



# Germans and Poles in the Middle Ages

*The Perception of the 'Other'  
and the Presence of Mutual Ethnic Stereotypes  
in Medieval Narrative Sources*

*Edited by*

**Andrzej Pleszczyński and Grischa Vercamer**

This volume examines mutual ethnic and national perceptions and stereotypes in the Middle Ages by analysing a range of narrative historical sources, such as chronicles, hagiography, and literary material, with a particular focus on the mutual history of Germany and Poland. What sorts of stereotypes and prejudices existed in the Middle Ages, and how widespread were they? Or what other types of differentiating features were considered, and why?

The majority of the contributions clearly shows that medieval authors in general displayed only limited interest in the activities of neighbouring lands, and only then when it concerned their own interests – such as matters of conflict, diplomacy, or marriage – while criticism usually focused on individuals, rather than being generalised to bordering regions as a whole.

Contributors are Isabelle Chwalka, Jarochna Dąbrowska-Burkhardt, Stephan Flemmig, Sławomir Gawlas, Georg Jostkleigrewe, David Kalhous, Norbert Kersken, Paul Martin Langner, Roman Michałowski, Wojciech Mrozowicz, Piotr Okniński, Andrzej Pleszczyński, Volker Scior, Florian M. Schmid, Marcin Starzyński, Adam Szweda, Kristin Skottki, Grischa Vercamer, and Thomas Wünsch.

**Andrzej Pleszczyński** is Professor of Medieval European History at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin. He has published monographs and articles on Polish-Czech-German relations, including *The Birth of a Stereotype. Polish Rulers and their Country in German Writings c. 1000 A.D.* (Brill, 2011).

**Grischa Vercamer** is Professor for Regional Studies at Technische Universität Chemnitz. His research focuses on rulership, historiography, East Central Europe, the Holy Roman Empire, and the military orders in the Middle Ages. His publications include *Hochmittelalterliche Herrschaftspraxis im Spiegel der Geschichtsschreibung. Vorstellungen von »guter« und »schlechter« Herrschaft in England, Polen und dem Reich im 12./13. Jahrhundert* (Harrassowitz, 2020).

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# Germans and Poles in the Middle Ages

*The Perception of the 'Other' and the Presence  
of Mutual Ethnic Stereotypes in Medieval  
Narrative Sources*

*This volume is dedicated to* Edited by *another* *Grigoris Vercamer*  
*and to the memory of* *Maryanna Pleszczyńska, Andrzej's wife,*  
Andrzej Pleszczyński and Grigoris Vercamer



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## Introduction

*Andrzej Pleszczyński and Grischa Vercamer*

The topic of this volume<sup>1</sup> – extending beyond just the context of Germany/Poland – is currently trending, since in a globalized world, where all information and all consumer goods supposedly are just around the corner and are available at any time, many people seem to feel a longing for orientation and identity. It is therefore no coincidence that on the best seller list of non-fiction books (*Sachbücher*) of the leading German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, at the time of the conference in May 2018<sup>2</sup> we found many books dealing with foreign- and self-perception ('Othering'), such as Thea Dorn's "Deutsch, nicht dumpf" (German, Not Dull) or Isolde Charim's "Ich und die Anderen." (Me and the Others).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, one may surely assume that the problem is clearly wider in scope and also occurs elsewhere in Europe and within the global framework. People want and need an identity narrower than expansively belonging to the world, or even just to the European Union; they seek local and regional identities even when those are encompassed within supranational unions. We are witnessing a renaissance of national ideas.<sup>4</sup> This is not necessarily a bad thing, provided that strengthening your own national identity is combined with a further understanding and respect for other nations, ethnic groups, and individuals. Taking this in account, there is a lot to improve upon and learn from each other in Europe and elsewhere. While the 'western peninsula' of Asia may not be the worst example, all the same, the continent (Europe) is

1 The research for this introduction has been supported by the National Science Centre, Poland, under Polonez fellowship reg. no 2016/21/P/HS3/04107 funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 665778.

2 This volume is the outcome of a conference held in the Instytut Historii im. Tadeusza Manteuffla PAN in Warsaw from the 24.–27. May 2018. The title was: "Germans and Poles in the Middle Ages – Perception of the Other and mutual Stereotypes" (conference report: <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-8077>).

3 <https://www.zeit.de/2018/18/sachbuecher-bestenliste-mai> (27.9.2018).

4 Which sometimes leads to nationalism – see e.g.: Greg Johnson, *Towards A New Nationalism* (San Francisco 2019); or the collection of studies: *Nationalist Myths and Modern Media. Contested Identities in the Age of Globalization*, ed. Jan H. Brinks, Stella Rock, and Edward Timms, (London-New York, 2006).

divided by cultural and political barriers and behind them stand in most of the cases a basic misunderstanding,<sup>5</sup> sometimes even intolerance and racism. One of these European bi-national barriers persisting even into the present still seems to be the Polish-German one. Despite generally friendly actual relations between both countries, present animosities arising from historical experiences and, in many cases prejudices, can still be recognized. The memory of the tragic 'fresh history' in the 19th/20th centuries plays a major part within these bilateral *lieux de mémoire*. In the current situation of open-mindedness and broad Polish-German academic cooperation, it seems well worth the effort to rationally analyze and evaluate the mutual stereotypical perceptions in the more distant past, which we offer here for the Middle Ages, using examples from its written memories (chronicles, hagiographies) which are examined in the majority of the contributions to this volume. This is in view of the fact that it is specifically history which has created and continues to create stereotypes and prejudices that are influentially present even today.<sup>6</sup> Neither Germans nor Poles were unique in creating stereotypes that slandered the neighbor. Therefore, the volume comprises, besides the mentioned contributions about German-Polish perceptions, other articles as well on various mutual perceptions within Europe, especially those regarding Germans and the Holy Roman Empire from outside in the Middle Ages.

- 5 Malcolm Chapman, Jeremy Clegg, and Hanna Gajewska-De Mattos, "Poles and Germans: An international Business Relationship," *Human Relations* 57 (8), 2004, 983–1015; Jarochna Dąbrowska-Burhardt, "O języku niemieckim w Polsce. Stereotypy i wyobrażenia na przestrzeni wieków [About German in Poland. Stereotypes and ideas over the centuries]," *Lingwistyka stosowana* 23,3 (2017): 15–25.
- 6 Agnieszka Łada, *Barometr Polska-Niemcy 2013. Wizerunek Niemiec i Niemców w polskim społeczeństwie po dziesięciu latach wspólnego członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej* [Poland-Germany Barometer 2013. The image of Germany and Germans in Polish society after ten years of joint membership in the European Union] (Warszawa, 2014); Jarochna Dąbrowska, *Stereotype und ihr sprachlicher Ausdruck im Polenbild der deutschen Presse: eine textlinguistische Untersuchung*, Studien zur deutschen Sprache 17 (Tübingen, 1999). See also on a broader level: Richard F.M. Byrn, "National stereotypes reflected in German literature," in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon N. Forde / Leslie Peter Johnson / Alan V. Murray (Leeds, 1995), 137–153; David Lowenthal, "Identity, Heritage and History," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis, Princeton, 1996, 41–57; Hans N. Hahn and Eva Hahn, "Nationale Stereotypen. Plädoyer für eine historische Stereotypenforschung," in *Stereotyp, Identität und Geschichte. Die Funktion von Stereotypen in gesellschaftlichen Diskursen*, ed. Hans H. Hahn (Frankfurt/M. 2002), 17–56; *Ethnic Images and Stereotypes – where is the border line? (Russian-Baltic cross-cultural relations); proceedings of the III International Scientific Conference on Political and Cultural Relations Between Russia and the States of the Baltic Region (Narva, October 20–22, 2006)*, ed. Jelena Nömm (Narva, 2007); different contributions in: *National stereotypes: correct images and distorted images*, ed. Bianca Valota (Alessandria, 2007).

Imagination is what usually stands at the start of stereotypical thinking, and it greatly simplifies and distorts reality. In 2011, a large exhibition took place in the well-known Martin Gropius Museum in Berlin/Germany and in the Royal Palace in Warsaw/Poland. The name was “Next door. Poland – Germany. 1000 years of Art and History” (German: *Tür an Tür. Polen – Deutschland. 1000 Jahre Kunst und Geschichte*; Polish: *Obok. Polska – Niemcy. 1000 Lat Historii w Sztuce*). The flyer for the exhibition proposed that the Germans and the Poles should deepen their knowledge of the others’ country and develop cultural exchanges in order not only to understand the other side better – but also their own selves. Obviously, the intention was to propose digging more deeply into the mutual history of both countries, reaching back further than just the last two centuries. For example, in the preface to the catalogue, Bernd Neumann (then the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media) wrote:

In the middle of Poland’s EU Council Presidency, the exhibition shows that the history of German-Polish relations cannot be narrowed to the dark chapter of the crimes of Nazi Germany. For 1000 years, the neighborhood of the two countries was marked by cultural diversity, vivid exchange, and fruitful cooperation.<sup>7</sup>

Further on in the foreword, somewhat for the “other side”, the famous politician and historian Władysław Bartoszewski, in his function as chairman of the scientific advisory board of the exhibition, wrote:

Living next door is the story of many generations. This time [meaning a thousand years] is long enough to realize that we understand our history not only as a series of conflicts, but above all as the history of a community. This community left its mark on our intellectual and cultural heritage. These traces – as Karl Dedecius once aptly stated – are deep and enduring, but forgotten and hidden.<sup>8</sup>

7 *Tür an Tür. Polen – Deutschland. 1000 Jahre Kunst und Geschichte*, ed. Tomasz Torbus and Malgorzata Omilanowska (Köln, 2011), 7 [Translation by GV]. Original: „Mitten in der EU-Ratspräsidentschaft Polens zeigt die Ausstellung, dass sich die Geschichte der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen nicht auf das dunkle Kapitel der Verbrechen des nationalsozialistischen Deutschlands verengen lässt. 1000 Jahre lang war die Nachbarschaft der beiden Länder geprägt von kultureller Vielfalt, lebendigem Austausch und fruchtbarer Zusammenarbeit.“

8 *Ibid.*, 9–10 [Translation: GV]. Original: „[...] Tür an Tür, leben, ist die Geschichte vieler Generationen. Diese Zeit [tousand years] ist lang genug, um zu begreifen, dass wir unsere

Even the small selection of different voices (*Blütenlese*) presented here will better sensitizes us to an important fact: The limiting of the history of relations for two large, coexisting cultures to merely their recent history narrows the view unnecessarily to just the very painful and dreadful experiences of the twentieth century.

It was this insight that gave rise to the idea for the planned volume, with most of the texts dealing with stereotypes and mutual perceptions of the 'other' by German and Polish historiographers throughout the Middle Ages (i.e. in this case from the 10th up to the 15th centuries) accompanied by a couple of other contributions reflecting on the same topic, but for other European regions. There is a serious gap in and *desideratum* for this research field about the medieval period because these types of studies are very rare.<sup>9</sup> Admittedly, we are not saying that there are already numerous studies devoted to this topic as it relates to Modernity, but at minimum there are plenty of shorter studies and also extensive scholarly dissertations on the stereotypes and mutual perception of Poles and Germans for the modern period.<sup>10</sup> However, there is

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Historie nicht ausschließlich als eine Abfolge von Konflikten verstehen, sondern vor allem als die Geschichte einer Gemeinschaft. Diese Gemeinschaft hinterließ Spuren in unserem geistigen und kulturellen Erbe. Spuren, die – wie Karl Dedecius einst treffend konstatierte – tief und beständig, aber vergessen und zugeschüttet sind.“

- 9 There are some older compendia on mutual relations in the Middle Ages: *Niemcy – Polska w średniowieczu: materiały z konferencji naukowej zorganizowanej przez Inst. Historii UAM w dniach 14–16 XI 1983 roku* [Germany – Poland in the Middle Ages: materials from a conference organized by the Institut of History of Adam Mickiewicz University, 14–16.11.1983], ed. Jerzy Strzelczyk (Poznań, 1986) – there are several interesting articles, but only the article of Henryk Samsonowicz really reflects on the perception of the Germans towards Poland. *Das Reich und Polen: Parallelen, Interaktionen und Formen der Akkulturation im hohen und späten Mittelalter*, ed. Thomas Wunsch (Ostfildern, 2003) – again: only 4 articles really reflect on the common history: Adam Labuda, Tomasz Jurek, Mieczysław Markowicz, Thomas Wunsch. The other 12 articles may be regarded as translation/explanation of already established Polish research results for German readers. Jerzy Strzelczyk, "Deutsch-polnische Schicksalgemeinschaft in gegenseitigen Meinungen im Mittelalter," in *Mittelalter – eines oder viele?/Średniowiecze – jedno czy wiele?*, ed. Sławomir Moździoch, Wojciech Mrozowicz, and Stanisław Rosik (Wrocław, 2010), 111–126 – this text is quite general and treats the problem in a very sketchy manner. Two books of Andrzej Pleszczyński, *The Birth of a Stereotype. Polish Rulers and their Country in German Writings c. 1000 A.D.* (Boston-Leiden, 2011); and: *Przekazy niemieckie o Polsce i jej mieszkańcach w okresie panowania Piastów* [German accounts of Poland and tis inhabitants during the reign of the Piast Dynasty] (Lublin, 2016), concern only the German perception of Poles in the Middle Ages and the scope of their analysis ends in the fourteenth century.
- 10 *Wokół stereotypów Niemców i Polaków* [Around the stereotypes of Germans and Poles], ed. Wojciech Wrzesiński (Wrocław, 1993); Tomasz Szarota, *Niemcy i Polacy. Wzajemne*

as well a clear imbalance between the historical research on German stereotypes about Poles versus the other way around (the Polish research is wider and deeper). This disproportion is even greater if we consider works related to the Middle Ages. Nor is it compensated for by studies on medieval literature and the opinions found in them.<sup>11</sup>

The deficiencies and imbalances in the studies of the mutual perception of these two large European nations in an important period of the birth of the literary and scientific traditions of both nations is a topic worthy of further attention even beyond the studies collected in this volume.

When speaking of stereotypes, we must consider two important and seemingly opposite pairings: 'Own/self' and 'others' are central terms in the discourse about stereotypes. Research in recent decades shows clearly that the perception of 'otherness' tells us quite a lot about the construction of the 'self'.<sup>12</sup> The assigning of stereotypes to others, therefore, only functions on the basis of an actual interdependence of 'self' – 'others', as the German literature scholar Alois Wierlacher rightly states.<sup>13</sup> It would certainly be wrong – specifically and especially for medieval history – to fall back on monolithic and static models,

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*postrzeganie i stereotypy* [Germans and Poles. Mutual perception and stereotypes] (Warszawa, 1996).

- 11 For example, it can be mentioned here: Robert F. Arnold, *Geschichte der deutschen Polenliteratur*, vol. 1: Von den Anfängen bis 1800 (Osnabrück, 1900, repr. 1966), this publication collects information rather superficially; similarly: Hasso von Zitzewitz, *Das deutsche Polenbild in der Geschichte: Entstehung – Einflüsse – Auswirkungen* (Köln, 1991); better but still fragmentary are: *Deutsche Polenliteratur*, ed. Gerard Koziellek/ Gerhard Kossellek (Wrocław, 1991); Arno Will, *Kobieta polska w wyobraźni społeczeństw niemieckiego obszaru językowego od XIV do lat trzydziestych XX wieku* [A Polish woman in the imagination of the societies of the German-speaking area from the 14th to the 1930s] (Wrocław, 1983); or: Paul M. Langner, *Annäherung ans Fremde durch sprachliche Bilder: Die Region Polen und ihre Ritter in Dichtungen des Hochmittelalters* (Berlin, 2018); and older: Andrzej F. Grabski, *Polska w opiniach obcych X–XIII w.* [Poland in the opinion of foreigners 10th–13th cc.] (Warszawa, 1964); id., *Polska w opiniach Europy Zachodniej XIV–XV w.* [Poland in the opinion of Western Europe 14th–15th century] (Warszawa, 1968).
- 12 Elisabeth Ganseforth, *Das Fremde und das Eigene: Methoden – Methodologie – Diskurse in der soziologischen Forschung* (Aachen, 2016). For the state of the art in medieval research cf. the introduction of Volker Scior, *Das Eigene und das Fremde. Identität und Fremdheit in den Chroniken Adams von Bremen, Helmolds von Bosau und Arnold von Lübeck* (Berlin, 2002).
- 13 *Das Fremde und das Eigene*, ed. Alois Wierlacher (München, 1985); Alois Wierlacher and Corinna Albrecht, "Kulturwissenschaftliche Xenologie," in *Konzepte der Kulturwissenschaften: theoretische Grundlagen – Ansätze – Perspektiven*, ed. Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning, 5th ed. (Stuttgart, 2008), 280–306.



as found, for example, in Johann Gottfried Herder's conception of the issue when in 1791 he asked:

Which people are there on earth who do not have their own culture?"

He continues: "[...] the most natural state is therefore a people with a national character. For millennia, this [...] remains the same.<sup>14</sup>

According to this view, known today as Herder's *Kugelmodell* (sphere-model), each nation experiences bliss in its own culture, in peaceful coexistence with other peoples, yet it holds an unmistakable danger in itself, because it requires a clear culturally defined labelling of distinct peoples and nations. The social scientist Armin Triebel, therefore, warned in an article in 2012 that: "Cultures are not available for our observation as finished objects. Who the self is and who the others are, results from reciprocal processes of perceptions and collective identity formation."<sup>15</sup> He speaks of "intermediate spaces", which can easily be overlooked, if one does not see the 'own' and the 'other' as alternatives and in constant change relative to one another. If one spent his childhood in the Late Middle Ages in Poland, his student years in Paris and began his early career in Germany, he already has several layers of identities, even though he might have returned in his later years to Poland to serve at the court of the Polish king. It is precisely this that must be taken into consideration when viewing most of the medieval chroniclers and writers.

We know this, for example, about Jan of Czarnkau, the vice-chancellor of the Polish king Casimir III and one of the most important historiographers of Poland in the second half of the 14th century. He first served for many years as chancellor for the bishop of Schwerin in Mecklenburg/Germany. Did he feel one hundred per cent 'Polish' or possibly a little bit 'German' as well? That leads to the question: what, in this case, did 'German' mean at all? There might be different parameters to a national labelling; one of the most important factors in that discourse would seem to be the language. In an essay by Michael Wolffsohn, which was published in the summer of 2017 in the Berlin *Tagesspiegel* (a widely recognized newspaper in Germany) as part of a series

14 J.G. Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 2. Vols. (Berlin/Weimar 1784/91, repr. 1965), vol. 1, 8 and 368 [Transl. GV]. Original: „Welches Volk der Erde ist's, das nicht eigene Kultur habe?“, „[...] der natürlichste Staat ist also auch ein Volk, mit einem Nationalcharakter. Jahrtausendelang erhält sich dieser in ihm [...].“

15 Armin Triebel, "Autonomie der Kultur und internationale Politik," in *WIKA-Report 1* (2012): 73, with reference to Georg Elwert, "Deutsche Nation," in *Handwörterbuch zur Gesellschaft Deutschlands*, ed. Bernhard Schäffers (Bonn, 2001), 123–134.

in the newspaper dealing with the question "What is German?", he places far more emphasis on the dynamics and changeability of all parameters involved (geography, theology, economics, sociology, culture, etc.) rather than on the stability and static state of the same parameters.<sup>16</sup> But in terms of language, he emphasizes a certain degree of stability and cited the American political scientist Karl W. Deutsch, who saw a nation as a "community of communication." This model is referring not only to the spoken language but also to a set of non-verbal common rituals and customs in a given culture.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the spoken language plays a major role.

Using that linguistic element as a criterion for distinguishing modern nations seems quite reasonable in so far as it finds its equivalent in the medieval period (at least for the High and Late Middle Ages).<sup>18</sup> It should be pointed out that in Polish the Germans are called "Niemcy". – The historical etymology points to "niemy", in English: "dumb or mute". That significance should not be underestimated: It means that the Poles once looked at the Germans as persons with whom they could not communicate.<sup>19</sup> That seems to be the reason for the Polish saying: "Jak świat światem nie będzie Niemiec Polakowi bratem" [As long as the world exists, a German will never be a brother to a Pole].<sup>20</sup> And indeed, the growing negative atmosphere in Poland against the Germans in the 13th century was caused by the difference in language in various contexts: church Masses were read in German, priests were trained in German, and so on. At this same time, we should not forget that a large influx of Germans into Poland took place (at the invitation of especially the Silesian princes).

16 Michael Wolffsohn, "Deutsch à la carte," in *Tagesspiegel*, Nr. 23147 (17.06.2017), 5.

17 Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication. An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge/London, 1962), 96–100; id., *Nationenbildung, Nationalstaat, Integration, aus dem Amerikanischen übersetzt von Norman Gonzales*, Düsseldorf, 1972, 204.

18 Joachim Ehlers, "Was sind und wie bilden sich *nationes* im mittelalterlichen Europa (10.–15. Jahrhundert)? Begriff und allgemeine Konturen," in *Mittelalterliche nationes, neuzeitliche Nationen. Probleme der Nationenbildung in Europa*, ed. Almut Bues and Rex Rexheuser (Wiesbaden, 1995), 7–26.

19 Idzi Panic, *Zachodniostowiańska nazwa „Niemcy” w świetle źródeł średniowiecznych* [The West Slavic name "Germany" in the light of medieval sources] (Katowice, 2007), 133–152.

20 Cf. Barbara Rodziewicz, "Póki świat światem, nie będzie Niemiec Polakowi bratem – językowy stereotyp Niemca (model archaiczny)" [As long the world is the world, a German will not be a brother to a Pole – the linguistic stereotype of a German (archaic model)], *Annales Neophilologiarum* 3, 2009, 129–35; also: Gerard Labuda, "Geneza przysłowia 'Jak świat światem nie będzie Niemiec Polakowi bratem,'" [The origin of the proverb 'As long the world is the world, a German will not be a brother to a Pole'] in *Polsko-niemieckie rozmowy o przeszłości* ed. id. (Poznań, 1996), 98–111.

These new settlers (in the countryside and in the cities) had a privileged legal position – in Krakow and Wroclaw they soon made up a large portion of the population. Although such privileges were natural for new settlers because they had to be attracted somehow, this caused a first “national” consciousness in Poland – masses were to be read in Polish, the “German element” (in the monasteries, for instance) was reduced intentionally, etc. The Gniezno archbishop, Jakób Świnka, († 1314) was a major player in this series of decisions.<sup>21</sup>

How do medievalists look on the ‘self’/‘other’-discourse (now that we have presented some modern views above)? In order to find answers, Volker Scior’s dissertation is very helpful, bearing the title “Das Eigene und Fremde. Identität und Fremdheit in den Chroniken Adams von Bremen, Helmolds von Bosau und Arnolds von Lübeck“ (“The ‘Own’ and the ‘Foreign’. Identity and Strangeness in the Chronicles of Adam of Bremen, Helmold of Bosau and Arnold of Lübeck”). He stresses the point that in medieval studies there is no clear research consensus on ‘own’ and ‘foreign’, but it is nevertheless clear that ‘foreign’ always has its pivot point in ‘non-foreign’.<sup>22</sup> In recent research, emphasis is therefore placed broadly on the medieval ‘writer’ (and his community). This means you get a more accurate picture of the author’s attitude toward his described objects. Every medieval author and his construction of the ‘other’ (in Scior’s conclusion) is unique to himself and therefore must be analyzed individually. Even just the geographical location of the writing creates differences: A German chronicler in Gdansk writing about the Poles very likely had many more contacts with Poles than an author sitting in Vienna – the former’s picture of the Poles being more precise and detailed than the latter’s. The concrete time period of the writing makes another difference: Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa’s verdict on this in her very helpful article “Poglądy polskich kronikarzy średniowiecznych na Niemcy i stosunki polsko-niemieckie” (“Medieval Polish Chroniclers’ Attitudes Towards Germans and Polish-German Relationships”),<sup>23</sup> is clear; she writes that each generation of medieval writers had its own experience with the neighbor. The authors’ attitudes developed unconsciously, often driven by stereotypes in the

21 Jerzy Strzelczyk, “Die Deutschen in Polen im Mittelalter,” in *Identitäten und Alteritäten der Deutschen in Polen in historisch-komparatistischer Perspektive*, ed. Markus Krzoska and Isabel Röskau-Rydel (München, 2007), 36–37.

22 Scior, *Das Eigene und das Fremde*, 10.

23 Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa, “Poglądy polskich kronikarzy średniowiecznych na Niemcy i stosunki polsko-niemieckie,” [Views of Polish medieval chroniclers on Germany and Polish-German relations] in *Wokół stereotypów Niemców i Polaków*, ed. Wojciech Wrzesiński (Wrocław, 1993), 15–72, at 15.

cultural memory of the respective nation.<sup>24</sup> People even today remember old medieval legends: for instance, in Poland there is the legend of Wanda and the German tyrant/emperor, which first appears in Vincent Kadlubek's chronicle on the Poles (around 1205).<sup>25</sup> An unnamed German emperor tries to conquer Poland but is, like all of his men, struck by the beauty of the Polish princess Wanda and then suddenly loses any ambition to subjugate her country. He asks his men to submit to Wanda and even commits suicide to make it easier for them to switch allegiances. This resembles modern national stereotypes: The strong German aggressor and the weak but pretty Polish lady, who dominates over physical aggression through her beauty.

'Germans/Germany' and 'Poles/Poland' – At what stage exactly may we apply these supra-regional, umbrella-like labels in the Middle Ages to ethnic groups actually living together in regional communities (e.g. Saxons, Silesians etc.)? They themselves had undergone different levels of development just back in the 9th/10th centuries, progressing from tribal structures to small principalities and tending to keep their regional identities (through customs, laws etc.). For the 'national level' we need to differentiate between labels coming from outside and the perception of identity from inside. Scholars such as Carlrichard Brühl, Jean-Marie Moeglin or Joachim Ehlers<sup>26</sup> clearly show for the German side that the heirs of the Frankish Empire – France and Germany – became concretely tangible as entities around 1025 (with the Salian dynasty). Very importantly, these supra-regional collective names served writers and observers from outside, making it easier to grasp a larger entity than when applied from inside. Obviously, only a very elitist circle of the highest nobility within these new state constructions had a notion of being e.g., 'Germans'. Especially in the case of the Holy Roman Empire, the kings and emperors also had to integrate the Burgundian and Italian parts of the Empire as well, which

24 Cf. Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity," in *Social Movements and Culture*, eds. Hank Johnston and Bert Kladersmans (London, 1995), 41–64.

25 Cf. Jacek Banaszkiewicz, "Rüdiger von Bechelaren którego, nie chciała Wanda. Przyczynek do kontaktu niemieckiej Heldenepik z polskimi dziejami bajecznymi" [Rüdiger von Bechelaren whom Wanda did not want. A contribution to the contact of the German Heldenepik with Polish fabulous history], *Przegląd Historyczny* 75 (1984), 239–247.

26 Carlrichard Brühl, "Die Anfänge der Deutschen Geschichte." in *Sitzungsberichte der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main* 10 (Frankfurt am Main, 1972), 147–181, 173; Carlrichard Brühl, *Deutschland-Frankreich. Die Geburt zweier Völker* (Köln-Wien, 1995); Jean-Marie Moeglin, "Die historiographische Konstruktion der Nation: 'Französische Nation' und 'deutsche Nation' im Vergleich," in *Deutschland und der Westen Europas im Mittelalter*, ed. Joachim Ehlers (Stuttgart, 2002), 353–377; Joachim Ehlers, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Reiches*, 3rd ed. (München 2010).

made a specific and solely German identification harder to develop. In the Polish case, the habilitation of Andrzej Pleszczyński from 2008 (translated into English in 2011) sums up the state of the research on early Polish identity to that point.<sup>27</sup> A similar sequence as to what manifested in Germany becomes visible in Poland: Regional communities from Lesser Poland, Silesia, Pomerania or Masovia, came into being during an earlier period, and then gradually from 963 onward they were subjugated by the Piast princes and incorporated into Greater Poland (namely by Mieszko I and Boleslav I). As a consequence, we can identify references to Poland in the early 11th century. Once again, we are dealing most of the time with very scarce source material such as short notes in annals, which gives us only an idea of the perception and self-identification of Polish nobles within the Polish population at that time. But at least we can state that at the beginning of the 11th century a notion arose of a larger unity that encompassed more than merely regional levels in the given countries. This happened well before the creation of most of the written records that serve here as sources for our inquiry.

It would be, in any case, a major fault to think too 'block-like' (here the Holy Roman Empire, there Poland). Naturally some national juxtapositions and comparisons can be found for the texts of the 10th–15th centuries, but the references to either 'region', or certain 'social groups' (knights, merchants, nobles) or 'individuals' (kings, archbishops etc.) in the narrations of the historiographical texts outweigh definitely the judgments of the writers about the other's nation. This is an aspect which has been surprisingly not clearly enough expressed or differentiated in many modern studies on the topic. Too often academics look through their own (nationally tinted) glasses rather than through the eyes of the medieval writers. We have to remember: Frequently in the Middle Ages, national-collective appellations were imposed first from the outside, as when Pope Gregory VII (at the time of the investiture dispute with Henry IV) spoke about the emperor for the first time as of the 'German king' (*rex Teutonicorum*)<sup>28</sup> – German chroniclers up to this time had not done so, because obviously they did not perceive themselves in that national way in the 11th century (as mentioned above). The regional link and identification

27 Andrzej Pleszczyński, *Niemcy wobec pierwszej monarchii piastowskiej (963–1034): narodziny stereotypu; postrzeganie i cywilizacyjna klasyfikacja władców Polski i ich kraju* (Lublin, 2008); and its translated and corrected edition: Id., *The birth of a stereotype: Polish rulers and their country in German writings c. 1000 A. D.* (Leiden, 2011).

28 Cf. Lutz von Padberg, "Unus populus ex diversis gentibus. Gentilismus und Einheit im früheren Mittelalter," in *Der Umgang mit dem Fremden in der Vormoderne. Studien zur Akkulturation in bildungshistorischer Sicht*, ed. Christoph Lüth (Köln, 1997), 155–193, 158.

were much stronger for most persons in the Middle Ages, which the studies of Herbert Ludat clearly show for the Northeast-German-Polish contact zone (using information on the interactions between the Ekkardiner, as the dominant noble family in the 11th century in eastern Germany, and the Piasts) and as well the studies by Sławomir Gawlas or Tomasz Jurek of the Silesian perception of 'own' and 'other'.<sup>29</sup> One last aspect within this issue: Narrations about individuals of the other's nation should under no circumstances be transferred one-to-one to a notion of the entire 'other' nation or the entire people. Upon closer inspection, some of those narrations can be unmasked as colored by personal sympathies or antipathies. If for instance Thietmar, the Bishop of Merseburg (and also a famous chronicler), in the early 11th century portrays a predominantly negative image of the Piast prince Bolesław I,<sup>30</sup> then this is mainly due to the fact that Bolesław Chrobry (the brave) cooperated closely with the noble family of the Ekkardiners – a relationship made more intense through numerous marriage connections. The Counts von Walbeck, a family from which Thietmar himself stemmed, were clearly disadvantaged by these marital politics, for they were active in the same area. His negative image of the Polish king can be and was often easily mistaken for a national dislike of the Poles.

To speak of nations, regions, groups or individuals (with their *habitus*) means in all of the cases that one is referring to units which were linked by *cultural* similarities and behavior. Researchers working on these different units tend to form rigid categories that allow them to analyze and differentiate these units clearly from each other. But in recent years, the concept of cultural transfer has been the subject of many debates within historical research.<sup>31</sup> 'What constitutes culture at all?' – was asked. Would it not be better to understand it

29 Herbert Ludat, *An Elbe und Oder um das Jahr 1000: Skizzen zur Politik des Ottonenreiches und der slavischen Mächte in Mitteleuropa* (Köln, 1971); Sławomir Gawlas, "Ślązacy w oczach własnych i cudzych. Uwagi o powstaniu i rozwoju regionalnej tożsamości w średniowieczu," [Silesians in the eyes of their own and others. Notes on the emergence and development of regional identity in the Middle Ages] in *Ślązacy w oczach własnych i obcych*, ed. Antoni Barciak (Katowice, 2010), 41–67; Tomasz Jurek, "Między Polską, Niemcami i Czechami. Średniowieczny Śląsk i jego kultura," [Between Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic. Medieval Silesia and its culture] in *Tradycje śląskiej kultury muzycznej XIV* 1, ed. Anna Granat-Janka (Wrocław, 2017), 39–60.

30 E.g. *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon* v/10, MGH SSrG. N.S. 9, 204. See also: Ludat, *An Elbe und Oder*, 18.

31 Cf. Michel Espagne, "Der theoretische Stand der Kulturtransferforschung," in *Kulturtransfer: Kulturelle Praxis im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolfgang Schmale (Innsbruck, 2003), 63–76 – with further literature.

dynamically rather than statically? How could it even be transferred into other regions or periods? Meaning: How might we measure and grasp culture at all? A glance into a major German encyclopedia makes it clear that at the least, the term 'culture' is used quite broadly:

A creation produced by people at certain times and in enclosed regions on the basis of the abilities provided them for dealing with the environment and shaping it by their actions in theory and practice (language, religion [myth], ethics, institutions, state, politics, law, crafts, technology, art, philosophy and science).<sup>32</sup>

With such a diversity and variability, how can one dare to identify even the *transfer* of culture? Michel Espagne's general definition may help here:

We start with the notion that cultural areas are not independent entities, but rather that their respective identities are the result of a multitude of interwoven threads. This working hypothesis naturally also has political implications. It culminates at the point where one has to emphasize the dimension of the 'foreign' in what is one's 'own', and in my case this is French cultural history. The 'foreign' and the 'own' are not complementary moments, but essentially identical moments of a single historical construct.<sup>33</sup>

He continues elsewhere: "The model of cultural transfer as an alternative to simple comparisons presupposes that the social carriers of cultural import are to be especially researched. These include, for example, the social groups that moved between Germany and France, artisans,

32 "Kultur," in *Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon* 14 (Mannheim, 1975), 437 [transl. GV]. Original citation: „Das von Menschen zu bestimmten Zeiten in abgrenzbaren Regionen aufgrund der ihnen vorgegebenen Fähigkeiten in Auseinandersetzung mit der Umwelt und ihrer Gestaltung in ihrem Handeln in Theorie und Praxis Hervorgebrachte (Sprache, Religion [Mythos], Ethik, Institutionen, Staat, Politik, Recht, Handwerk, Technik, Kunst, Philosophie und Wissenschaft)."

33 Espagne, "Kulturtransfer – Podiumsgespräch," in *Kulturtransfer*, ed. Schmale, 15. Original citation: "Wir gehen davon aus, dass die Kulturräume keine eigenständigen Größen sind, sondern dass ihre jeweilige Identität das Ergebnis einer Vielzahl von Verflechtungen ist. Diese Arbeitshypothese hat natürlich auch eine politische Tragweite. Sie läuft darauf hinaus, im Eigenen, also in meinem Fall in der französischen Kulturgeschichte, die Dimension des Fremden zu betonen. Fremdes und Eigenes sind nicht ergänzende Momente, sondern im Grunde identische Momente eines einzigen historischen Konstrukts."

musicians, soldiers, wine merchants, bankers, high school teachers. In addition to social groups, books, sometimes complete libraries, are also to be understood as carriers of foreign cultural assets."<sup>34</sup>

These statements on cultural transfer blend fairly well with the issue as discussed above, namely, that the medieval authors in particular must be investigated and discussed in order to understand their perception.

To sum up: The mutual perceptions of (mainly) Germans and Poles in the Middle Ages in the eyes of medieval authors (chroniclers, authors of hagiographic texts, poets) has seldom been researched in the past and they form a *desideratum*. This volume consciously tries to create a counterpart to the modern period (which has been covered much better in this regard); our goal is to fill in the gaps. In order to do so in a proper way and to provide a certain level of comparability, the editors have added to the main body of texts on the German-Polish perception-contributions articles (see the first section: *Georg Jostkleigrew*, *Isabelle Chwalka*, *David Kalhous*) that deal as well with the views towards the Germans of the medieval authors from England, France and Bohemia (the other neighbors of the Holy Roman Empire). The first article in this section (*Kristin Skottki*), within this set of 'wider articles', serves as a introduction to the whole issue in focusing on the Holy Land and the perception of (religious) 'otherness' during the crusades. These four articles serve generally, as mentioned above, to compare structural patterns of 'otherness'/'othering' to the German-Polish case. In the second and third section six contributions (*Andrzej Pleszczyński*, *Stawomir Gawlas*, *Roman Michałowski*, *Volker Scior*, *Norbert Kersken*, *Stephan Flemmig*) are offered as to the direct mutual perception of Germans and Poles in the medieval period in hagiographical and historiographical sources. In addition, in the third section we also shift from specifically historical sources to literary sources, with two authors (*Paul Martin Langner*, *Florian Schmid*) focusing on German medieval epics and poems and the views of the Poles contained in them. A fourth section connects five studies (*Wojciech Mrozowicz*, *Grischa Vercamer*, *Adam Szweda*,

34 Espagne, "Der theoretische Stand," 64. Original citation: „Das Modell des Kulturtransfers als Alternative zum einfachen Vergleich setzt voraus, dass die sozialen Träger des Kulturimports besonders zu untersuchen sind. Darunter versteht man beispielsweise die sozialen Gruppen, die zwischen Deutschland und Frankreich pendeln, Kunsthandwerker, Musiker, Soldaten, Weinhändler, Bankiers, Gymnasiallehrer. Neben den sozialen Gruppierungen sind auch Bücher, manchmal vollständige Bibliotheken als Träger fremder Kulturgüter zu verstehen."



*Marcin Starzyński, Piotr Okniński*) on regional German-Polish contact zones in the Middle Ages (Silesia, Prussia, and examples of a town with both German and Polish residents: Kraków). In a fifth section one contribution (*Jarochna Dąbrowska-Burkhardt*) reflects on national stereotypes in the modern period between German and Poles to give some theoretical and modern background to the medieval material. There is one concluding reflection (*Thomas Wunsch*) serving as a final summary and theoretical overview of the presented material.