

The memory still endures in the names of the German generations... Forest Germans in Franciszek Siarczyński's anthropogeographical description of Galicia

Abstract

This text analyses the anthropogeographical and ethnographic clues about the Forest Germans [*Glusi Niemcy*, *Gluchoniemcy*] in the Carpathian Foothills by the Enlightenment scholar and priest, Franciszek Siarczyński. In his description of Galicia at the dawn of the 19th century, the author explored the phenomenon of descendants of German-speaking settlers brought to the former Polish–Ruthenian frontier by King Kazimierz the Great in the 14th century. Siarczyński created an account that reflected the processes of describing the rural populations, their culture, and their history in the context of the space they inhabited that were characteristic of the late Polish Enlightenment. Among other things, he devoted considerable attention to the etymology of the term 'Forest Germans', and conducted field observations in the village of Markowa, near Łańcut, where he recorded old songs and elements of the local language, indicating that the residents spoke a distorted form of German. The materials collected by Siarczyński are likely the most detailed among existing studies on the Forest Germans in Polish literature. Furthermore, they provide an insight into the beginning of history of the scientific discourse that has developed around this phenomenon since the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Keywords

Forest Germans • Germans • Carpathian Foothills • cultural diversity • Siarczyński

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The phenomenon of Forest Germans from the perspective of an Enlightenment scholar

The Carpathian Foothills, at the dawn of the 19th century, viewed through the lens of the work of scholar Dionizy Franciszek Ludwik Siarczyński, appear to have been a culturally diverse area. At the time, the peculiarities and ethnic phenomena that were remnants of the First Polish Republic still existed within Galicia. Among these were the Forest Germans [*Glusi Niemcy*]¹, who were the descendants of German settlers brought by King Kazimierz the Great to populate the Polish–Ruthenian frontier in the 14th century following the annexation of Red Ruthenia to the Kingdom of Poland. Their characterization, recorded in the first quarter of the 19th century by Siarczyński, contributes to research into the phenomenon of Forest Germans, reflecting the centuries-long relationship between Polish and German cultures in the Carpathian Foothills. The description was based both on older literature and archives and on observations and documentation of the customs of the people and cultural monuments. From the perspective of contemporary studies, it still contains research-inspiring tropes, especially regarding the etymology of the ethnonym *Gluchoniemcy*, and contexts relevant to understanding the ethnic and cultural transformations that took place in the region from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, which resounds in the cultural landscape even today as locally discovered traditions (Solarz & Raczyńska-Kruk 2023). The question

arises: what factors and paradigms shaped Siarczyński's characterization of Forest Germans? Why, despite its detail, did it not survive in this form in the writings of Polish authors during the Romantic period? It can be argued that this description is part of a broader discourse of 19th century research into the cultural diversity of the Polish lands, as the post-Enlightenment era problematized the presence of elements of German culture in the Polish cultural circle.

Franciszek Siarczyński seems to remain on the margins of Polish academic history and geography. Apart from a monograph (2007) and a few texts (e.g. 2006, 2013) by Agnieszka Kawalec, his profile and work are mentioned only incidentally, usually in the context of regional history. He was born on 12 October 1758 in Hruszowice, in the Przemyśl region (Kawalec 2007). During his time in Warsaw, in the late 1780s, he became involved with individuals from the education and science circles surrounding King Stanisław August (pp. 18–19). In 1789, he took on the role of parish priest in Kozienice for about a decade. Despite prevailing difficulties, he began gathering entries for his *Słownik geograficzny Polski* [*Geographical Dictionary of Poland*], which was never completed (pp. 30–53). In September 1799, he was transferred to Łańcut where he managed the parish for nearly five years at the behest of Princess Izabela Lubomirska (p. 54). Assuming the roles of archivist and librarian, he began delving into documents related to the history of the town and its surroundings. The lively court life in Łańcut took its toll on Siarczyński, and he soon moved (around 1804) to the Collegiate Church of the Body of Christ in Jarosław (Wójcicki 1850, p. 89). It was here, while fully devoted to his scholarly pursuits, that he produced works such as

¹Siarczyński used a two-part name (*Glusi Niemcy*); in later literature, a single name appears (*Gluchoniemcy*). Both names literally mean 'Deaf Germans'; the name 'Forest Germans' is ambiguous (the forest as a deaf place), and better conveys the meaning of the phenomenon (see below for more).

Obraz wieku panowania Zygmunta III [The Reign of Sigismund III] and *Dzieje narodu i kraju Rusi Czerwonej [The History of the Nation and Land of Red Ruthenia]* (Kawalec 2007, pp. 104–115). He also compiled materials for the aforementioned multi-volume Dictionary, which was the first work of its kind for the territory of Galicia and, at the same time, the largest regional dictionary project in Polish literature (Kawalec 2013, pp. 37–40). This period of intense regionalist activity for Siarczyński lasted until 1827 when, at the initiative of Prince Henryk Lubomirski, he was transferred to Lviv and appointed First Director of the Ossoliński Library. He held this position for two years until his death on 7 November 1829 (Kawalec 2007, p. 190).

Siarczyński's scattered and largely underexplored body of work is multidisciplinary in nature, serving as a testament to an era when domains of knowledge were mutually interwoven, and the academic disciplines we know today were still in their infancy. Although Siarczyński is most closely associated with the fields of history and anthropogeography (Jędrzejczyk 1997, pp. 38–39), the narratives extracted from his writings about the Forest Germans exhibit distinct characteristics of a classic ethnographic description, aimed at portraying a people and cultural reality in their geographical and historical context. This refers to excerpts found in the following manuscripts: *Słownik historyczno-statystyczno-geograficzny królestwa Galicji (t. I: Wiadomości ogólne) [Historical-Statistical-Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Galicia (Vol. I: General Information)]*, preserved in both a clean and a rough draft, as well as a rough manuscript fragment of the Dictionary, containing entries from I to M, which includes a description of the village of Markowa, near Łańcut, and a collection of writings titled *O Łańcut i jego dziedzicach [On Łańcut and Its Heirs]* (date not specified), along with *Rozprawa o starodawnych osadnikach niemieckich na Podgórzu i Rusi Czerwonej pióra Franciszka Siarczyńskiego [Dissertation on the early German Settlers in the Foothills and Red Ruthenia by Franciszek Siarczyński]*, which was published in *Pamiętnik Narodowy* (Vol. I) in 1827.

Volume I of *Słownik [Dictionary]*, in which Siarczyński presented the characteristics of the Forest Germans, includes general information from the fields of natural science, anthropogeography, ethnography, and history. The individual entries regarding the culture and history of Galician villages (Volumes II and III) portray the people in the context of local history rather than the purely environmental conditions. For Siarczyński, anthropogeographical space was the resultant action of both the natural environment and society, including the products of its culture: crafts, science, trade, religion, politics, and so on (Jędrzejczyk 1997, p. 39). The categories used by the scholar to describe reality arose primarily from the tenets of objectivist naturalism and the reason-based approach (Bystron & Dynowski 1948, p. 48; Jędrzejczyk 1997, p. 38; Węglarz 2021, pp. 70–71). His attitude, and those of similar collectors of national antiquities, towards cultural diversity was shaped by the concept of the nation as a self-existent and primordial entity, which emerged in Europe at the end of the Enlightenment (Sulima 1982, p. 42; Jasiewicz 2011, p. 38). Siarczyński was inspired in his studies by the works of humanists and naturalists from the first half of the 19th century, including Stanisław Staszic and Jędrzej Śniadecki, who adhered to the concept of anthropology as a science about humans that is much broader than the study of customs (Bystron & Dynowski 1948, p. 47; Jasiewicz 2011, p. 44). At the same time, however, his texts were a response to the need for a description of the Polish lands, including the peoples who inhabited them, addressed to researchers in the face of the division of the First Polish Republic between the partitioning states (Posern-Zieliński 1973, p. 46).

Deaf and mute: a portrait of the foreigners²

In organizing information about the ethnic geography of contemporary Galicia, Siarczyński classified the Forest Germans as Germans, one of the minorities inhabiting this part of the former Commonwealth, alongside Ruthenians, Poles, Armenians, Jews, and Karaites. The explanation of who the Forest Germans were is a component of a larger subsection in the *Dictionary*, where the scholar described the pathways through which the German ethnic element penetrated Polish culture in the Middle Ages, as well as the enduring evidence of these processes that persisted until the 19th century, observable within the borders of Galicia (Siarczyński 1827a, pp. 150–163). The work *Rozprawa o starodawnych osadnikach niemieckich [Treatise on Ancient German Settlers]* (containing information identical or very similar in form to that recorded in the *Dictionary*) also suggests, through its very title, the author's way of categorizing the phenomenon (Siarczyński 1827c, pp. 129–147). While Siarczyński displayed Slavophile inclinations, he did not dismiss culturally different phenomena in his descriptions. What is more, he acknowledged the process of 'mixing with strangers' as a natural element that co-created national identification (Siarczyński 1790–94, *Przedmowa [Preface]*). Such a clear criterion for classifying the Forest Germans largely results from the rules governing contemporary historiography. In later periods, the inhabitants of villages located in the regions of Łańcut, Krosno, and Biecz began to be explicitly defined as Poles – as evidenced by the writings of Wincenty Pol (1869, p. 32), a patriotic advocate of the Carpathians and the father of modern Polish geography and ethnography, and of Józef Łepkowski (1852, p. 5) and Oskar Kolberg (1974, p. 13), among others. It is hard to say definitively whether the Polonization of this narrative was solely a result of transformations in political agendas and national identity, leading to changes in how the past was described, or if it was also, at least in part, a consequence of the Polonization of the original German settlers. It is, however, likely that both factors influenced this situation.

Siarczyński was particularly drawn to the issue of the sources of the German and Forest German stereotypes in Polish culture, a topic that falls within the scope of ethnolinguistic and sociological research. Both depictions, in his view, were fundamentally identical, as they denoted otherness and the existence of communication barriers (which, in the case of Forest Germans – literally 'Deaf Germans' – were intense). The ethnic characterization of the inhabitants of the medieval towns and villages, whose residents were referred to as 'deaf' and 'mute' by the local people, transformed into a multifaceted reflection on the stereotype of the German as a foreigner in Polish culture:

They came from Swabia, whence earlier and later newcomers were generally called Swabians. They might have also come from Flanders, as they were referred to as Flemings or Flondrians, and the term 'Flondry' became a term of derision. The very same reason for which the Slavs once called the Teutons 'the mute Germans' in all branches of their language later served the inhabitants, especially those of the Foothills and Red Ruthenia, to name the Germans settled in this land 'the Deaf Germans'. It probably seemed to them that people who did not understand their speech, and therefore did not respond when asked, must be deaf and mute. In the past, settlers from Germany near Szamotuły were called 'the deaf', because there were German cloth merchants who did not understand the Polish language in those regions (Siarczyński 1827a, pp. 158–159).

²This subheading paraphrases the title of a book by Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, which contains the first mention of the Forest Germans [in Polish, *Głuchoniemcy* is derived from the words *głuchy* (deaf) and *niemy* (mute)] in the 21st century (see Benedyktowicz 2000, p. 130).

The author perceived the Forest Germans less as a cultural group and primarily as a linguistic and sociological phenomenon that arose as a result of the development of German settlements in the Carpathian Foothills. He must have been fully aware that the Polish term *Glusi Niemcy* or *Gluchoniemcy* is fundamentally a stereotype that arose from the need to categorize reality, simplify it, and conceptualize it based on the principle of identification, which organizes the so-called tribal mind and, consequently, the world of the rural population.³ The way he analysed the components of the stereotype exhibits characteristics of classical ethnographic discourse known, for instance, from Bystron's *Megalomania narodowa [National Megalomania]* (1935, p. 102). Siarczyński sought analogies; he also suggested a connection between the terms *Niemiec* [German] and *Gluchy Niemiec* [literally 'Deaf German'] with stereotypical concepts of a derogatory nature (the word *flądra*, originally *flondra*, describing a messy woman – derived from settlers from Flanders – or *Szwab* as a term for newcomers from Swabia, extended to refer to all foreigners, i.e. Germans), which had been adapted into Polish through relations with the expanding German-speaking population in the East. It is worth noting that in *Obraz wieku panowania Zygmunta III [The Reign of Sigismund III]*, he included observations on the etymology of the word *gbur* and linked it to the territory of the Forest Germans. He wrote, 'In Prussia, in the Kraków and Ruthenian Foothills, where there are German settlements, the peasants were referred to by variations of the German word 'Bauer' ('peasant') as 'gebaur', 'gbaur', and 'gbur' (Siarczyński 1861, p. 107, note 21). By outlining the background for the genesis of the image of the foreign German, with all the traits of that foreignness (mute; deaf; with pejorative attributes such as messiness and vulgarity), Siarczyński seemed to suggest that the term *Gluchy Niemiec* [literally 'Deaf German'] may have originally served as an insult. This is supported by one of the oldest records of the term, found in *Akt sądu ławniczego w Łańcutie [Act of the Town Court in Łańcut]* (1687–1694), which states, 'you deaf Polish German dog' (p. 21), along with other accompanying insults: *pludra* and *szoldra*.

Nomina propria, 'corrupted' language, and the memory of customs

Siarczyński sought evidence of medieval German settlements in the Carpathian Foothills 'in proper names of places and German families, some of which have been Polonized, yet still bear unmistakable traces of their German origin; finally, in the established judicial order, in the rights of settlement, and in customs that exist among the Germans' (1827a, p. 150; 1827c, p. 141). These two groups of phenomena – names of places and personal names – as well as customs, including the functioning of village courts and elements of intangible cultural heritage, were described by Siarczyński using specific examples. All of them, in different ways, were shaped by the German language, which survived in distorted forms in proper nouns, everyday speech, and cultural texts such as court records and songs.

'The newcomers used only the German language among themselves, and new villages and towns took on German names that either preserved the memory of past native homelands, such as Krosno, Gorlice, Tyczyn, Pilzno, Łańcut, Frysztak, Felsztyn' – Siarczyński thus referred to medieval German settlements in the towns of Małopolska, not just those limited to the phenomenon of rural *Glusi Niemcy* (1827a, p. 158) – 'or they created new ones,' he continued, 'which over time became so Polonized that the German influence can barely be noticed' (1827a, p. 158).

³It is important to note that the author completely omitted the etymology of the name *Glusi Niemcy*, known from the text of Benedykt Chmielowski (1756, p. 341), which links the settlers to their inhabitation of the former Carpathian Forest area, utilizing the ambiguity of the term *glusza* (the wilderness) (see Solarz, Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, p. 118).

As he pointed out, the processes of Polonization are reflected in some place names (also in rural areas, as evidenced below) and in personal names (1827a, p. 158). The language used by the descendants of German settlers in Pogórze, therefore, was seen by Siarczyński as 'corrupt', meaning a distorted German that eventually led to the development of a local dialect, unique to Markowa and nearby villages. In this way, the author expanded one of the definitions of the term *Glusi Niemcy* as used by Benedykt Chmielowski (see: 1756, p. 341), implicitly considering standard German to be the pure form. He noted that 'in several villages in Pogórze, even today, *Glusi Niemcy* speak such a corrupted German that only they can understand it, and even then, not all, as most have become accustomed to speaking only Polish' (Siarczyński 1827a, p. 161). This 'corruption' of the language and the emergence of a vernacular form, in his opinion, occurred over time under the influence of the dominant Polish language in the area. After visiting Markowa, he recorded several examples of how these processes had influenced local speech:

In some of these 'Forest German' settlements, German had completely fallen out of use, while in others, only faint traces remained in certain distorted, unintelligible words. For example, they still say: 'Koza doytza spracha?' (Do you know German?); 'Schno der fara agath' (Look, the priest is coming); 'Szwind szpano ferda' (Hurry and hitch up the horse). In the Jasło district near Korczyn, household equipment is called 'Gerada', from the German 'Geräthe' (equipment), and brothers call each other 'Estercho', from the German word 'Schwesterchen' (1827a, pp. 159–161).

Regarding the 'corruption' of language, Siarczyński took particular interest in the village of Markowa, located near Łańcut. He wrote in his *Dictionary*: 'For example, in the village of Markowa in the Rzeszów District, the hereditary estate of Prince Henryk Lubomirski, in some families, corrupted German is still used, and they sing religious songs in this language in church' (1827a, p. 162).⁴ He decided to dedicate a separate text to these songs, titled *Zabytek mowy niemieckiej w okolicy Łańcuta [A Monument of the German Language in the Łańcut Area]* (consisting of a fair copy and a draft), written in November 1827 and included in the summary *O Łańcut i jego dziedzicach [About Łańcut and Its Descendants]* (pp. 12–15). It is unclear whether Siarczyński himself visited Markowa to gather the necessary materials or sent someone there to gather information. However, certain parts of his notes, describing his impressions of the level of 'corruption' in the German language and attempts to discern differences in accent and pronunciation by an elder, Jakub Szputnar, suggest the first option is more likely. Above all, Siarczyński's clarification implies this: 'Kuba Szputnar, who dictated this song to me, himself saw it in his youth' (p. 14), along with the structure of his draft notes, which includes overwritten content that reflects the fieldwork setting and the relationship between the source of knowledge (the informant) and the transcriber. The purpose of the meeting was Siarczyński's desire to document verses (along with Polish translations) of songs sung by the residents of Markowa, considered to be local linguistic phenomena – and were, effectively, part of the cultural heritage of the Forest Germans around Łańcut. Although his primary goal was to transcribe the texts, he ultimately created a unique ethnographic note that described the local customs related to the Easter period and provided a general characterization of the language used daily by the inhabitants of Markowa.

⁴Siarczyński includes an excerpt from a resurrection hymn (*Chrysta ist adensztanda...*) in a footnote.

In the late 1920s, Austrian Germanist Franz A. Doubek (1928, pp. 66–87) transcribed the manuscript with the contents of the songs and provided numerous annotations. Doubek, then a lecturer at the University of Vilnius, began with studies on German-language relics in Małopolska, which included a court register fragment from Krzemienica, near Łańcut, and dedicated a separate study to it in 1931 (Doubek & Schmid 1931), which was the start of his engagement with Nazi scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, his article *Ein deutsches Sprachdenkmal aus der Gegend von Łańcut [A Monument of the German Language in the Łańcut Area]* retains some ethnographic value, and its remarks or references to German-language literature cannot be disregarded. Being fully aware of the context in which the author worked, I will aim to extract key elements relevant to the topic from the text. The manuscript of *Zabytek... [Relic...]*, preserved in the collections of the Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław, appears incomplete when compared with the more complete version – with an additional final paragraph⁵ – printed in *Historia literatury polskiej [The History of Polish Literature]* by Michał Wiszniewski (1844, pp. 367–370), the last thinker of the Polish Enlightenment. Doubek's 1928 article already includes an incomplete version, suggesting that one of the pages likely went missing between 1844 and 1928, during the time the archives were still housed at the Ossolineum in Lviv.

Siarczyński made a kind of compilation of several songs, of which three can be distinguished: a Lenten hymn sung in Markowa on Good Friday and Holy Saturday (beginning with the words: *Am Donnerstag zeita...*), an Easter hymn (*Chrysta ist adestanda*), and a Marian hymn (*Der Reiter sey di Igey und har will d'resta...*). According to Doubek, based on his analysis of German literature dealing with folk religious songs, it is challenging to find any analogies for the first of these; it was undoubtedly a crucifixion hymn that emerged in the 16th century and quickly spread throughout Europe (Doubek 1928, p. 74). The *Chrysta ist adestanda* hymn represents a local version of the Old High German Easter hymn *Christ ist erstanden*, considered the oldest liturgical hymn written in German (Doubek 1928, pp. 76–80). However, the Markowa variant was expanded to include a song about three women's journey to Christ's tomb, which was originally a separate hymn (Doubek 1928, p. 85). With this remark, Doubek ventured the conclusion that the chronology of the connection between the two songs may be linked to the second wave of German settlement in Markowa during the time of Konstanty Korniakt (16th century), a point also suggested – although without citing a source – by Siarczyński in the pages of his *Słownik [Dictionary]*: '[T]he entire estate was once the extensive property of the Korniakt heirs, who introduced the Germans here...' (1827b, p. 307). The final Marian hymn, which is neither translated nor found in the original or in Wiszniewski's version, was believed, by Doubek (1928, p. 85), to reference the Catholic faith of the colonists, which directly connects to the researcher's ultimate conclusion about their origins. His linguistic arguments indicate that all recorded songs were initially sung in the High German dialect, suggesting that the people who settled in Markowa in the Middle Ages, and were later reinforced by Korniakt's group, likely originated from southern or central Germany (p. 85). The content of the Siarczyński's manuscript, *A Monument...*, is entirely devoid of references to Christmas carols, which, according to a note prepared under the entry 'Markowa' in the *Dictionary*, were still sung in the local dialect in the first half of the 19th century. '[T]heir pious songs in church', Siarczyński reported (1827b, p. 307), 'are still sung by the people in an incomprehensible language at Easter and Christmas, but it can be inferred that it is a corrupted form of German'.

⁵The text, beginning with the words *Der Reiter sey di Igey und har will d'resta...*, can be found in the draft part of the manuscript (p. 14). Based on Wiszniewski's study, it can be assumed that this song originally formed an integral part of the fair copy, preceding the ending.

The Forest Germans and their territory

The relationship between man and geographical space was an important point of reference for Siarczyński. In his writings, the descendants of German settlers in the area of the former Polish–Ruthenian border are generally referred to as the 'elemental' people, meaning original, or even pioneering. This corresponds to the views on the etymology of the Polish term *Gluchoniemcy*, which is considered synonymous with *Leśni Niemcy* [Forest Germans], or *Walddeutsche* in German (Solarz & Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, p. 122), in the Carpathian region that has been settled since the Middle Ages: 'these settlements [of the Forest Germans] also prove that the land they settled was regarded as the property of the Crown – we read in the manuscript *O Łańcutcie...* [About Łańcut...] (p. 2) – or the king'. Thus, surnames of Forest German families were, in this context, 'original' surnames ('[i]n the surviving descendants of Forest Germans, many of whom have already completely Polonized, the surnames still retain the memory of their original German lineage'; 1827c, p. 141), and their customs also possessed an 'elemental' character (*O Łańcutcie...* [About Łańcut...], p. 3). The concepts of 'elemental population' and 'elemental lineage' were used in this sense, not only by Siarczyński but also by the similarly educated and Enlightenment-loyal priest Andrzej Nowina Ujejski (1801–1867) in his work *Liber memorabilium parafii w Krościenku Wyżnym [Liber memorabilium of the parish in Krościenko Wyżne]*, referring to the German-sounding surnames of the inhabitants of this village near Krosno (2010, pp. 100–105). Therefore, just like Krościenko Wyżne, the Forest German's Markowa studied by Siarczyński was still (i.e. in the 19th century) inhabited by families settled there by Kazimierz the Great. 'From these Forest Germans, the lineage', wrote the author of *Słownik [Dictionary]*, 'is actually the lineage of the first settlement' (1827a, p. 162).

However, not all Forest Germans met the criteria of the elemental people definition. From the introduction to the manuscript *O Łańcutcie i jego dziedzicach [About Łańcut and its descendants]*, it can be inferred that the scholar was aware that not all towns and villages of Forest Germans were settlements established from scratch and settled by German pioneers in the Carpathian Forest. 'Not all [...] these settlements were founded in this way during this time; not one of the places around Łańcut, and apparently even Łańcut itself, was already inhabited by locals, besides the new arrivals, who only populated and expanded it further' (p. 2).

Conclusions

Siarczyński's description of the Forest Germans remains one of the most nuanced studies on this subject in Polish literature. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that it was written at the dawn of the 19th century when the last vestiges of the Forest Germans' living culture were still visible. Moreover, this was a period not yet marked by Polish–German antagonism, which allowed for a more open consideration of the multicultural character of the Polish lands. Unfortunately, this description was largely forgotten (as was most of Siarczyński's output) by later authors – mainly due to trends shaping Romantic era writing and growing nationalist tendencies in European science. Meanwhile, the three anthropogeographical and ethnographic contexts identified by Siarczyński and discussed in this article – the stereotype of the German in Polish culture as the basis for the name 'Forest Germans', the language used by this group, and their relationship with the space they inhabited – help us better understand the nature of this unique cultural phenomenon in the landscape of the Polish Carpathians.

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