



Privacy of documents – documents of privacy. Remarks on personal sources in historical and archival studies

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ABSTRACT

The authors set themselves the goal of indicating the places in the archival holdings where texts of a private nature are present. They used the ego-documentary theory developed in European science since the mid-twentieth century. It makes us pay attention to narrative sources (diaries, journals, memoirs, correspondence) in the first place. It also allows you to extract privacy from official sources in which a person is forced to tell the story of his life, express his individuality and identity. Court testimony is of particular importance in this context. It is an important component of the archival holdings, and at the same time the source basis for many fundamental scientific works on the history of the mentality of all social groups, including those marginalized. They notice untapped sources such as CVs (biographies) attached to official files or petitions submitted by private individuals to the authorities. They draw attention to the fact that all archival entities, such as fonds, collections or archive holdings, may be self-documentary in nature. This applies to private archives, but to some extent also official ones. It is a difficult problem to capture the private character of archives in the archival description. The authors indicate the usefulness of creating source and archival studies characteristics of classes of archival sources in terms of the possibility of ego-documentary research.

KEY WORDS

private documents,
document privacy,
ego-documents,
the structure of the
archival holdings,
archival description

Prywatność dokumentów – dokumenty życia prywatnego. Rozważania o źródłach osobowych w badaniach historycznych i archiwalnych

STRESZCZENIE

Autorzy postawili sobie za cel wskazanie miejsc w zasobie archiwalnym, w których obecne są teksty o charakterze prywatnym. Posłużyli się teorią egodokumentalną rozwijaną w nauce europejskiej od połowy XX w. Nakazuje ona w pierwszym rzędzie zwrócić uwagę na źródła narracyjne (pamiętniki, dzienniki, korespondencja). Pozwala również na wychwycenie prywatności ze źródeł urzędowych, w których indywidualna osoba opowiada o swoim życiu, wyraża indywidualność i tożsamość w sposób wymuszony okolicznościami. W tym kontekście szczególnie znaczenie mają zeznania sądowe.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

dokumenty
prywatne,
prywatność
dokumentów,
egodokumenty,
struktura zasobu
archiwalnego, opis
archiwalny

Źródła narracyjne są istotnym elementem zasobu archiwalnego, a jednocześnie podstawą dokumentalną wielu fundamentalnych prac naukowych dotyczących dziejów mentalności wszystkich grup społecznych, również tych marginalizowanych. Badacze dostrzegają niewykorzystane dotąd źródła, takie jak życiorysy dołączane do akt urzędowych czy supliki wnoszone przez osoby prywatne do władz. Zwracają uwagę na fakt, że wszelkie całości archiwalne, takie jak zespoły, zbiory czy zasoby archiwów, mogą mieć charakter egodokumentalny. Dotyczy to wytworów prywatnych, ale w pewnym stopniu również oficjalnych. Trudnym problemem jest uchwycenie prywatnego charakteru archiwaliów w opisie informacyjnym. Autorzy wskazują na pożytek z tworzenia charakterystyk źródłoznawczych i archiwoznawczych całych klas źródeł archiwalnych pod kątem możliwości badań egodokumentalnych.

Opening remarks

In the historiographical tradition, in the analysis of sources based on the classical auxiliary sciences of history, a dominant was played by the oppositions of types of sources: normative and narrative, objective and subjective, public and private. Whereas the former indicated the document's field of study and the objective reality recorded in the message, the latter was more like literature and all the consequences that accompany it – convention, style, creation, subjectivism. The discussion ongoing for several decades in the field of historiography, history of literature and sociology, has ushered in some fundamental changes in the approach to the old, dichotomous opposition. Narrative sources, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, letters, etc. began to be read as ego-documents, self-testimonies, as the literature of a personal document, strongly linking the sources of these concepts with a restoration of historical value, with their documentary nature, with objectifying subjectivism in research¹. The essence of the change was to acknowledge that two functions of the message – literary and historical – must be understood in order for it to be interpreted. Depending on the structure of the text, one of these functions may outweigh the other, but it is the researcher who, in the final interpretation, labels a text as a document (as a source about an epoch, author, event, phenomenon) or as a literary piece (as a work of art, reflecting a convention, style, fashion, individualism of the creator)². It is worth

¹ The purpose of the article is to try to answer questions to what extent an archival resource can be treated as a source for privacy research. In the analysis of the problem, the authors adopt the term ego-document as best reflecting the essence of documents representing the subjective, private world of the source creator.

² R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Style wypowiedzi pamiętnikarskiej*, Kraków 1983, p. 37.

emphasising, however, that the nature of the source and its features should be demonstrated during the analysis, and not indicated *a priori* on the basis of the structure of the text.

Nowadays, a new inclusive approach to various types of personal expression has been gaining traction. On the ruins of the former division between document and literary message rose statements about the need to read literary works (diaries, journals) as documents of a given historical time³. In turn, the concept of a personal document has gained a very broad interpretation – it can be anything that bears traits of subjectivity on the part of the creator of this document⁴.

In historiography, the notion of “ego-document” introduced in 1958 by the Dutch historian Jacob Presser has gone from strength to strength. In our opinion, this concept accurately reflects the essence of tradition and changes in approach to historical sources. First of all, it emphasises the fundamental importance of the source in historical research. Secondly, it recognises the subjectivity of the creator of this source. Thirdly, it acknowledges the author’s right to subjectivism, which does not preclude the documentary nature of a personal statement. And fourthly, it indicates the role of the historian as the one who discovers the individual, the one who seeks the “I”, or “ego”, of the hero in a document from the past.

Discovering the “I” (“Ego”) in historiography

The traditional approach to narrative sources, diaries, letters and journals limited the analysis to selected cases – representative of an epoch, a social group – that historians viewed as the best and most interesting. This approach meant that historiography, while emphasising the personal statements of outstanding thinkers, commanders and rulers, did omit personal messages from other social groups. On the one hand, this phenomenon was perpetuated by the methodology of positivist (classical) historiography; on the other hand, it resulted from the objective mechanics of making inquiries in libraries and archives. Only in exceptional political or social conditions was there any interest in personal sources, messages from a family environment or from the home circle.

³ Z. Ziątek, *Wiek dokumentu. Inspiracje dokumentarne w polskiej prozie współczesnej*, Warszawa 1999, p. 6.

⁴ M. Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie*, Kraków 2000, pp. 13–14.

Publisher of an anthology of Polish diaries from the 16th century, Marian Kaczmarek, emphasised that the importance of diaries stems from the fact that they were written by great leaders, politicians and artists⁵. These historians sought to find some insight into significant events and explanations of important problems in military, political and cultural history. They paid less attention to the authors themselves and the world of their inner experiences. In turn, literary historians treated the autobiographical and diary genre of sources with great criticism, because often these texts did not represent a high artistic level and were far from the main literary styles or conventions of the era. In terms of form, such sources were hybrid in nature, the best example being the thematically and formally diverse *silva rerum* books or the French *livres de raison*⁶. The author himself was of little interest. The authors of diaries and journals were often consigned to the background. What came to the fore were the events they described.

In what circumstances did historiography begin to discover ordinary people lurking in the background of history? The earliest research on this type of domestic and autobiographical sources began in France in the second half of the 19th century. In 1885, household books – *livres de raison* – fell under the umbrella of the Historical and Scientific Research Committee, headed by Jules Ferry. At that time, scholars grew interested in the fact that numerical data on households and household expenses were kept in books. Interest was also aroused by the durability of these books in the ancestral tradition, as the manuscripts handed down from generation to generation testified to a strategy of preserving the memory of family and ancestry.

Historians' interest in household books stemmed from the growing popularity of family values, which became a strong point of reference in France in the 1870s, after the military defeat with Prussia. *Livres de raison* were a natural reservoir of these values described and passed on to successive generations. Examples of ancestral glory, testimonies of the splendor of families, and consequently of the splendor of the French nation, were extracted from archives. The renaissance of domestic writing, previously disregarded by literary scholars, led to regional historians – experts in the archival and library resources of a given region – seeking out this type of source. It is worth recalling the publishers of the first

⁵ *Antologia pamiętników polskich XVI wieku*, ed. M. Kaczmarek, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1966, p. 7.

⁶ About various forms of Old Polish literature see A. Sajkowski, *Nad staropolskimi pamiętnikami*, Poznań 1964 and S. Skwarczyńska, *Wokół teatru i literatury*, Warszawa 1970.

household books: Charles de Ribbé, Philippe Tamizey de Larroque and Louis Guibert.

In the second half of the 19th century, a campaign to publish old manuscripts was also initiated in Poland, which, just as the struggle in France to restore national dignity after defeat at the hands of Prussia, resulted from the need to commemorate the great national tradition in the face of battle against the partitioning powers. Like historical painting or a didactic novel, pulling diaries, journals and letters from archives and libraries served to comfort hearts. Family values, the tradition of successive generations of the nobility became a national value. It is worth noting here another similarity to the situation in France, namely the freedom of publishing rules prevailing at that time, a kind of editorial creativity whereby the source was subordinated to the notion of commemorating ancestors rather than to the fidelity of conveying a message, which resulted in any changes in the arrangement of the content or interference in the message itself. One example of such efforts may be the edition of “Krzysztof Zawisza’s Memoirs”. In 1862, the publisher Julian Bartoszewicz selected fragments of the *silva rerum* book of the Zawisza family and arranged them chronologically. In this way, this *silva rerum* became the printed diary of K. Zawisza. Similarities can also be found in descriptions of this type of sources by librarians and archivists. French home economics books – *livres de raison*, often interfoliated and containing a wealth of private notes written by the owners – were classified as *miscellanea* or *varia*. A similar terminological confusion persisted in the description of noble manuscripts – *silva rerum*. The books themselves, often varied in topic as well as diverse in formal structure, were referred to by the nobility as *vorago rerum* – an abyss of things. For the author, it was more important to define the purpose of keeping private notes than worry about the formal order. Hence, the Latin additions on the title page were more important than the title – *ad subsidium memoriae* (to strengthen memory), *ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* (for the greater glory of God) and *ad posteritatem* (for posterity). Years later, archivists and librarians preparing inventories and catalogues often entered the Polish term *zbiór różności* (miscellaneous collection) or the Latin term *varia* or *miscellanea*, not knowing how to define the handwritten code of the nobility.

It is worth noting at this point that times of war represented a special period when ego-documentary work intensified, which in turn resulted in the deepening of historical research on this type of source. J. Presser, the creator of the term ego-document, conducted his research after World War II on the memoirs of Dutch

Jews⁷. The mass documentation of German crimes during the war was greatly influenced by the summons of Queen, who, before leaving the country, appealed to her subjects to write down all acts that must not be forgotten. Times of crisis and wars were conducive to personal confessions⁸.

Subsequent anniversaries of World War I and World War II heralded returns to diary sources and personal messages in various countries. One excellent example of such publishing initiatives combining memoirs (fragments of diaries and accounts of officers and ordinary soldiers) with a photographic message may be Andrzej Nieuważny's publication about soldiers on the Eastern Front during 1914–1918⁹. In German historiography, the records of soldiers from the time of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) sparked research on this type of communication¹⁰.

New impulses for systematic research based on a new methodology emerged in the 1980s. Let us try to determine their main features using the example of French historiography. Due to the state of preservation of the sources, the nobility became a privileged group in these studies. As François-Joseph Ruggiu writes, the rejection of the dominant paradigms of marxism and structuralism also caused historians to abandon the stratigraphy of social groups determined by analysing the conflicts that divided them internally, which in turn directed researchers towards new areas where individuals would reveal their own ideas about themselves¹¹.

Fresh impetus was provided by inquiries made and meetings held by a team led by Jean-Pierre Bardet and J.F. Ruggiu from the University of Paris-Sorbonne, who were running a project entitled “les écrits du for privé de la fin du Moyen

⁷ R. Dekker, *Jacques Presser's Heritage – egodocuments in the study of history*, “Memoria y Civilisation” 2002, vol. 5, p. 14.

⁸ See comments on Poles displaced during World War II: *Losy Polaków wysiedlonych z Kresów Wschodnich II RP (1944–1945)*, ed. B. Kubis, Opole 2011, pp. 10–35.

⁹ A. Nieuważny, *Zapomniana wojna 1914–1918. Front wschodni*, Warszawa 2016.

¹⁰ B. von Krusenstjern, *Was sind Selbstzeugnisse? Begriffskritische und quellenkundliche Überlegungen anhand von Beispielen aus dem 17. Jahrhundert*, “Historische Anthropologie” 1994, vol. 2, pp. 463–465.

¹¹ E.J. Ruggiu, *L'utilisation de la notion d'identité en histoire sociale*, [in:] *Identité, appartenances, revendications identitaires, XVIe–XVIIIe siècles*, ed. M. Belissa, A. Bellavitis, M. Cottret, L. Croq, J. Duma, Paris 2005, pp. 395–406, see also earlier considerations on the interface between the personal perspective and the perspective of the community: E.J. Ruggiu, *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, agricolae ! ou le journal d'un gentilhomme campagnard au début du XVIIIe siècle*, [in:] *État et société en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, Mélanges offerts à Yves Durand*, Paris 2000, pp. 471–489.

Âge à 1914". The results of the work were subsequent conferences and studies laying out new research fields. The first of them showed the potential of writing produced in the private sphere for opening up the realm of private life and exploring the category of intimacy¹². At the same time, it posed many questions about definition (introduced as basically interchangeable: writing in the private sphere and ego-document) and genre, pointing to the differences between methods of recording impressions in accounting books and diaries. Another book called *Les Écrits du for privé. Objets matériels, objets édités* heralded an attempt to analyse the state of preservation of this type of writing in France¹³. The variety of "genre", the divergence of titles, the multitude of forms, etc. resulted in the fact that to this day, in departmental archives, in collections of family manuscripts, in private libraries, there are many tomes which, albeit with the appearance of a rough draft or a collection of loose notes, turn out to be family books or diaries. This formal diversity makes it difficult not only to identify the genre, to discover the "I" of the author among the notes about personal, family and political life, but also makes it difficult to edit. Sylvie Mouysset's *Papiers de famille* was an attempt to synthesise this specific type of household book writing of a *livres de raison nature*¹⁴. The author analysed about 400 such books from south-western France, examining their relationship with private writing and literature.

The next stage in work on ego-documents was the introduction of a comparative perspective. It turned out that research on the nobility and the elite in many countries underwent similar changes, and the extraction of private sources made it possible to discover the hero of the story not only as a great leader, politician, artist, but also as an ordinary man, accompanied by the worries and joys of everyday life recorded in a household book, diary, or notes¹⁵.

International cooperation initiated by studies on French ego-documents resulted in conferences and three French-German-Italian meetings at Villa Vigoni in Italy between 2013–2015, devoted to cultural transfer and identity from a series entitled *Les écrits à la première personne en Europe de la fin du XVe*

¹² *Au plus près du secret des coeurs? Nouvelles lectures historiques des écrits du for privé*, ed. J. Bardet, F.J. Ruggiu, Paris 2005, pp. 15–28.

¹³ *Les Écrits du for privé. Objets matériels, objets édités*, ed. M. Cassan, J.P. Bardet, F.J. Ruggiu, Limoges 2007, pp. 15–25.

¹⁴ S. Mouysset, *Papiers de famille. Introduction à l'étude des livres de raison (France, XVe–XIXe s.)*, Rennes 2007.

¹⁵ See S. Roszak, *Historia społeczna i historia kulturowa epoki nowożytnej. Doświadczenia oraz perspektywy ukrywania i odkrywania jednostki*, „Historyka” 2017, vol. 47, pp. 77–88.

siècle au XIX siècle. At subsequent meetings, some fundamental questions were raised about the direction of research on ego-documents:

- how memory and history coexist in private writing?, forms of preserving and selecting events, using memory in history, and history in different versions of memory (e.g., memory of institutions and memory of the state);
- the identity of an individual, family or group as the identity of the creators of private writing;
- transcultural spaces: juxtapositions of different types of sources and epochs, an attempt to compare and contrast messages, an indication of what individualism is – understood by Western culture as an effect of modernisation, economic changes, capitalism, an answer to the question whether the growth of individualism determines a growth in autobiographical writing.

As a consequence, studies on ego-documents found their counterparts in other countries – in Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Spain and beyond Europe – and offered an introduction within the field of comparative research¹⁶. Among the many themes and trends, some common topics stand out, such as self-testimony as an expression of social and cultural practice, collective and individual identity and identification, where, when and how ego-documents circulated, memory and time perspectives recorded in “writing in the private sphere”, and the stages of human life in the ego-documents.

Discovering the “I” (“Ego”) in sources

The new proposals that emerged from analysis of autobiographical writing could be treated as a kind of catalyst for historiographic changes, a transition from social to cultural history and finally to the history of mentality. The traditional approach to text as a witness to history, as a source revealing facts, has been replaced by a subjective approach. Autobiography began to be treated as a document with its form and materiality, as a document revealing the person behind it, and sometimes the personality of the creator. Therefore, new terms such as “personal document”, “ego-document”, and “self-writing” appeared in

¹⁶ *Anthologie franco-suisse d'écrits de l'intime (1680–1830). La vie privée au fil de la plume*, ed. M. Figeac, C. Le Mao, Paris 2020. See also the Lithuanian-Polish initiative: *Egodokumenty. Tradycje historiograficzne i perspektywy badawcze*, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, A. Pacevicius, S. Roszak, Toruń 2015.

the discussion, replacing traditional terms related to the history of literature defined as diaries, autobiographies, journals, confessions, etc.¹⁷. Emphasising the documentary character of a personal text enhanced its status. A document was associated with objectivism, as opposed to the subjectivism of a diary, diary or autobiography. The new approach also broke with the linear perception of individualism developing, in terms of traditional historiography, from the personal messages of Teresa of Avila or Michel of Montaigne, through the intimate diaries of the 18th century and to the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau. The history of individualism ceased to be understood as a linear process of self-awareness, individualisation and secularisation, liberation of the individual from the domination of the Church and dependence on the group¹⁸.

Questions arose about the essence of individualism and identity, about the possibility of finding them among various social groups¹⁹ and among various categories of sources²⁰. In a dimension that can be called extensive, historians chartered new territory, known previously in the history of literature as so-called hybrids or particular forms of autobiography²¹.

A theme that often appears in the analysis of private writing is the body. However, while the traditional approach emphasised the perception of the body, the new approach was more concerned with the experience of the body. Classic examples of this trend include a book about the private body in the 18th century²² and the depiction of a man with a cold from the end of the 18th century²³.

¹⁷ See the analysis of these concepts by S. Schmolinsky, *Selbstzeugnisse im Mittelalter*, [in:] *Das dargestellte Ich. Studien zu Selbstzeugnissen des späteren Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. K. Arnold, S. Schmolinsky, U.M. Zahnd, Bochum 1999, pp. 20–25 and J. Amelang, *Saving the Self from Autobiography*, [in:] *Selbstzeugnisse in der Frühen Neuzeit. Individualisierungsweisen in interdisziplinärer Perspektive*, ed. K. von Greyerz, München 2007, pp. 131–139; compare also J. Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe 1500–1800*, Oxford 2017, pp. 18–42.

¹⁸ R. van Dülmen, *Die Entdeckung des Individuums 1500–1800*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, pp. 7–12.

¹⁹ J. Peters, *Mit Pflug und Gänsekiel. Selbstzeugnisse schreibender Bauern. Eine Anthologie*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2003. See also *Schiffbruch! Drei Selbstzeugnisse von Kaufleuten des 17./18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. O. Ulbricht, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2013.

²⁰ E. Kormann, *Ich, Welt und Gott. Autobiographik im 17. Jahrhundert*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2004 and L. Heiligensetzer, *Getreue Kirchendiener – gefährdete Pfarrherren. Deutschschweizer Prädikanten des 17. Jahrhunderts in ihren Lebensbeschreibungen*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2006.

²¹ R.R. Wuthenow, *Das erinnerte Ich. Europäische Autobiographie und Selbstdarstellung im 18 Jh*, München 1974, p. 187.

²² G. Piller, *Private Körper. Spuren des Leibes in Selbstzeugnissen des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2006.

²³ P. Lejeune, *Célestin Guittard, diariste malade*, [in:] *Les écrits du for privé en Europe, du Moyen Age à l'époque contemporaine*, ed. J.P. Bardet, F.J. Ruggiu, E. Arnoul, Bordeaux 2010, pp. 303–314.

An example of turning to sources absent or marginal in the autobiographical discourse, and at the same time an example of these sources being treated subjectively, was a work entitled *The Flight of Icarus*²⁴. James Amelang sought out diaries, journals and personal notes of craftsmen in modern Europe. The eponymous flight of Icarus is a metaphor reflecting the effort and risk taken by the townspeople, who are not always able to cope with matters of the quill and language. J. Amelang showed the diversity of writing among this group, emphasising that the authors sometimes hide behind the third person, behind description of events, avoiding the author's "I". Direct declarations by authors, such as the entry of a young tanner's journeyman from Barcelona, were rare. On 26 March 1626, sixteen-year-old Miguel Parets began making entries in a chronicle about Barcelona, which took the form of diary entries²⁵. For him, the act of writing was an act of courage, like the flight of the mythical Icarus.

The second dimension of research on ego-documents, which could be called intensive, brings questions about how individualism is expressed, with reference to the juxtapositions: individualism–community, subjectivism–objectivism, private sphere–public sphere, uniqueness–typicality. Concepts seemingly similar cannot always be equated, such as privacy and individualism in the case of confessional sources. A pietist's autobiography, although full of individual reflections and emotions, served to join the community, to socialise as part of a collective religious process rather than individualise faith. In Protestant self-testimonies, individual piety turns out to be a set of features typical of confessional piety and astrological practices. In this case, private and individual records become a typical collective message, a certain pattern reflecting a specific piety²⁶.

As recently pointed out by Judith Pollmann, for the modern era, the institutionalised memory of the elites was too valuable to be shared with the lower classes, which of course does not mean that these social strata did not have their own means of preserving memory²⁷. The difference lay in the forms

²⁴ J. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus. Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe*, Stanford 1998. See more S. Roszak, *Od piśmiennictwa przestrzeni prywatnej do Villi Vigoni. Z doświadczeń europejskich zespołów badaczy egodokumentów*, [in:] *Memuarystyka w dawnej Polsce*, red. P. Borek, D. Chemperek, A. Nowicka-Struska, Kraków 2016, s. 11–12.

²⁵ J. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus...*, p. 8.

²⁶ K. von Greyerz, *Einführung*, [in:] *Von der dargestellten Person zum erinnerten Ich. Europäische Selbstzeugnisse als historische Quellen (1500–1850)*, ed. K. von Greyerz, H. Medick, P. Veit, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2001, p. 8.

²⁷ J. Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe...*, pp. 5–7.

of presentation and promotion of this memory. The elite used writing, while the rest bequeathed material objects. However even such a distinction, which is correct in principle, of course does not explain the whole issue. A good example may be the personal notes of craftsmen from Catalonia shown in the aforementioned book by J. Amelang²⁸, as well as sources that mention the so-called hidden “I”. This means texts produced not out of personal need and not for oneself, but out of the necessity due to an administrative, judicial or economic process. We sometimes learn about the “I” hidden in these texts indirectly, thanks to the transmission or recording of third parties. Such types of new ego-documents include court testimonies, interrogation protocols, lawsuits, applications, requests, inquisition files, visitations, and wills²⁹. The research conducted by French historian Robert Muchembled on the basis of so-called *lettres de rémission* (requests for clemency) may be an example of an analysis of this type of message³⁰. Criminals, in writing letters to the king asking for pardon, presented the circumstances and reasons for the crimes committed. Based on the explanations contained in the *lettres de rémission*, the historian witnesses how the world was understood by convicts, as well as ways of self-shaping. Similar research was conducted by Natalie Zemon Davis for the 16th century, stating that requests for clemency contain deliberate fabrications of history and self-expression, albeit via third parties – lawyers writing on behalf of their clients³¹.

A similar phenomenon of “making up stories”, modeling and shaping stories about oneself was discovered by Alexandra Shepard, who conducted research on witness testimonies in cases before diocesan courts in England³². She mainly analysed answers contained in the interrogation questionnaire given in response

²⁸ J. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus...*, pp. 7–8.

²⁹ The examples discussed in this section were analysed earlier by Stanisław Roszak in his work: idem, *Writing in a Private Space. Three Case Studies*, [in:] *Selbstzeugnisse im polnischen und deutschen Schrifttum im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit (15.–18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. R. Skowrońska, H. Flachenecker, R. Czaja, S. Roszak, J. Tandecki, Toruń 2014, s. 20–22, and S. Roszak, *Historia społeczna i historia kulturowa epoki nowożytnej*, „Historyka” 2017, vol. 47, s. 77–88.

³⁰ W. Schulze analyzes this method from the point of view of the anthropology of history, *Ego-dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte?*, [in:] *Von Aufbruch und Utopie. Perspektiven einer neuen Gesellschaftsgeschichte des Mittelalters*, ed. B. Lundt, H. Reinmoller, Köln–Weimar–Wien 1992, pp. 417–450.

³¹ N. Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives. Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France*, Stanford 1987.

³² A. Shepard, *Poverty, Labour and the language of social description in Early modern England*, “Past and Present” 2008, vol. 201, pp. 51–95.

to the question of how much the property of the defendants was worth. Based on 14,000 testimonies, the researcher examined the issue of self-presentation, the language used to express oneself, social situation and moral attitude. She showed that the interviewees from the poorest group avoided the term poverty in relation to themselves. The term “poor” at that time means submission and dependence; hence, witnesses used a specific defence strategy before church courts – one of self-presentation, emphasising their honesty, diligence, independence, but not poverty when it came to themselves. It was different when they described others. So, in this case, the witnesses made a conscious choice to use language of internal identification (“modest, honest”), which would hide the external identification as “poor” and the social connotations associated with it. The questionnaire of interrogation drafted by third parties thus represents a personal statement.

Emma Griffin analysed 350 diaries written by workers in England from the turn of the 18th/19th century, with subsequent chapters depicting the heroes in political, educational, religious and family relationships³³. Personal sources offered a glimpse of the situation faced by workers “from below”, which turned out to be surprising, different from the traditional vision of oppression and depression in this social stratum. For many of them, the new circumstances of living in a city and working in a factory, despite the difficulties, turned out to be better than memories of childhoods spent in the countryside. Griffin’s book challenged classic social history and the vision based on statistical and tax sources, in which a deteriorating economic situation goes hand in hand with an erosion of political, social and personal freedoms³⁴. By bringing personal sources (diaries and journals) to the fore, a complex and diverse picture of workers is revealed, whose assessment of the world and standard of living was conditioned not only by objective economic and political factors, but also resulted from individual life experiences.

Privacy enshrined in official records

When historians of earlier eras turned to the ego-documentary theory, developed for the needs of sources from the Second World War, they noticed that if they only understood ego-documents to be private texts, they would not be able

³³ E. Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn. A people's history of the industrial revolution*, Yale 2013.

³⁴ E P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, New York 1963.

to say much about the micro-perspective of an individual, especially of someone outside the intellectual elite. Medieval and early modern societies were largely illiterate, and if someone could read and write, for a long time this was for pragmatic purposes only, and not for expressing one's individual vision of the world. Did such a person not have this vision? Well, he did, but articulated only with ephemeral words. Does this mean that his message disappeared completely without a trace? Well, no, but the personal experiences and views of the average man of old were not recorded in private texts, but in official, in court records. Here, a faithful account of the testimonies of witnesses or defendants always had great evidentiary value. In their time, these testimonies formed the basis for harsh sentences, often imposing the death penalty, while today they have remained a valuable source of knowledge about the views and attitudes of people from the past.

It is not surprising that historical and anthropological studies, which are classical in world historiography, were based on protocols of court hearings. Here we cite just two. The first is *The Village of Heretics* by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. These heretics were the Cathars, and the village is Montailou in southern France at the turn of 14th century. The source of information about the views and life of the Cathars (the pure ones) was the testimonies given by them before the inquisition court during the Albigensian crusades against the Cathars. The south of France returned to the bosom of the Catholic Church, and the Cathars were immortalised in court records³⁵. The second is *Cheese and worms. A 16th century miller's vision of the world*. This miller, Domenico Scandella, known as Menocchio and a resident of northern Italy, built his own private theogony and cosmogony in his free time. He came to the conclusion that just as worms emerge from cheese (at that time animate matter was believed to be spontaneously generated from inanimate matter), so all beings, including angels, hatched from the original chaos. Of course, in the light of Christian doctrine, this heresy was perhaps only more bizarre and amusing than others. It is possible that such alternative theogonies and cosmogonies were created by many Christians unaware of the unorthodoxy of their ideas. However, Menocchio differed from them in that he liked to share his thoughts on various occasions. As a result, he stood twice before the inquisition tribunal, the second time as a heretic – a repeat offender

³⁵ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou. Wioska heretyków 1294–1324*, transl. E.D. Żółkiewska, Czerwonak 2014.

sentenced to death. Extracted by Carl Ginzburg from the files of his court cases, it has gained considerable popularity in our times³⁶.

While Polish historiography lacks such spectacular works based on court ego-documents, there is no shortage of decent, reliable works with a high level of methodological awareness. For the sake of balanced exemplification, two Polish examples shall be cited here. The first is *People of the highway in the 17th-18th centuries* by Bohdan Baranowski, delving into the lives and minds of these poor, illiterate people living outside the privileged social classes such as the clergy, nobility, bourgeoisie or peasantry in their higher stratum of serfdom. The liberty of these free-wheeling people, naturally close to the social margin and the criminal underworld, was only apparent. Not surprisingly, these people were brought to court more often than others, and this is an opportunity for researchers. B. Baranowski attempted an extensive and thorough analysis of court testimony, which is the main source base for his research. He devoted an entire chapter to them, eloquently entitled *Lives enshrined in the torture chamber*. The question of torture also arises in the second example. This is relevant when taking into account the credibility of court testimony. I will now give the floor to B. Baranowski, who wrote as follows: "Peasant memoirs apparently only have a very short pedigree. Even in the 19th century, few peasants knew how to put pen to paper to record memories from their lives. Only in the 20th century did peasant diaries become more numerous. However, those were different times, and the cultural level of the village was also different. However, one ought to remember that from the period from the 16th to the 18th century we also have a significant collection of over a thousand, and perhaps several thousand, authentic biographies of peasants, free-wheeling people, vagabonds who, although they did not have the ability to write, nevertheless gave fairly accurate accounts about the paths of their lives. Certainly, from the formal point of view, these were not memoirs, but biographical material sharing many features typical of memoir literature. In accordance with the rule in force in the judiciary of the former Republic of Poland for any criminal case, if the accused was not well known to the judiciary, he would be carefully interrogated about his origin, life history, etc."³⁷ Only after the scribe had recorded this sometimes meticulous biography, running from half to several pages, did the judge proceed to questions about the crime itself. This practice was generally applied by all courts of old

³⁶ C. Ginzburg, *Ser i robaki. Wizja świata pewnego młynarza z XVI w.*, transl. R. Kłos, Warszawa 1989.

³⁷ B. Baranowski, *Ludzie gościńca w XVII-XVIII w.*, Łódź 1986, p. 24.

Poland – rural, urban and municipal. So maybe there are many more of these court autobiographies than the few thousand according to Baranowski's estimation?

The problem that torture was applied during court proceedings offers historians no peace of mind. Marcin Kamler, representing a different generation of historians than B. Baranowski, explored this topic in his book entitled *The criminal world in Poland of the 16th and 17th centuries*. He wrote: "Judges inquired about the details of the crime itself, about companions and accomplices, about other crimes committed in the past, sometimes about motivation behind them, as well as about the origin and previous escapades of the accused, about the work or service they were engaged in. All this paints a fascinating, direct picture of these people's lives, not to be found in any other sources from this era, and most importantly – a true picture, personally drawn by its heroes. Fears that the credibility of these confessions is in doubt because some of them were extracted under torture, or given under direct threats of torture in the struggle for life, do not seem justified. Detailed analysis of hundreds of testimonies, often intersecting and confirming each other, ensures that the vast majority of the information is true. Even if sometimes the defendants testified falsely, these were just single cases – both concealment of a crime and confession under the influence of torture to an act that had not been committed"³⁸. Clearly, what constitutes the strength of court testimony as ego-documents, their autobiographical narrative, should not be questioned even in the face of torture and fear thereof.

The privacy present in historical sources from later epochs until ours has not received such thorough attention, although studies devoted to biographies (*curricula vitae*) as components of personal files prove that the significant saturation of the archival holdings with self-testimony is a principle that may be applied to all historical epochs.

Ego-documents in archival holdings – the ego-documentality of archival holdings

Archival holdings contains various dispersed texts classified as ego-documents: diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, private correspondence – so, in general, personal texts of a private nature. It also contains a much larger number

³⁸ M. Kamler, *Świat przestępczy w Polsce XVI i XVII stulecia*, Warszawa 1991, p. 10.

of official texts, involving many situations where a government office provokes or forces a personal narrative: testaments³⁹, supplications, wills, biographies (*curricula vitae*) as attachments to official applications⁴⁰. Is a testament written by a professional writer not a form of self-testimony? Is a supplication to a feudal lord, transcribed on behalf of an illiterate peasant, not our only glimpse into the worldview of said peasant? Not only do we learn a great deal about the fate of simple people, we also discover their world of values, which a professional writer would have had no business distorting, especially if the idea was to share them. Does an ego-document necessarily have to be a formally private document? This would hugely impoverish the source base and deprive many opportunities for anthropological research. There are many categories of texts where the author expresses his personality, his worldview, his values, although the circumstances surrounding the creation of these texts are official. Therefore, it is not the private or official nature of the document that is decisive, but the author's ability to break the conventions of a given category of sources, which reveals the author's personality.

Finally, the holdings of a given archive itself, as well as the archival fonds and collections that constitute it, or parts thereof that may be referred to as sections, series, classes, reflect the personality of their creators as their self-testimonies⁴¹. The fact that these creators, government offices, departments are institutional in character is irrelevant. They stand as testimony to a certain legal and bureaucratic organisational culture, yet the organisation is always made up of people and it is they who, despite attempts to standardise their activities, express their personality more or less strongly. Putting archival records in some kind of order (beginning with the formation of office units and ending with the arrangement of an entire registry) imprints the creator's individuality on them as much as the selection of archival records to be included in the archives. This individuality

³⁹ A. Rosa, *Testamenty fordońskie jako egodokumenty mieszczańskie*, „Kronika Bydgoska” 2006, vol. 28, pp. 41–44.

⁴⁰ K. Siuda, *Życiorysy jako egodokumenty*, [in:] *Egodokumenty. Tradycje historiograficzne i perspektywy badawcze...*, pp. 131–166.

⁴¹ A. Rosa, *Egodokumentalność polskiego zasobu archiwalnego*, [in:] *Archiwa – archiwistyka – kultura. Antologia*, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, W. Piasek, A. Rosa, Toruń 2020, pp. 173–183; eadem, *Indywidualność twórcy archiwaliów a struktura zasobu archiwalnego*, [in:] *Archiwa – archiwistyka – kultura...*, pp. 201–211; M. Wiśniewska, *Egodokumentalność archiwów społecznych*, [in:] *Z uczniami, kolegami i przyjaciółmi w świecie nauki. Prace dedykowane Profesorowi Bohdanowi Ryszewskiemu w osiemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, A. Żeglińska, Olsztyn 2014, pp. 255–265.

and uniqueness of the structure of an archival fond, collection or archive is most apparent in the case of public and private archives, where there are no tendencies to standardise the archiving process to such an extent. Archival collections are worth attention and respect to a degree no less than archival fond⁴². Value is bestowed upon collections by their artificiality – i.e., they are created according to certain rules and deliberately thought out. Nothing here is left to chance, so everything stands as testimony to its creator. Archival collections as artefacts are a lauded subject of anthropological research⁴³.

Archival holdings can therefore be treated ego-documentarily and subjected to ego-documentary analysis in an attempt to find features indicating the individuality of the creator (firstly, as archivists, by “creator” we mean here not the direct author of the text, but the one who collected both the texts he created as well as those he received as a whole; secondly, we regard the creator as not only a single person, but also an office, institution, local government body, group or family). This individuality can be found both in terms of an archive, a group of archival fonds, an archival collection, an archival fond, a series of different levels (including subsets or classes), as well as an archival unit and document. The individuality of the archive creator can be examined by analysing the documentation itself and the links between the documents and individual objects – i.e., by the structure that the creator gave to these archives. This analysis therefore includes all the choices made by the creator: what he leaves for preservation and what he destroys⁴⁴.

Various archival entities⁴⁵ are certainly ego-documentary texts or, simply put, self-testimony. However, archival (registrative) connections are not the only type of relationships that link documentation entirely ego-documentary in character. A different genre of these relationships stems from the authorship, joint production by one institutions. These texts naturally disperse, eventually ending up in various archives and archival groups, of producers and recipients. They were never sent so that their originals might be collected in one place, in one group or archive. Letters are the property of their recipients, not their senders. In order to

⁴² The archival fond consists of files from one institution, created by it as a result of its statutory tasks. An archival collection is an artificial creation, composed of objects of various origins, gathered together due to some formal or content feature.

⁴³ W. Chorażyczewski, *Zachęta do archiwistyki*, Toruń 2022, pp. 89–113.

⁴⁴ A. Rosa, *Indywidualność twórcy archiwaliów a struktura zasobu archiwalnego...*

⁴⁵ By archival entities, we mean such constructions as archival fonds, archival collections and archives understood as archival holdings.

examine chanceries and offices, it is not enough to analyse the registers created by their administrators. Likewise with the documentary heritage of a chanceries, one may be tempted to define all the texts as being potentially ego-documentary in nature, produced by one person – it would be appropriate to call this an ego-documentary heritage⁴⁶. During the course of life, a person creates a multitude of such texts, some of which he retains, but over many he loses control; these texts dissipate, are forgotten by the author, or sometimes he simply has no knowledge of their survival or destruction. Eventually, they may be rediscovered by a researcher who will recognise a given ego-documentary heritage.

Indeed, one may talk about a documentary entities that is not an archival entities, but nevertheless carries some information about the author as a whole. What does this consist of: 1) our personal archive; 2) letters that fell into the hands of others; 3) biographies dispersed around the world in the archives of all institutions with which fate has bound us; 4) our statements recorded by the police, courts, reporters of collegiate bodies; 5) children's drawings and cards, of whose survival we have no idea, and which our uncles, aunts, fathers, mothers carefully hide; 6) petitions, applications, submissions to various authorities in which we manifest ourselves; 7) marginal notes made while reading; 8) dedications in books and articles, sometimes sincere, sometimes by courtesy; 9) profiles on social networks that we do not own, but express us⁴⁷.

Concluding remarks: ego-documents from the perspective of archival institutions

To a large extent, archives are unlikely to collect ego-documents as such. Since a great variety of archival institutions, one can find archives that deliberately gather certain types of documentation that are more readily perceived as self-documentary than others. Social archives willingly accept or even produce written accounts and oral history. Diaries, memoirs and private correspondence

⁴⁶ W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, *Egodokumenty – egodokumentalność – analiza egodokumentalna – spuścizna egodokumentalna*, [in:] *Egodokumenty. Tradycje historiograficzne i perspektywy badawcze...*, pp. 11–22.

⁴⁷ A. Rosa, *Human trace on the Internet – the issue of archiving the Web from the point of view of anthropology-oriented archival science*, "Archiwa – Kancelarie – Zbiory" 2015, vol. 6(8), pp. 193–205; eadem, *Ślad człowieka w Internecie – zagadnienie archiwizacji Internetu od strony archiwistyki z antropologizowanej*, [in:] *Archiwa – archiwistyka – kultura...*, Toruń 2020, pp. 213–224.

occupy an important place in a heritage eagerly acquired by archives of all types, especially the archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences, university archives and manuscript departments of academic libraries. A special sphere of privacy is nurtured in family archives that remain in private hands, but also those taken over by public or community archives.

In the last quarter of a century, archives have swung towards “ordinary” people who did not participate in the events of “great” history. What was relevant was their subjective experience of historical events, the impact of macro-history on the private lives of “ordinary” people, everyday private and social life. Public archives are ready to support bottom-up initiatives aimed at creating social and family archives, and provide them with methodological and technological assistance. They work on developing archival sensitivity in society, manifested by the desire to preserve archives produced by individuals and their families, searching in the resources of institutional archives for materials concerning individuals and their families, and obtaining copies of them. Thus educated, people will not be indifferent to anything considered worthy of preservation. They will begin to collect archival materials created neither by themselves nor their relatives, nor in connection with themselves or their relatives. They will collect them for their safety and preservation. However, if they discover that some archival records that they were able to secure are supplementary to an entire collection already stored somewhere else, they will return them there so that everything may be in its right place, and not necessarily at their place.

In light of the above, archival holdings are full of ego-documents. However, how to show users that self-testimonies are present in an archival resource? Strictly speaking, this is impossible, because no text is an ego-document *per se*; only when subjected to an ego-documentary analysis, in the context of specific research, does it become such. Of course, one may think of catalogues, repertoires or guidebooks that indicate texts usually treated as ego-documents – autobiographical accounts and private correspondence. Then, registers of private letters, diaries, memoirs will be created rather than registers of ego-documents. Any such archival assistance is useful, as long as we do not believe it unconditionally, but merely treat it as a control group in relation to our own inquiries. Such aids, however, will cast to the wayside a lot of texts that could be subjected to ego-documentary analysis but without constituting “classic” self-testimony. While it would make sense to indicate places where supplications or testaments occur, the inclusion of such informants in court testimonies or biographies would mean the creation

of some records of court files or personal files in general. Such broad search characteristics would not be effective. A basic archival description based on an archival unit, or sometimes just a series, is sufficient to reach all the records that should be analysed – i.e., first extracting records from the archives that are suitable for ego-documentary analysis. Archival and source analyses of individual diplomatic forms may be of real value, showing their ego-documentary potential and referring to the types of archival collections and series in collections where the sought after texts can be found.

Finally, the ego-documentary perspective encourages archivists themselves to self-reflect⁴⁸. What distinguishes them from other people? Is this now a specific view of the world of human society bound together by documentation? Documentation records human activities, achievements, social position and property status. Archives guarantee the durability of our identity. Therefore, the preservation of archive materials becomes the overriding goal of an archivist's work. In order to achieve this goal, in borderline circumstances, one might even enter into cooperation with an opponent of one's own social group (e.g. nation), if only in this way the security of the archives can be ensured. One can go as far as archival disobedience – i.e., acting for the good of the archival holdings in accordance with one's own conscience, even in spite of instructions from above⁴⁹. In peaceful circumstances that do not require heroic deeds, being an archivist means solid, everyday work, performed with mindfulness, which was defined in the concept of slow archives.

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⁴⁸ A. Rosa, K. Siuda, *Analiza egodokumentalna pamiętników archiwistów jako przyczynek do poznania mentalności określonej grupy zawodowej*, [in:] *Pogranicza archiwistyki*, Toruńskie Konfrontacje Archiwalne, vol. 6, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, Toruń 2019, pp. 85–100; K. Siuda, *Archiwista na powstańczym Żoliborzu. Dziennik Piotra Bańkowskiego z perspektywy egodokumentalnej*, „Archiwa – Kancelarie – Zbiory” 2016, vol. 7(9), p. 212.

⁴⁹ W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, *Ku globalnej wspólnocie archiwistów*, [in:] *Archiwa, źródła, historia. Prace ofiarowane w siedemdziesiątą urodziny Profesora Władysława Stępnia*, ed. E. Rosowska, H. Wajs, Warszawa 2018, pp. 58–68.

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