consists of three parts, divided into chapters and subchapters. In Part 1, comprising two chapters, Tarkowska describes the circumstances and paths which brought participants in the November Uprising first to France, and then to the Côtes-du-Nord department on the Atlantic coast. Most of those who reached the region had previously spent some time in the large *dépôts* for émigrés in Besançon and Bergerac, successively dispersed by the French authorities in 1833. The Poles who found themselves in Brittany also included participants in the failed Portuguese expedition of the Polish Legion organized by General Józef Bem. In Chapter 2, the author presents France's policy towards the November Uprising veterans. In an insightful manner she discusses the legal status of the refugees and the scope of assistance for them, comparing Paris's treatment of political émigrés from Poland, Italy and Spain. Following changes in the French benefit policy, Tarkowska rightly concludes that the system of benefit payments was a tool deliberately designed for controlling the politically uncertain element, that is the foreigners in France (p. 71). In addition, she stresses the significant fact that after the European upheavals of 1848–49 the new French authorities clearly limited financial assistance provided to political refugees (p. 98).

The second part of the book is considerably longer than the first. It also consists of two chapters. Chapter 3 — the longest, constituting more or less two-fifths of the entire book — is devoted to the everyday life of Poles in the department of Côtes-du-Nord (pp. 107–305). It contains subchapters concerning the attitude of the authorities and the local community to the émigrés, their financial situation, employment, and family matters, as well as their perception of the milieu in which they found themselves. In the fourth chapter the author seeks to determine the scale of the Côtes-du-Nord Poles' involvement in the socio-political life of the Great Emigration, as well as the intensity and nature of their contacts with their homeland. She presents information about the political sympathies and antipathies of members of the group in question, as well as their reactions to events like the 1846 Uprising in Cracow or the Crimean War.

The third part of the book is different in nature from the other two. It is made up of a substantial, one-hundred-page biographical dictionary of the participants in the Great Emigration associated with the department of

Côtes-du-Nord (pp. 397–506). The biographical entries differ in length, but in most cases they make it possible to follow the individual life stories of their protagonists, both before and after the November Uprising. The book ends with a conclusion summing up the main threads of the author's analysis and is complemented by a bibliography, list of tables, list of abbreviations, and a French-language *résumé*.

What constitutes the main strength of Tarkowska's book and deserves particular praise is the author's extensive source base. Tarkowska draws not only on hand-written resources (well known to historians of emigration) from the Polish Library in Paris, the Czartoryski Library in Cracow, Wrocław's Ossolineum, Warsaw's Central Archives of Historical Records or the central archives of the French ministries of foreign affairs and war. The documents kept in these institutions are obviously extremely important and can still be a source of scholarly surprises, but in the pursuit of the goals Tarkowska set for herself they were of secondary importance. Her primary research materials are the resources of the provincial archives of the Côtes-du-Nord department in Saint-Brieuc, the Ille-et-Vilaine department in Rennes, the Finistère department in Quimper, the Morbihan department in Vannes, the Loire-Atlantique department in Nantes, and the Doubs department in Besançon. The author's survey of the provincial archive holdings is complemented by her study of the contents of the municipal archives in Saint-Brieuc, Rennes, Saint-Malo, Quimper, Vannes, Nantes and Besançon. It has to be said that none of the scholars studying the history of the Great Emigration in France has used these resources as extensively as Ewelina Tarkowska. They have enabled her to capture and describe many previously unknown events, processes, and conduct of Polish émigrés living in the French provinces.

Among the author's most valuable findings are, in my opinion, her remarks concerning the attitude of the authorities and inhabitants of the Côtes-du-Nord department to the newcomers from Poland (pp. 116–29). Tarkowska describes campaigns organized there to aid the Poles; cites evidence of the friendly attitude of public officials and ordinary Bretons to the émigrés; and offers examples of French-Polish family relationships. Her reflections on the relations within the Polish community are of particular interest. They were not free from tensions and conflicts, with the latter caused not only by differences in political views (pp. 143–52). The author does not shy away from describing the pathologies plaguing the Polish community in Brittany such as, for example, public disorder caused by alcohol abuse or the refusal of some émigrés to pay back the debts they incurred with the French (pp. 166–69). What becomes important to the author's reconstruction of the actual standard of living of Poles in the French provinces are her findings concerning the Poles' purchasing power. To this end Tarkowska compares the government refugee benefits with the average salary and prices of basic consumer goods in France at the time (pp. 189–93).

Another important contribution made by the author — and useful to other researchers — is her biographical dictionary included in the third part of the book. It

contains numerous entries concerning people who did not distinguish themselves in any way in public life. And yet it was their life stories that made up the phenomenon described by historians as the 'Great Emigration'. Reconstructed by Tarkowska, elements of their biographies can be of considerable significance, not just to further prosopographic research into the post-November Uprising diaspora, but also to individual genealogical studies. All biographical entries are accompanied by valuable source references. Collecting and organizing this condensed information must have cost the author considerable effort, which should be duly appreciated.

Ewelina Tarkowska's book is marked by a disciplined and precise language along with meticulous editing. It is hard to find in it even the slightest typographical errors, not to mention more serious stylistic flaws or translation shortcomings. I stress this with full appreciation, and I hope I will not be regarded as being spiteful in pointing out that the author has made an error in the title of my book on the Great Emigration in the British Isles, which she cites twice. The end date indicated there is 1863, not 1861 as Ewelina Tarkowska writes (pp. 171 and 528). Some incidental errors in the spelling of place names ('Biatignolles' — p. 353; 'Côtes-du-Nord' — p. 408) are of no importance, because the author spells the names correctly elsewhere. More consistency could be recommended for the information appearing in the biographical notes of the émigrés and concerning the military decorations they received. The author usually writes about the Golden Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari in the correct way, that is using capital letters (pp. 401, 406, 428, 438, 441 f.). However, occasionally she fails to capitalize parts of the name of the order. The form 'golden cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari' (pp. 410, 419, 457) can sometimes be found and it should be corrected. A more significant shortcoming is the book's lack of an index — which seems essential in this type of a book.

Having said the above, I hasten to point out that Ewelina Tarkowska's monograph is a valuable and excellent book. I am convinced of this despite the fact that the author's narrative choices sometimes seemed debatable to me, and that some of the topics tackled by her would have benefited from further elaboration. For example, instead of information — repeated after other studies — about émigré associations or the history of the Free City of Cracow, I would prefer to learn more about the perception of the Polish 1831 insurgents by the Bretons themselves. As I have mentioned, Tarkowska writes about the specificity of peaceful, rural Brittany and the warm welcome of the Poles by its inhabitants. She suggests that one of the reasons behind this welcome may have been a shared strong attachment of both groups to Catholicism (p. 510). I wish she had delved more deeply into this interesting topic. This would have required her to go beyond the sources she has studied — of the prefectures and town halls — and investigate the private and church archives, as well as carry out a more thorough analysis of French memoirs and the Breton press. The fact that Tarkowska leaves out the local press (including *Gazette de Bretagne*, *L'Auxiliaire Breton*, *Le Dinannais*, *L'Armoricaïn*, *Le Journal de Rennes*, *Le Progrès de*

Loudéac or *Le Quimpérois*) from her book is the most serious shortcoming in her source base.

There is no doubt that such research would have been painstaking.³ However, it would have created opportunities to show more completely the spheres, contents, and dynamics of bilateral contacts between the newcomers and the hosts. The way in which the Polish view on Brittany is presented in the book is not entirely satisfactory. The title of subchapter 3.6 — ‘Brittany in the Eyes of Polish Émigrés’ — unfortunately promises more than it delivers. It contains observations taken almost exclusively from the letters kept in the Polish Library in Paris — mainly those of the brothers Stanisław and Napoleon Poniński to their friend Florian Chaborski. Their observations are indeed interesting; but firstly, the chronological framework of the correspondence is limited to the period 1842–44; and secondly the horizon of observations presented in them was determined by the activity of just two individuals. I understand that the author had to face the problem of insufficient sources on this topic. In that case perhaps she should have chosen a different title for the subchapter? It should be kept in mind that the family saga and the opinions of the Poniński brothers were related to their specific situation — they enjoyed a much higher standard of living than most Poles because they were financially supported by their family from Poland (in 1842 they lived in a rented chateau in Kersa near Paimpol, and shortly afterwards Napoleon married Melanie Morand, who came from a wealthy French family). Owing to this, their case is not very representative and perhaps does not add much when looking for answers to the question of how Brittany was perceived by the refugees living there.

I conclude this review with one more remark of a general nature. In the introduction to her book Ewelina Tarkowska writes that her aim was to ‘consider the position of Polish refugees in France after the fall of the November Uprising from the point of view of the life stories of ordinary émigrés living in the French provinces’ (p. 9). This statement seems overly broad and somewhat misleading. Does it mean that the Olsztyn scholar treats her findings concerning the 119 Poles living in Brittany as a set of observations concerning the entire Great Emigration in France? This would be risky given that among those who settled in the Côtes-du-Nord department there were no outstanding émigré politicians, poets, journalists, priests, or engineers — in other words no one from the groups which largely determined the image of Poland’s post-November Uprising emigration. In fact, there is no need to treat the Brittany émigrés as the Great Emigration in a nutshell. What makes her book so valuable is the fact that by referring to hitherto unknown sources, Tarkowska has reconstructed the everyday life of a large group of ordinary émigrés living in the French provinces. Thanks to the results of her research readers are given a more complete picture of what

³ A model example of analysis of the local foreign-language press is presented by Zdzisław Jagodziński in his study *Anglia wobec sprawy polskiej w okresie Wiosny Ludów 1848–1849*, Warsaw, 1997.

happened within the Great Emigration outside the Paris, Brussels, or London circles of great leaders, great texts, and great events. The book *Wielka Emigracja we Francji: Polacy w bretońskim departamencie Côtes-du-Nord* is an excellent case study, and for that its author deserves full credit.

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