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**Witold Wieczorek, *Polskie
i wyjątkowe piwo grodziskie.
Siedem wieków ikony piwowarstwa
(Polish and the Unique Grodzisk
Beer: Seven Centuries of Beer Icons)*,
Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy,
Łódź 2025, pp. 264**

Reviewing works authored by non-professional historians is an invariably problematic task. In the first place, one should ask whether the work should be reviewed even if it does not display scholarly ambitions. Or maybe what one needs is simply to set different assessment criteria. These questions are far from easy, yet it seems that the publication discussed here is worth reviewing, due to certain valuable elements that may be of interest to professional researchers and enthusiasts of brewing history.

The book is an attempt at a broad synthesis of the history of Grodzisk brewing. Aside from the introduction and a brief foreword by the author, it consists of five chapters discussing consecutive periods: the Old Polish epoch, the years from 1783 to 1918, the interwar period and the Second World War, the years from 1945 to 1993 and, last but not least, the restoration of style in the 21st century. Such an arrangement is chronological and clear, so it does not raise any objections. The book's graphic design is definitely one of its assets. This beautifully presented album contains a huge collection of reproduced graphics, mostly of phenomenal quality. The typesetting is neat and clear, and the content is logically laid out. The book offers plenty of visual material, photographs and scanned images, which alone are a sufficient reason to become acquainted with the work.

When we look at the content itself, however, it transpires that the work is, to put it mildly, unusual. Let us start with the source base. The bibliography is prepared

in a rather chaotic manner; one could turn a blind eye on it were it not for the fact that it proves extremely challenging to navigate. The archival material and references are recorded in a peculiar way, making seeking out information problematic. Similarly, printed published sources have been grouped together with studies and reports. In addition to quite random items from the literature of the subject, we find, for example, the address book of the city of Toruń from 1923 (why here exactly?). It would suffice if the author had looked at any historical book, and he himself would have seen that the good practices concerning bibliography and records, rather than being a whim, are meant to assist the reader in navigating sources and literature.

One of the most serious disadvantages of the work is that it has not been put in the context of any previous research. The choice of literature is at least debatable. Thus, the author used popular studies, some rather random works by recognized historians, whilst leaving out most of the achievements of professional researchers in the field of brewing history (both Polish and foreign). I gather that the author looks down on the achievements of professional researchers of the history of beer and, of course, he has every right to do so. From the reader's point of view, he could have devoted a paragraph or two to justify this omission and the absence of such works in the bibliography, which could, at minimum, serve as points of reference (even if negative ones). Perhaps the author was simply not aware of those publications; still, this would be an accusation of an even greater calibre. Regardless, his omission has real consequences for the content of the book itself. On pages 138-140, the author cites a provision of the anti-alcohol law, trying to explain its impact on the beer market. And rightly so, but in the footnote he refers only to his unpublished book. Why did he ignore the existence of an article by S. Dryja on beer taxation in the Second Republic of Poland?¹ There are two options: either he was not aware of its existence or he just omitted it. Given such an extensive query, it is hard to believe that the author failed to consult the basic literature of the subject. Also, in that context it is surprising that no query was conducted in the Archive in Bydgoszcz, which contains post-war documentation on the activity of the Brewing Board.

Nevertheless, the author found several noteworthy documents and cited a number of interesting facts. However, it is difficult to resist the impression that the book is a collection of quite random data, woven into the chronological narrative, and the length of individual chapters or descriptions of issues and events results directly from the sources consulted. For instance, in some places the author shares plenty of rather accidental details, only to summarize the entire transformation

¹ Dryja S. 2021, pp. 149-182.

and closure of the brewery in a few sentences on page 213. It was a long process that did not happen overnight.

As for the interwar period, the author did not explain what CZPPiS was, and the map on page 169 shows the locations of beer recipients in the Poznań province. Nowhere has it been explained that the CZPPiS divided the beer market in a “cartel-like” manner, which is crucial for understanding the situation in the interwar Poland. On page 160, compensation agreements were mentioned without any explanation of the terms “foreign exchange regulation” or “commodity regulation.” This lack of context is a rather serious drawback. This problem could easily be remedied by referring to classic works on the economic history of Poland. Similarly, the selection of data raises doubts. On page 198, we find a table showing 1950-1963 production volumes in hectoliters and then beer exported to Germany in the years 1955-1961. We will not find out why this time frame was taken into account, as the author did not supply any context – was the increase large relative to the whole country or was it insignificant? Likewise, page 204 contains a table with the amount of malt produced in the years 1950-1980 without context (apart from a list of recipients). This may be useful information, but is it really relevant for a reader of popular science? And if so, why?

To sum up, the work possesses a certain substantive value: there are no serious factual errors and it contains a collection of interesting facts, although, as mentioned, quite accidental. The graphic aspect of the work is sensational. If the author had referred to existing works instead of “reinventing the wheel,” the book would undoubtedly be much better, especially as a great effort has obviously been put into archival research, which is commendable. I absolutely do not want to sound patronizing, but the author’s technique is poor; the same is true of his understanding of individual historical eras. Regrettably, due to his incomprehensible aversion to the existing historical literature, the chance for the book to become a classic not only among beer history lovers and hobbyists, but also professional researchers, has been lost.

Bibliography

Dryja S., *Podatek akcyzowy od piwa w II Rzeczypospolitej na tle ogólnej kondycji przemysłu piwowarskiego*, “Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych,” 82, 2021, pp. 149-182.