

Forest Germans: a forgotten ethnic group in the contemporary landscape of the Polish Carpathians

Abstract

In the 1340s, the Kingdom of Poland expanded eastwards, prompting large-scale settlement in the Wisłoka and Wisłok river basins, formerly a borderland between Poland and Ruthenia. This initiative integrated German and Polish settlers, who became known as the “Forest Germans” (Polish: *Gluchoniemcy*). Led by King Casimir the Great and Lesser Poland magnates, Germans settled around Biecz, Krosno, and Łańcut, introducing advanced flax processing and contributing to the region's development. Villages established under German law gained self-government, and village courts were formed. By the late 15th century, some German villages became Polonized, although German was still spoken in certain areas until the late 16th century. The 1624 Tartar invasion devastated the region, accelerating its Polonization. By the 20th century, the term “Forest German” had largely disappeared, and research into this community's history and settlement patterns remains limited.

Keywords

Forest Germans • Germans • Carpathians • ethnic group • Poland

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The first chapters of the history of German settlers in the Carpathian Foothills on Polish lands

The former Polish–Ruthenian borderland is situated in the Wisłoka and Wisłok river basins in the south-east of contemporary Poland. Before the middle of the 14th century, this area was sparsely populated, except for a narrow strip along the Wisłoka River, which had been colonized by monasteries and bishoprics since the 11th century for the purposes of Christianization and economic development. The scattered knightly villages, by contrast, were defensive on account of their proximity to borders (Dobrowolska 1985; Klemenski 2025). The limited deforestation and settlement were due to the region being a wide borderland separating Lesser Poland from Red Ruthenia. After the death of the last princes of Ruthenia in the early 14th century, the region attracted interest from several neighbouring powers. Polish King Casimir the Great eventually annexed key Ruthenian territories in the 1340s, transforming them into internal Polish lands and promoting settlement efforts (Bieniak 2000; Paszkiewicz 2002; Klemenski 2025).

These territories – which include an area of previously untrammelled frontier forest – could not be colonized by the Polish population as the Polish lands themselves were not densely populated. There was, however, a substantial surplus population in German-speaking areas. These people were therefore invited to colonize these wilderness regions. Both the Polish initiators of the colonization and the German immigrants were primarily concerned with economic benefits. Every major migration was carried out under special legal norms that took into account the expectations of the immigrants and the interests of the Polish State. The colonists were granted preferential settlement conditions,

which further accelerated the wave of German colonization in the East. This is known as part of the *Ostsiedlung* (East Settlement) in German historiography (Lück 1934).

Polish researchers have distinguished several German-language islands clustered around such centres as Biecz in Lesser Poland, Krosno and Łańcut in Ruthenia, Wielopole Skrzyńskie, and Pilzno in the Sandomierz Palatinate in the 14th century (Blajer 2007; Chromik 2017; Klemenski 2025). The intensive settlement of the western part of the region, centred in the town of Biecz, is closely associated with the colonization efforts of King Casimir the Great in the 1340s and 1350s. This town was predominantly settled by Germans. Additionally, many surrounding villages have names of German origin (Binarowa, Olpiny, Rozembark – now Rożnowice, Szymbark, and Szywnald) or feature a high percentage of German surnames among the peasantry. Another significant urban settlement with a predominantly German character was Krosno, located in the eastern part of the region. Several villages were established around this city by settlers from the West in the 1350s. In 1594, Emperor Rudolf II's envoy to the Zaporozhian Cossacks, Erich Lassota von Streblau, crossed the Beskids. He passed through Jaśliska and soon arrived in Rymanów, where “almost every common man speaks German more often than Polish” (Lassota von Streblau 1866). A third area of notable German settlement was around the city of Łańcut, whose name is derived from the German “Landeshut”. There remains strong evidence of the German origins of the surrounding villages. It is likely that this wave of German settlement was associated with the arrival of colonists from Saxony and Thuringia (Klemenski 2025; Doubek 1932).

The influx of Germans into Polish–Ruthenian territory represents the final phase of the medieval German “conquest”

of the East. This extensive migration movement might have continued had the Black Death not decimated Western Europe in the 1350s. The subsequent centuries were marked by alternating periods of tranquillity and disruption, particularly in the 17th century, which saw brutal Tartar and Turkish incursions. The most brutal and destructive Tartar invasion of the former Polish–Ruthenian borderland, in 1624, decimated the villages in the vicinity of Łańcut and tore apart the existing social structures. Despite these challenges, the surrounding towns and villages prospered, benefiting from profitable trade routes to Hungary and Black Sea ports. Polish and German chroniclers of the 15th and 17th centuries described the Carpathian Foothills as a region that stood out on the map of Poland, with a significant German-speaking population that cultivated German traditions and taught their Polish neighbours profitable agricultural practices. In this context, Marcin Kromer from Biecz deserves our attention. Kromer came from a patrician family with deep roots in the area. As such, he had a good grasp of the history and characteristics of the Carpathian Foothills. In his work *On the Origin and Deeds of the Poles*, first published in 1555, he wrote that King Casimir the Great, noticing the devastation of Poland and Ruthenia caused by wars and plague, brought in Germans and allowed them to settle. Thanks to their diligence, Poland quickly began to grow in population and development (Kromer 1555).

The mid-16th century records are the most informative in terms of German rural settlement in the Carpathian Foothills. They reveal that villages were established and inhabited by settlers from German-speaking regions, that a variant of German continued to be spoken there, and that the settlers set a good example of economic and infrastructural order. Drawing on personal experience, Maciej Strykowski addressed these facts in his 1582 compendium of knowledge about the history of this part of Europe titled *Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia, and all of Ruthenia*: “in 1355, King Kazimierz settled German people in Subcarpathian Rus, devastated by Lithuanian invasions, and their descendants, known for skilled farming, still live in villages near Przeworsk, Przemyśl, Sanok, and Jarosław” (Strykowski 1846). Strykowski most likely took the date of settlement and its motivation, namely the need to repopulate areas that had been depopulated following hostile invasions, from Marcin Kromer’s chronicle. However, he also claimed that he had seen the German villages he mentioned with his own eyes. Stanisław Sarnicki, who wrote *Yearbooks on the Origin and the Deeds of Poles and Lithuanians, Eight Books* (1585), partly relied on Kromer, although he supplemented his knowledge of the ethnic landscape of the Carpathian Foothills with Sarmatian mythology. According to Sarnicki’s narrative, King Casimir the Great, after conquering Ruthenia, brought colonists from Germany to the Carpathian Foothills, as evidenced by the names of towns and villages. He unequivocally confirmed the industriousness of the German settlers and claimed that they supplied Poland with horses, cattle, canvas, butter, cheese, and similar products (Sarnicki 1587). Marcin Bielski, the author of *The Polish Chronicle*, printed in Kraków in 1597, also admitted to drawing on Kromer’s work. He wrote that Germans were settled here:

to defend the borders from Hungary and Ruthenia, but because they were a sturdy, non-warlike folk, they were turned to farming and cattle, because they make good cheese, especially in Spisz and in the Foothills; others also spin flax well: therefore, linen from the Foothills is most abundant here with us (Bielski 1597).

Similar to Sarnicki, Bielski linked the economy of the local Germans not only with animal husbandry products (e.g. cheese), but primarily with linen production, for which the region came to

be renowned. Another aspect that Bielski touched on was the putative reason for inviting Germans to the Carpathian Foothills – namely, to defend Poland’s borders. This naturally raises the question as to whether this supposition was the result of Bielski’s personal reflections or whether it was a presumed continuation of the ancient tradition of having German colonists settle the borderlands for defensive purposes, as illustrated, for example, by the network of fortified churches erected by Transylvanian Saxons. This analogy, however, might have been somewhat automatic, as evidenced by the narrative of the *Chronicle of Singular Events in Europe*, written by Paweł Piasecki, the Bishop of Przemyśl. The chronicle was printed in Kraków in 1645–1646. In a fragment concerning the struggles of Cardinal Andrzej Batory and the Wallachian voivode Michael the Brave for control over Transylvania in 1599, Piasecki stated that the victorious voivode led masses of Wallachians and Transylvanian Saxons (Piasecki 1645). However, he believed that all of Transylvania, and not just the area around Sibiu, had been colonized by the descendants of war captives that the cruel Huns had resettled from Germany. They were said to have multiplied rapidly, to have settled in the most convenient locations, and to have built the most impressive cities. Importantly, Piasecki acknowledged that similar colonies could also be found in Moldavia and in Polish Ruthenia. As the Bishop of Przemyśl, he was likely well versed in the characteristics of the region. While the statement about countless villages inhabited by Germans around Przemyśl and Sanok may be literary hyperbole, it is at least a reflection of what was taken to be true at the time; – as is the belief in the preservation of German language and customs among the descendants of the settlers who had supposedly been brought there as war captives (Piasecki 1645).

The tales of the chroniclers allow for the extraction of several research axes around which any analysis of 15th to late 17th century German villages in the Carpathian Foothills should revolve. The first axis is language. Identifying German-speaking communities, and determining the period during which they were Polonized, enables the extent of the most intensive colonization to be delineated, namely the colonization that led to the formation of villages with a predominantly or entirely German-speaking population. Their dialects, influenced by isolation and interaction with neighbouring communities, bore traces of ancient linguistic roots and regional variations, and served as a distinctive marker of their identity. The German villages around Biecz seem to have become Polonized in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, while German was still being spoken in the Krosno area at the end of the 16th century and, in the Łańcut area, as late as the second half of the 17th century (Kolpak 2025). The second trait characterizing these communities, according to the chroniclers, was their high level of economic advancement, primarily manifested in their weaving technology – from flax cultivation, through processing, and culminating in the linen trade. The Forest Germans ingeniously adapted agricultural practices to suit the rugged terrain and fertile soils of the forested regions, cultivating crops and raising livestock in harmony with nature’s rhythms. The third research axis, which is not so well documented in the source materials, is the defensive role of German colonization. Hypothetically, these villages could have served as outposts, protecting the Carpathian Foothills against pagan Tartars, and aligning with the ideological defence system known as the “Bulwark of Christianity”. This concept is comparable to the defensive nature of German settlements in Transylvania.

Delimitation of the Forest German Settlement Area (Forest Germany)

In light of the complex historical, cultural, and geographical context of Central Europe, including Poland’s proximity to

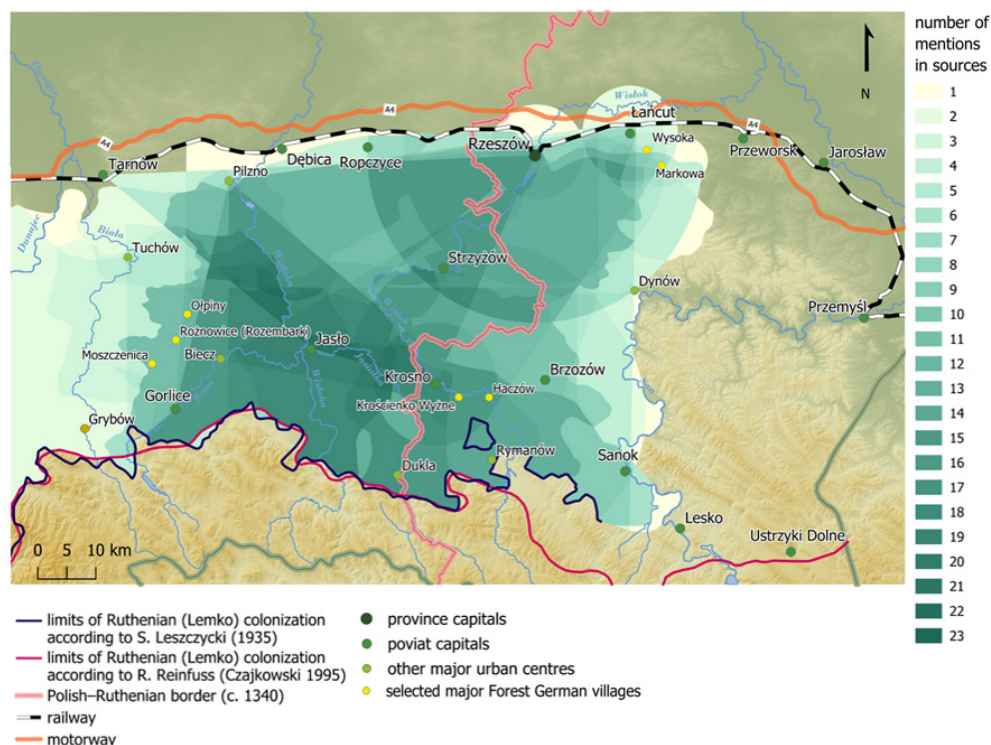


Figure 1. Borders and area of Forest Germany – areas included in the territory of Forest Germany according to the number of mentions in historical sources (17th–20th centuries)

Source: Own elaboration

Germany, delimiting the settlement area of Forest Germans requires careful analysis of sources and literature. No one has ever undertaken a systematic description of the borders of Forest Germany, and the only map (from 1923) is very inaccurate and schematic (Niemcówna 1923, p. 61, map annex). We only have a few descriptions – of varying accuracy – of the boundaries of the Forest German settlement area, dating from the 17th century to the mid-20th century (Biblioteka Warszawska... 1882, p. 304; Borcz 2005, pp. 72–189; Bystron 1935, p. 102; Chmielowski 1756, p. 341; Mycielski 1882, p. 1; "Przegląd polityczny" 1884, pp. 1–2; Fischer 1926, p. 16; "Emigracja chłopska" 1884, p. 2; Gloger 1869, p. 111; Karłowicz 1906, p. 185; Karpiński 1887, p. 160; Liber... 1617–1713; Mss. 1038; Maciejowski 1859, pp. 356–357; Majerski 1921, p. 60; Majerski 1903, p. 271; Majerski 1912, p. 95; Dębicki 1903, p. XXX; Michna 1879, p. 20; Niemcówna 1923, p. 61; Niesiecki 1842 (1989), v. 9, p. 11; Pol 1869a, p. 32; Pol 1869b, p. 87; Siarczyński Mss. 1827, pp. 140, 154, 158–161; Siarczyński 1827, pp. 129–147; Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego... 1880–1892, pp. 612 (v. 2), 151 (v. 8), 155 (v. 10); Szujski 1882, pp. 17–18; Szujski 1896, pp. 17–18; Świętochowski 1939, p. 557; Świętochowski 1928, v. 2, p. 498; Tatomin 1876, p. 59; "Dowcipny manewr" 1884, pp. 62–63; "Petersburg, 31 marca" 1884, p. 4; "Przestroga" 1885, p. 569).

Demarcating the Forest German settlement area comprised several stages and culminated in a series of maps. The first step involved finding as many mentions of Forest Germans in a geographical context as possible. Only texts directly containing the relevant ethnonym or choronym associated with a specific territory were selected for further analysis. The second step consisted in geographically analysing and interpreting the descriptions or images extracted from the sources, and using the results to draw up appropriate maps. The third step involved superimposing the maps obtained in the second step, and colouring the analysed area with a single hue, whose intensity

corresponded positively with the number of instances in the sources (Fig. 1).

During the fourth step, locations indicated merely once or twice were rejected as accidental or as lacking a sufficient basis in the sources (Fig. 2).

The fifth and final step consisted in drawing up a map showing the border of the settlement region of Forest Germans (Fig. 3).

Each step was accompanied by a lot of randomness or subjectivity. Given the vast quantity of sources and literature that had to be analysed, it is likely that some geographic descriptions of the Forest German country were not successfully captured. The geographical and cartographic interpretation of the relatively few sources found posed another challenge (with their interdependence posing an additional one). The picture obtained as a result of the source analysis presented here is merely preliminary and approximate. It requires further definition based on other indicators.

Relics of medieval and early modern German settlement in Forest Germany

The two most enduring relics of Forest German (German) settlement in the Middle Ages and the early modern era are toponyms and surnames. However, it should be noted that the Forest Germans have a mixed ethnogenesis. They are not a German minority in Poland, but a Polish cultural group with German–West Slavic roots. The Forest Germans are the descendants of German, Polish, and other West Slavic settlers from so-called Germania Slavica (Slavic Germany), in what is now, inter alia, Saxony, Thuringia, Czechia, or Moravia, who had been Germanized to a greater or lesser degree (Strzelczyk 1976). Toponyms and surnames of Germanic origin are a necessary

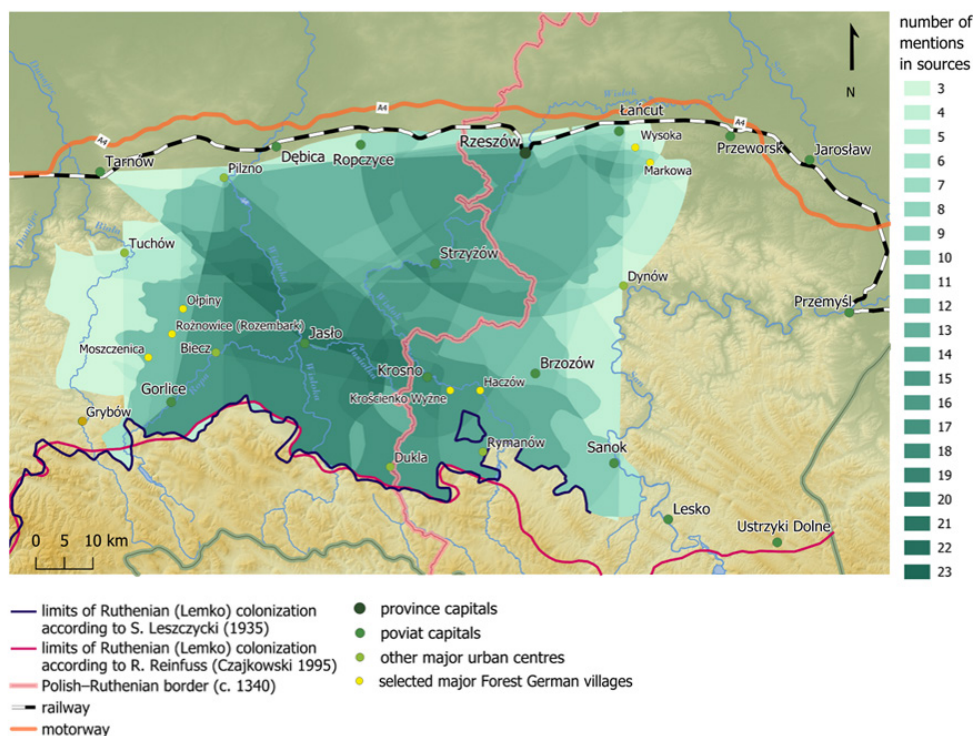


Figure 2. Borders and area of Forest Germany – areas included in the territory of Forest Germany according to the number of mentions in historical sources (17th–20th centuries), and with at least three mentions in historical sources
 Source: Own elaboration

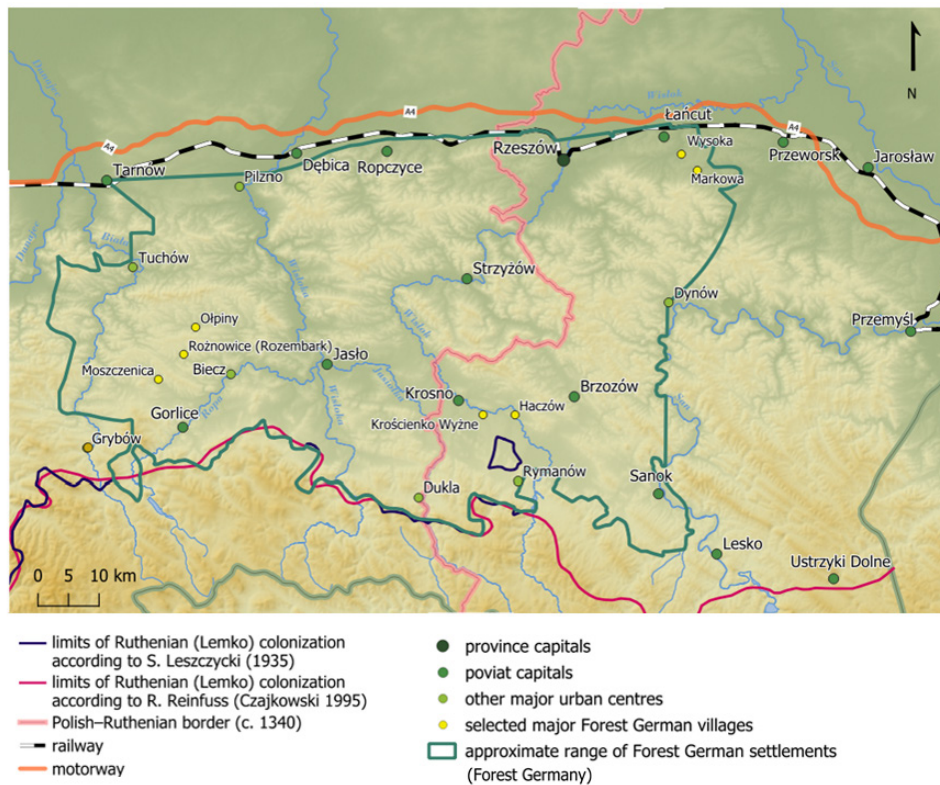


Figure 3. Approximate borders and area of Forest Germany
 Source: Own elaboration

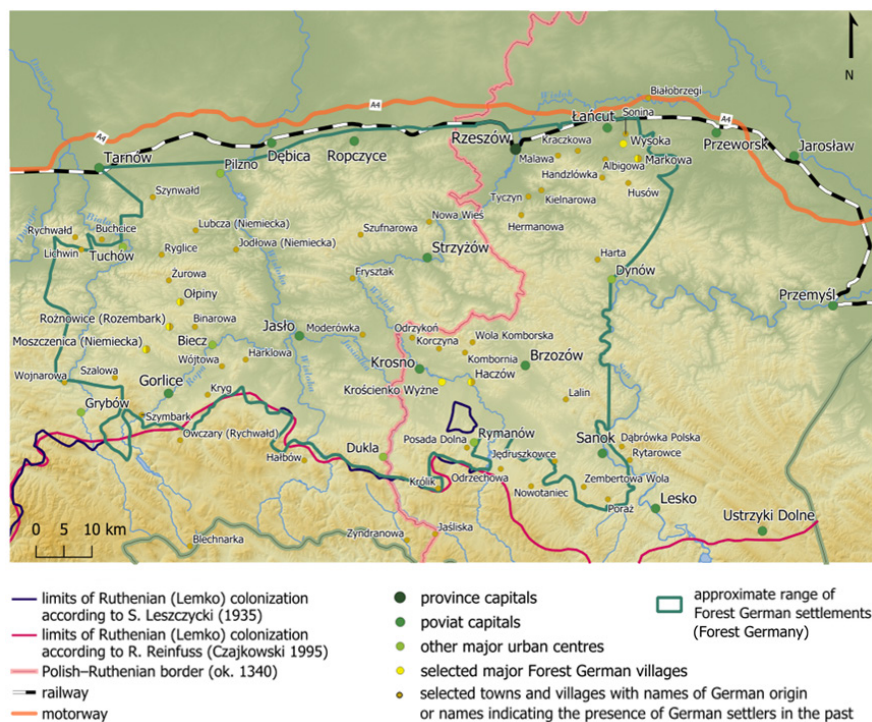


Figure 4. Distribution of selected Forest German toponyms of German or Polish origin that have been distorted under German influence or which once contained an element alluding to German settlers

Source: Own elaboration

element in the cultural landscape of Forest Germany but they are not sufficient to tell the whole story. In the nearly 700 years since its inception, Forest Germany has become a veritable melting pot in which Germanic and West Slavic elements have merged to form a cultural and territorial community. Hence, Polish toponyms dominate in the cultural landscape of Forest Germany, and German ones have become heavily distorted. Traces of the medieval settlement of Germans have basically only been preserved in the landscape in the names of towns and villages (FIG. 4). These date back to the 14th and 15th centuries. In the case of anthroponyms, the Forest Germans may have surnames of German origin, but these are sometimes very distorted or transformed (e.g. as calques), but most of them probably now have Polish surnames.

Forest German surnames raise a number of research challenges. The most fundamental problem has to do with source materials. Record books were made compulsory in Poland at the turn of the 17th century. However, the oldest of these have been very poorly preserved. This is largely because archival resources sustained significant damage over the course of Poland's turbulent history – especially between 1648 and 1945. For the period prior to the turn of the 17th century, there are almost no sources at all. It is high impossible to find larger groups of surnames from the 14th–15th centuries for the vast majority of places inhabited by Forest Germans. Apart from the gaps in the records, it should be borne in mind that surnames in rural communities in Poland were very unstable. They were also often notated in various ways, depending on the skills, education, or physical limitations (e.g. hearing) of the notary, and were subject to mutations as a result of being inflected for age and gender. It should be noted that Polish is a highly inflected language.

Olpiny, in the western part of the region, is one of the villages in Forest Germany where surnames have been thoroughly

researched. Although the analyses are based on data that are incomplete or lacking, they suffice to warrant the conclusion that the ancestry of the population of a typical village in Forest Germany, such as Olpiny, which, in 1510, was categorically defined as a German village, is mixed. At the same time, they allow us to confirm the reduction of the German substratum over time in the total population of Olpiny (Kolpak, Raczyńska-Kruk & Solarz 2024) (Fig. 5).

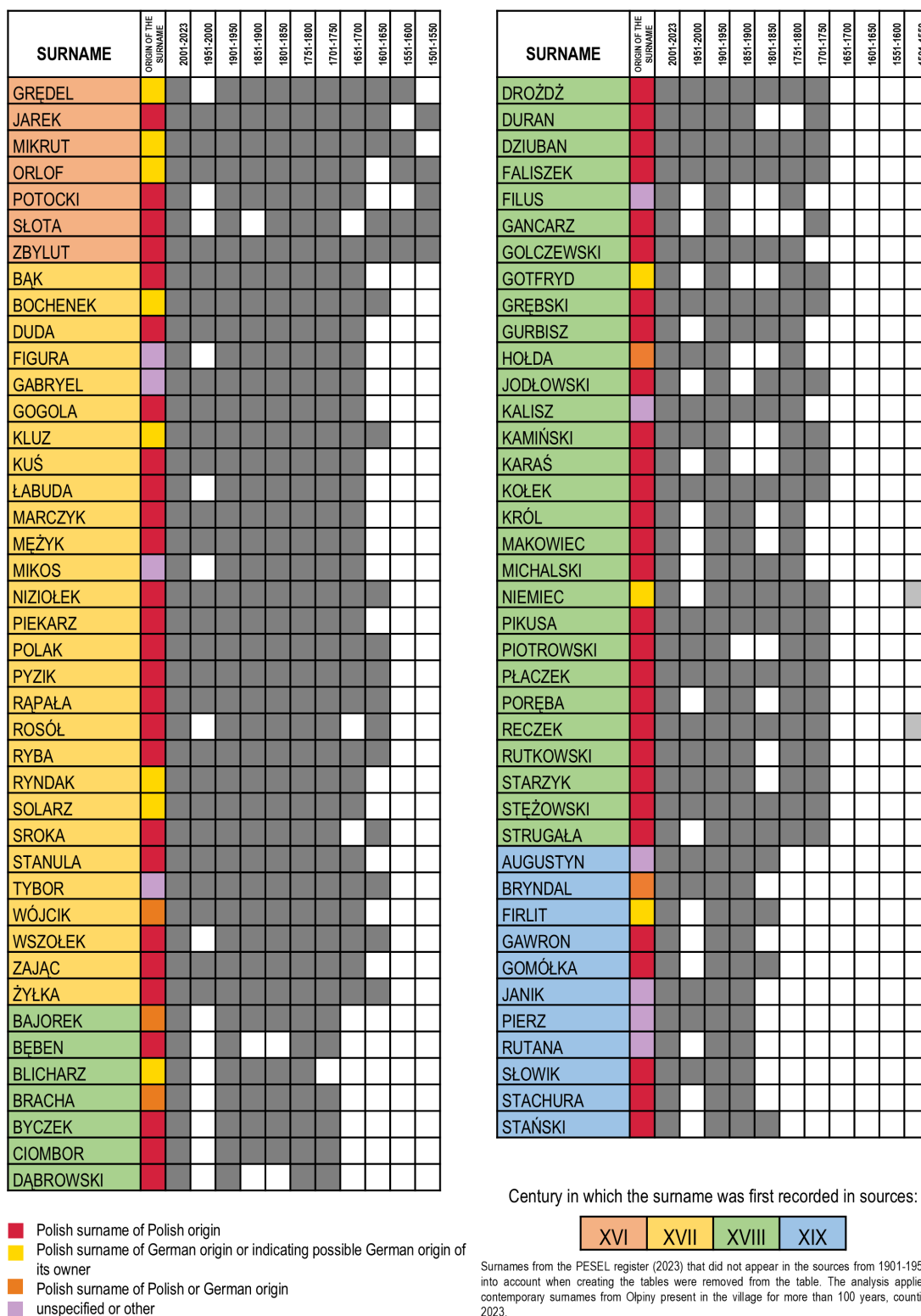
Gluchoniemcy: the term and its meanings

The etymology of the terms denoting the descendants of medieval German settlers in the Carpathian Foothills provides many contexts for its interpretation (Solarz & Raczyńska-Kruk 2023). This paper has adopted the English term “Forest Germans”, which best captures the ambiguity of the Polish name *Gluchoniemcy*, literally translated as “deaf Germans” or “forest Germans”.

The first, socio-linguistic, understanding of the term *Gluchoniemcy* refers to the fact that it originated and functioned at its root as an ethnic stereotype and exoethnonym.¹ The birth of the term falls into the transitional stage between Germanness and Polishness of the descendants of the settlers, namely the 16th–17th centuries (Solarz & Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, p. 115). It described people separated from their neighbours by a double² communication barrier – namely, they were mute and deaf (literally “deaf Germans”). It also might have had a pejorative overtone. This seems to be confirmed by an entry in the records of the Łańcut town court of 1687 (one of the oldest known records of the time). In a case involving a brawl, the assailant allegedly said to the victim: “Your business is linen making, not copper trading,

¹Exoethnonym – a name given by representatives of a foreign group (ed. Staszczak 1987).

²A single communication barrier is expressed in the word “German” meaning “mute” (Solarz & Raczyńska-Kruk 2023).



Ołpiny od XXI w. – ver. 22.04.2025 ANG

Figure 5. Surnames of the oldest families from Olpiny (present in the village before 1950) in 2023, according to their appearance over the centuries and their ethnic origin
Source: Own elaboration

you dog! Polish deaf German!” (Akta sądu ławniczego w Łańcucie, p. 21). The second understanding has geographical connotations. The Polish word *glusza* (wilderness) is derived from the adjective *gluchy* (deaf). As the medieval German colonists settled in the Carpathian Forest, the term can also be understood as “Forest Germans”.

Both explanations were noted in an expanded version of the *New Athens* (*Nowe Ateny*) encyclopaedia (1756) by Fr Benedykt Chmielowski. In defining the term *Glusi Niemcy*, the author pointed to the community of descendants of German colonists as a population in the process of linguistic change (speaking German “so badly”), and to the stereotype of the German as an outsider in Polish culture (Chmielowski 1756). Fr Chmielowski added that these people were the descendants of colonists settled “in a deafening and almost unheard-of country for Germans”, which may be understood as the Carpathian Forest, which straddled the Polish–Ruthenian frontier in the Middle Ages (Chmielowski 1756, p. 341; Solarz & Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, pp. 116–118).

In German literature, there are two names – *Taubdeutsche* and *Walddutsche* – which are secondary to the Polish original term (Solarz & Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, pp. 122–123). Translated literally, they have the same meanings as the Polish terms *Glusi Niemcy* (deaf Germans) and *Niemcy w głuszy* (forest Germans). The term *Taubdeutsche*, as a single word, originated in a German-language publication *The Poles and Ruthenians in Galicia* by Polish historian Józef Szujski in 1882 (Szujski 1882, p. 17, 25). It had previously functioned as two words in German literature as early as the mid-19th century (Berghaus 1847, p. XII). The origin and history of the term *Walddutsche* can be linked to interpretations made in the 1930s by the German Nazi historian and ethnographer Kurt Lück, who pointed to the pioneering nature of medieval German settlement in the forested Polish–Ruthenian borderland (Lück 1934, p. 40).

Forest Germans in Polish scholarly and public discourses

From the end of the Enlightenment (when the Forest Germans were beginning to vanish as a living phenomenon) until the 1930s, scholarly interest in the Forest Germans reflected the ongoing socio-political changes in Polish culture (Raczyńska-Kruk 2023).

The turn of the 19th century was a time of collecting and describing “national antiquities” in the partitions of the First Polish Republic. The activities that led to the emergence of modern ethnography as an academic discipline with a range of research methods and tools are therefore rooted in the ideas of the Enlightenment and early Romanticism. It was a time when “folk” became an issue in (the nation’s) life, and folk studies and descriptions of regional cultures were assigned the task of somehow resolving it (Burszta 1973, pp. 6–7). Dating from this period are the works of historian and regionalist Franciszek Siarczyński (1758–1829), who collected very diverse and multicontextual material relevant to understanding who the Forest Germans were, how and where they were born as a cultural phenomenon, and why their distinctiveness disappeared (Siarczyński Mss. 1827).

During the Romantic era, the Forest Germans became a topic in the scholarly and public debates on the formation of the national consciousness and the identity of the Polish peasantry. Probably the most important accounts, providing reference points for other descriptions of the Forest Germans in this period, were those made by the geographer and ethnographer Wincenty Pol. In his 1869 work *The Historic area of Poland* (*Historyczny obszar Polski*), he outlined their territorial extent with remarkable precision and discussed their language and culture. Pol maintained that the Forest Germans spoke pure Polish and that the customs associated with their German ancestry had disappeared (Pol 1869a, p. 32). However, he signalled the distinctiveness of the phenomenon evident in their attire, which was similar to that worn by the Saxons of Transylvania, as well as

in the occupations of the people: agriculture and weaving crafts. As not only a geographer but also a romantic poet, he used hyperbole, exalting and dividing the attributes of Forest Germans into Polish and German – namely, spiritual and material, ideal and transient. Polish customs and language were elevated to the rank of the highest moral virtues, and the old Germanness was relegated to the physical and the impermanent. This description was a model for the mentions of the relic culture of the Forest Germans by ethnographer Oskar Kolberg and historian and archaeologist Józef Łepkowski. They, however, did not use the term *Gluchoniemcy* in their writings but drew attention to German-sounding names and customs derived from the medieval German colonists (Kolberg 1974, p. 13; Łepkowski 1852, p. 5).

The image of the Forest Germans in Polish humanities and public debate has been expanded by further themes as a result of studies conducted by historian and conservative publicist Józef Szujski. His *Die Polen und Ruthenen in Galizien* (1882) dealt with ethnic relations and historical processes on the Polish–Russian border. Szujski created a kind of quasi-ethnographic theory supported by political arguments. He drew attention to the presence of “remnants of the original native languages, which testifies that at the time of their arrival, every foreigner was called ‘German’”, and the ethnic complexity of the local element (German, Swedish, and even Tartar), as well as the characteristic attire (Szujski 1896, p. 17). To criticize current social phenomena, he also drew a connection between the origins of the Galician peasants living in villages settled by the medieval German colonists and the mass emigration of their descendants to the United States in the 1880s (Szujski 1896, p. 17).

Szujski died on 7 February 1883. Around the first anniversary of his death, the migration theory was recalled by the conservative Kraków daily *Czas* (Time). The thesis of the mental distinctiveness of the people inhabiting the area stretching between Tarnów, Krosno, and Rzeszów also supported an argument about the outbreak of the so-called Galician slaughter in 1846, in which the peasants revolted directed against the nobility (“Przegląd polityczny” 1884, pp. 1–2). Less than two weeks later, social activists and publicists from the Warsaw positivist circle, including Aleksander Świętochowski, who were in favour of the emancipation of the peasants, launched a polemic against this controversial text (“Dowcipny manewr” 1884, pp. 62–63).

Authors at the turn of the 20th century, although fascinated by the everyday life of the countryside and folk culture in general, did not devote as much attention to the Forest Germans (Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, pp. 451–454). The growing national movements in Europe determinedly began to dictate the ways of thinking about culture and history. In the 1930s, ethnographer Jan Stanisław Bystroń and regionalist Adam Wójcik “invented” the Polish ethnographic groups *Rzeszowiacy* and *Pogórzanie* in place of *Gluchoniemcy* (Bystroń 1935, p. 102; *Kurier Literacko-Naukowy* 1936, Vol. 33, p. IX–X). This new terminology facilitated the removal of the term *Gluchoniemcy* and its referent from Polish scholarship for a few more decades. It also prevented the development of regional awareness. The main factor accounting for this lack of interest, however, was the course that Polish–German relations had taken since the end of the 19th century and, in particular, World War II and its political, social, and cultural fallout in the form of anti-German sentiment. The ideological conflict of national origin influenced the criteria for ethnographic and historiographic descriptions of Polish–German relations in the People’s Republic of Poland. Folk culture researchers (e.g. F. Kotula, R. Reinfuss, J. Czajkowski et al.) wrote about the traces of German colonization in the context of the folk culture of *Pogórzanie* and *Rzeszowiacy*, although the term *Gluchoniemcy* itself no longer appeared in their publications. Until the turn of the 20th century, when the works of cultural anthropologists Ludwik Stomma and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz were published, it was absent from ethnographic

writing and other texts – and, as a result, it was not translated or interpreted in any way (Stomma 1986, p. 32; Benedyktowicz 2000, p. 130). Michel Foucault referred to the discourse of knowledge as a set of rules that reflect social, economic, geographical, linguistic, and other factors that are characteristic of a specific era and which determine scholarly statements (Foucault 2002). Seen from this perspective, the history of Forest German studies is the history of the changes that took place in the Polish humanities in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Nowadays, the Forest Germans exist, as it were, anew in the history of their land and the historical memory of their inhabitants. Local identities in the Carpathian Foothills are, on the one hand, an expression of rootedness, reaffirming traditions and local peasant genealogies and, on the other, they are constantly reinvented, transformed, and supplemented with new segments (Karpecki & Raczyńska-Kruk 2025). The German origins of the village are increasingly mentioned by authors of local publications. No less important is the role of the Internet. The appearance of the entry *Gluchoniemcy* in the Polish, German, and English-language Wikipedia in November 2008 should be considered one of the milestones in the process of shaping the contemporary

narrative about Forest Germans. What's more, there are virtual communities on social media, run by local amateur historians, genealogists, and regionalists, that discuss this topic. Therefore, local narratives of the Forest Germans can hardly be called heritage in the traditional sense, since there are so many cracks and blurs in their history. Perhaps, then, we should call it a kind of "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) formed locally (in various local configurations) on the foundations of the relics of old Forest German culture, and with the contribution of scholarly knowledge and collective imaginations.

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