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# Jan Stanisław Bystroń's “Old Easter traditions”

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**Abstract:** For many years, the view prevailed that *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* [Old Easter traditions] was the first ethnographic study by Jan Stanisław Bystroń. Published in the journal *Wiedza* in 1905, it was considered to be the harbinger of a future scientific career of the young schoolboy from Cracow. My central point is that not only has the title of the periodical in which the text appeared been determined incorrectly, but also the authorship has been erroneously attributed to Bystroń. I demonstrate how both of these mistakes came into being, and call attention to two factors which have determined the perpetuation of these false beliefs.

**Keywords:** history of Polish ethnography; Jan Stanisław Bystroń

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Polish humanities have long mentioned an ethnographic study by Jan Stanisław Bystroń (1892–1964) that was allegedly published as early as 1905. In the introduction to a famous selection of Bystroń's works, *Tematy, które mi odradzano. Pisma etnograficzne rozproszone*, Ludwik Stomma makes the following remark:

Being thirteen years old, Jan Stanisław publishes his first academic study *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* [Old Easter traditions]. The boy, advanced for his age, became enthralled with the taste of the Old Polish customs, he read a bit here and there and wrote something himself... Such things happen and do not mean anything. However, if we add that the next study penned by Bystroń was a bibliography of academic studies dedicated to Cieszyn Silesia, we get a clear picture (Stomma, 1980b, p. 10).

The selection also features a *Bibliography of the most significant works by J. S. Bystroń*. Compiled by Stomma, it mentions *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne*, published in the *Wiedza* periodical in 1905, page 49, as the first study by Bystroń (Stomma, 1980a, p. 470).

Anna Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa also confirmed this fact: “The first ethnographical article by a high school student, Jan Bystroń, described as the younger, was published in print in *Wiedza* as early as 1905 and concerned old Easter traditions” (Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa, 1977, p. 57). She actually repeated the same thing several years later: “He published his first minor works on folklore, however, as Jan Bystroń Jr. in 1905 and 1910, already after the death of his grandfather (in 1898)” (Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa, 1986, p. 312).

Surprisingly, Włodzimierz Winclawski was not immune from repeating this information either:

When in mid-1910 Jan S. Bystroń started his studies at the Faculty of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University “with a view to study pure philosophy and Polish literature,” he could pride himself on ethnographic publications in *Wiedza* (1905) and *Lud* (1910), as well as

journalistic publications in youth magazines of the [patriotic underground] Zet movement (Winclawski, 1993, p. 8).

The same fact is also recorded in Winclawski's monumental *Słownik biograficzny socjologii polskiej* [The biographical dictionary of Polish sociology]: "As a high school student, he published short ethnographical studies (*Wiedza, Złanie Śląskie, Lud*) and programmatic texts and polemics in youth magazines (*Znicz, Łan Młodzieży*)" (Winclawski, 2001, p. 73). Nevertheless, in the entry dedicated to Bystróż and including the bibliography of his works, Winclawski did not list the article (or other short publications in the above-mentioned magazines), since, by principle, the dictionary was to enumerate exclusively texts in sociology, in some cases supplemented with literature in related fields (Winclawski, 2001, pp. XIII, 76–78).

The information about the early piece by the Polish polyhistor is also provided by Robert Dziecielski, whose study encompasses an extensive biographical note about Bystróż, based on archival sources, among other things: "The first ethnographical article of a high-school student, aged thirteen, by the name of J. S. Bystróż was published in print in 1905 and concerned Easter traditions (*Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne*)" (Dziecielski, 2001, p. 19). A different fact concerning the beginnings of Bystróż's literary work was recorded by Wiesław Bieńkowski in a biographical note published in the first volume of *Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy* [Polish ethnographers and folklorists]. He wrote there that the future ethnographer "made a debut as a writer" in the *Łan Młodzieży* bi-weekly (1909–1910),<sup>1</sup> but did not address the authorship of *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* (Bieńkowski, 2002, p. 29). A study by Sław Krzemień-Ojak also deserves to be mentioned, which justifiably includes Bystróż in the circle of "authorities in the Polish Human Sciences," while remarking the following with respect to his early attempt: "At the age of thirteen, Jan Stanisław publishes his first ethnographical text, *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne*" (Krzemień-Ojak, 2007, pp. 209–210).

There are more writers who repeat the information about the early work by Bystróż. In spite of that, I claim that the information about the text *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* having been published by Bystróż in *Wiedza* in 1905 is not correct. It contains two errors.

## Error one

This one is easier to identify. Bystróż did not publish his article in *Wiedza*. The very information about the existence of such periodical is a result of mistaken interpretation of an entry made in *Bibliografia ludoznawstwa polskiego* [Bibliography of Polish folklore studies] by Franciszek Gawełek, which features several references to Jan Bystróż. Gawełek was right in separating the work of the father, who died in 1902. He attributed

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to express his gratitude to an anonymous reviewer, who pointed him to this fragment in the study by W. Bieńkowski.

two studies to Jan Stanisław – to whom he referred as “Jan Bystron Jr. [młodszy]”: “2527. Bystron Jan. Gaiczek śląski. Lud XVI, 98. 2528. Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne. Wiedza 1905, s. 49” (Gawełek, 1914, pp. 91, 273).

While the text of *Gaiczek śląski* [The Silesian maypole] published in the more widely circulating *Lud* was easier to obtain by scholars, the article *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* was more difficult to access. In their attempts to identify the oldest works by Bystron, the scholars who used the study by Gawełek referred only to the indexes and the above-quoted description. Unfortunately, in the bibliography by Gawełek, only an abbreviated version of this reference was published. In order to decode the full version, one would have to refer to the list of magazines featuring on pages XVII–XXXVI of the same bibliography. The magazine which published *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* is presented in more detail there: “*Wiedza i praca*. Dodatek do *Rodziny i szkoły*. Pismo poświęcone szerzeniu i popularyzowaniu wiedzy. Lwów 1903–1909, t. 7” [Knowledge and work. Supplement to *Family and school*. A periodical dedicated to the dissemination and popularization of knowledge. Lviv 1903–1909, vol. 7] (Gawełek, 1914, p. XXXV).

The failure to identify the proper title of the magazine resulted in scholars being convinced that Bystron published his text in *Wiedza*. Unable to find the text titled *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* in this magazine, they contended themselves with repeating the abridged information, erroneously obtained from Gawełek’s bibliography.

## Error two

It may appear an easy task to find the text by Jan Bystron Jr. on the basis of information included in the indexes, biographical note and list of magazines compiled by Gawełek. Indeed, the study *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* was published in *Wiedza i Praca*, a supplement to *Rodzina i szkoła*, issue no. 7/8 of April 1905. However, it is not attributed to Jan Stanisław Bystron, but to Ładziław Borzywojowicz (Borzywojowicz, 1905). Additionally, another version of the same text (under the same title and authorship; differences between the two versions are negligible) was published in *Kurjer Warszawski* one year earlier (Borzywojowicz, 1904). The alias Ładziław Borzywojowicz was used by journalist Władysław Korotyński (Jankowski, 1994, p. 290; Szwejkowski et al., 1973, p. 466; Świerczyńska, 1999, p. 113).

The error committed in the bibliography by Gawełek resulted from the fact that the entry on the work by Jan Bystron Jr. directly followed the information on texts authored by Borzywojowicz, one of which actually also deals with Easter traditions (Gawełek, 1914, p. 91). That a non-intentional error was made finds corroboration in a reference featuring in another publication by Gawełek, where the data is correct: “Borzywojowicz: Dawne zwyczaje Wielkanocne. Wiedza i praca 1905, p. 49” (Gawełek, 1911, p. 25). Another

circumstance worth mentioning concerns the fact that Gawełek arranged the entries about a single author in the chronological order; in the case of Bystroń, however, a later study is listed first, followed by an older one, which additionally supports the argument that this was an incidental error.<sup>2</sup>

### **The factors which allowed the erroneous information to persist**

There were at least two reasons why the erroneous information about the authorship of the paper titled *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne* has persisted in academic literature for so long. Firstly, it was confirmed by persons who were close to Bystroń. It appeared in a paper penned after his death by two scholars who knew him well, Kazimierz Dobrowolski and Anna Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa:

According to Professor Antoniewicz, the earliest work printed by Bystroń as a teenage high school student was a journalistic piece dedicated to the issue of women, which was most likely inspired by the interests and social work of his mother. Short pieces on folk traditions were published by Bystroń in *Wiedza* and *Lud* as early as 1905 and 1910 (Dobrowolski & Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa, 1966, p. 17).

The above facts are given in a manner which makes it impossible to discern whether the entire statement comes from Włodzimierz Antoniewicz or only its first part concerning a publication on the issue of women. Antoniewicz was also closely related to Bystroń as his friend and companion of numerous expeditions, which potentially made him a credible source of information. Regardless of whether or not Dobrowolski and Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa informed about Bystroń's publications in *Wiedza* following Antoniewicz, this piece of information ultimately originated from the bibliography by Gawełek, repeating the error he had made.

The second reason why this erroneous piece of information about the article concerned survived so long was that it was never questioned by Bystroń himself. His review of *Bibliografia ludoznawstwa polskiego* enumerates a host of errors, but not the one whereby somebody else's study was attributed to him (Bystroń, 1916).

Translated by Katarzyna Matschi

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<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing his attention to this fact.

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#### „Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne” Jana Stanisława Bystronia

**Abstrakt:** Przez wiele lat utrzymywał się pogląd, że najstarszą pracą etnograficzną Jana Stanisława Bystronia jest artykuł *Dawne zwyczaje wielkanocne*, opublikowany w 1905 roku w czasopiśmie „Wiedza”. Miał stanowić zapowiedź późniejszej kariery naukowej ówczesnego krakowskiego gimnazjalisty. Wskazuję, że nie tylko błędnie określono tytuł periodyku, w którym ów tekst się ukazał, ale także mylnie przypisano autorstwo Bystroniowi. Przedstawiam, w jaki sposób doszło do obu błędów. Zwracam uwagę na dwa czynniki, które wpłynęły na utrzymywanie się tej nieprawdziwej informacji.

**Wyrażenia kluczowe:** historia polskiej etnografii; Jan Stanisław Bystron

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