

# Introduction

By *Martin Löhnig*

Upper Silesia was the subject of Polish-German conflict in various ways during the 20th century. This was particularly true of the interwar period. During this phase, this historically evolved region, in which different cultures had encountered and intermingled, was divided between three nation states. Economic and social networks were therefore fragmented down to the level of individual families. Political and national claims clashed there, as did the narratives of national historiographies. “Bleeding border” vs. “unredeemed Slavic soil”.<sup>1</sup>

Upper Silesia was therefore a region in which each of the participating nations set up a “showcase” and wanted to present itself culturally from its best side. Excellent architecture was therefore created in the Polish part of Upper Silesia in particular. The Silesian Museum in Katowice, for example, designed by Karol Schayer<sup>2</sup>, was one of the most modern museum buildings in Europe; it was demolished by the German invaders before it opened. This impressive building and its history are not only exemplary of this modern architecture, but also reflect the fate of Poland in the 20th century. Upper Silesia was also a pioneering region of industrialisation, in which the previously agrarian landscape underwent massive changes with the construction of mines and smelters, workers’ settlements and their connection to railway lines. And which played a central role in heavy industry and armaments production in the first half of the 20th century.

But Upper Silesia is also a region in the centre of Europe whose more recent history was not dealt with by historians, at least in Germany, for a long time, if only to avoid being suspected of revanchism. Fortunately, this has now changed and there has been fruitful co-operation<sup>3</sup> between Polish, Czech and German historians. Legal historiography, on the other hand, has lagged behind this development. This volume, which is based on a conference organised by the editors in Regensburg in March 2023, aims to provide an opportunity to make Upper Silesia the subject of legal history research and to turn to a region that has been a “connecting region” (Verbindungsland<sup>4</sup>) between

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<sup>1</sup> *Manfred Alexander*, Oberschlesien im 20. Jahrhundert – eine mißverständene Region, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 30 (2004), S. 465 ff., 465 f.

<sup>2</sup> For Schayer’s architecture cf. *George Arbid*, Auf den Spuren eines Architekten, *Bauwelt* 2009, S. 24 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Kai Struve/Philipp Ther* (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Nationen. Identitätswandel in Oberschlesien in der Neuzeit*, Marburg 2002; *Bahlcke/Gawrecki/Kaczmarek* (eds.), *Geschichte Oberschlesiens. Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. only *Manfred Alexander*, *Oberschlesien im...*, S. 465 ff., 466.

different cultural areas for centuries. And which, as a Polish region with an identity fuelled by plural cultural roots,<sup>5</sup> will hopefully once again be such a connecting region in the long term.

A connecting region about which very little is now known in Germany.<sup>6</sup> The associations of expellees, with their often poisoned memories of their homeland, have been marginalised without any subsequent “non-poisoned” discussion of Upper Silesia. Apart from the numerous reports in the summer of 2014, when Germany became football world champions and Miroslav Klose from Opole became the most successful goalscorer of all time at a World Cup. Where exactly does he come from? Even if players with Upper Silesian roots no longer save German football and the results of the German national football team were catastrophic after Miroslav Klose’s retirement: It’s time to rediscover Upper Silesia.

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<sup>5</sup> *Andrzej Kaluza/Julia Röttger*, Warum Oberschlesien?, in: Deutsches Polen-Institut (ed.), *Jahrbuch Polen 2021. Oberschlesien*, Wiesbaden 2021, S. 5 ff., 7.

<sup>6</sup> But see *Marcin Wiatr*, *Literarischer Reiseführer Oberschlesien*, Potsdam 2016; and of course *Horst Bienek*, *Gleitwitz – Eine oberschlesische Chronik in vier Romanen: Die erste Polka*, München 1975, *Septemberlicht*, München 1977, *Zeit ohne Glocken*, München 1979, *Erde und Feuer*, München 1982, which Hanser-Verlag unfortunately never republished; the first volume has now been republished by *Elsinor-Verlag* (Coesfeld 2019).