

*Section 8. Oral History in Modern Researches*

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**HISTORY OF ONE FAMILY WITHIN THE HISTORY OF EUROPE: THE  
ROBAKS GENUS THROUGH THE LENS OF FAMILY STORIES**

In modern historical science, any life stories or interviews collected and written seem to be a new source - secondary oral history source [6, c. 18]. Surely, this approach is considered to be the most relevant for researches of the recent past. However, those researchers engaged in earlier periods should not reject oral history either. Most of the narrative, chronologically far apart, have not been erased from people's, particularly, families' memory and survived as oral legends. Surely, like any source of personal origin, this source seems to be subjective, but historians of everyday life believe that the subjective side is no less significant than the objective one. This subjectivity reflects global historical processes, and we are going to study it in the case of the ancient Polish family of the Robaks as both family related legends and documents are available and allow in some cases to compare facts.

According to the family oral epos [4, Родовід], the Robaks comes from the Czczots Varangians who served Prince Vladimir the Great for a while, then moved to Polish king Boleslaw the Brave. Apparently, this happened during the

feud among Prince Vladimir's sons, in 1018, when the Poles supported Sviatopolk the Accursed. In 1023, the family was granted Knightly Dignity (Knightly Spurs) for the capture of the Cherven cities. Some Czeczots turned into Robaks after a pilgrimage of one of the family members to the Holy Land. This is a kind of self-deprecation, and means consciousness of himself as a "worm before the Lord" ("robak" is a worm in Polish). One of the outstanding descendants of the family Jan Czeczot shared the legend with Adam Bernard Mickiewicz, who used it in his novel "Pan Tadeusz".

In 1715, Jan Robak is known to acquire part of the Narayevschizna farm (now Gomel region in Belarus) and a bond slave [3, Ф. 319. Оп. 1. Д. 30. Л. 454–457 об.]. This estate became a family nest for the Robaks [7]. Upon the region annexation by the Russian Empire, the Robaks faced a serious problem for the class society – the nobility non-recognition. The Russian Empire understood that if recognize numerous Polish gentry to be nobles, all the rest nobility would be in danger of becoming a minority. A lawsuit began and part of the family, apparently, proved its nobility, and part failed to complete the case. And this resulted in a casus when one brother – Zygmunt – was recorded as "odnodvoret" [9, с. 61] and the other two – the elder Alexander and the younger Walerian – as nobles [8, с. 39; 2, Ф. 965. Оп. 2. Спр. 5. Арк. 153–154]. Documents describing this case are kept at fund 319 of the National Historical Archives of Belarus [3, Ф. 319. Оп.1 Д. 30 Л. 122, 454–457об.; Оп. 2. Д. 2750]. However, the family legend contradicts the archive – the Robaks believed to be deprived of the nobility after the Polish uprising of 1863–1864, followed their moving to Kharkiv [4, Родовід]. In fact, a beautiful legend about their fight for freedom was based on the ordinary lawsuit. According to Krzysztof Robak's data, Kaetan (Anton) Robak was a captain of the Russian Imperial Army and a loyalist, so, he supported the tsar. In this case, it seems logical to move to Kharkiv, otherwise defeated rebels might revenge upon them,

especially, the captain was attacked once [4, Листування з К. Р. Робаком. Тема від 2 лютого 2018 р.].

His sons eventually moved to Kharkiv. First, Alexander went there to study medicine after completion the Mozyr Gymnasium [8, с. 39]. Then he served as a zemstvo doctor in Kursk province. In particular, his descendants are the famous Russian actor, director and producer Alexander Robak and his son Arseniy, an actor as well. Other one, Zygmunt studied initially at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir and then at the Imperial Kharkiv University, and became a renowned otolaryngologist and pediatrician [1]. The third brother, Anthony, studied in St. Petersburg, however was expelled for revolutionary activity and exiled to Kherson province [4, Лист до FATSО]. Soon he and his younger brother Walerian moved to Kharkiv [4, Листування з К. Р. Робаком. Тема від 5 серпня 2017 р.]. After the revolutionary events of 1917, Zygmunt's children left for Poland. One of his sons, Stanislaw, joined the Student Legion and fought against the Bolsheviks near Warsaw. After the war, he studied at the University of Warsaw to become a lawyer [5, Студентське посвідчення Станіслава Робака] and served as a prosecutor. When World War II began, he served in the Polish army and later went underground. He and his wife, Aune Margit, were involved into the Warsaw Uprising. After the war, he worked as a prosecutor in the city of Bydgoszcz. Many family legends are known from his son, Krzysztof Robert Robak. He is also a remarkable personality. K. R. Robak studied at the Lodz Military Medical Academy. Being a representative of the "golden youth" (son of the prosecutor), however, in 1968 he supported the Prague Spring and went to fight against the USSR. However, he was caught and handed over to the state security service of the Polish People's Republic. When he was released from prison, K. R. Robak completed his study and immigrated to the United Kingdom, where worked as a physician [7]. Currently he is retired.

Anthony had three daughters and a son. His grandson, daughter Helena's son, Eustachy Jaroszenko, served in Władysław Albert Anders' Army and was awarded high honors, including the French Legion of Honor. After the war, he came to London, but returned to Poland and achieved the repatriation of his mother and sister, expelled from Białystok after annexation to the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1939. Eustachy's father was shot dead in Katyn as a Polish officer [10]. Another Anthony's daughter, Anna, served as a sister of mercy during the First World and Civil Wars and stayed in Kharkiv [4, Листування з К. Р. Робак. Тема від 2 серпня 2017 р.]. She retained the last name Robak to her son Yuri to keep the noble lineage [4, Родовід]. Yuri participated in World War II; he was a Soviet officer and an athlete. His son, Kharkivian historian, professor Ihor Robak has collected many family legends as well.

Walerian had two sons, one of them, Michael, was an officer in the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and later worked in Crimea as a chief of the kennel for breeding service dogs. In 1938, he was shot dead as a Polish spy. Surely he was not a spy, just appeared to be under repression and was later reasonably rehabilitated [4, Листування з К. Р. Робак. Тема від 5 серпня 2017 р.]. Another son, Marian, a member of the White Movement and the Gallipoli operation, found himself in France. His grandson is French director Alain Robak, a well-known art-house filmmaker.

Thus, the history of one family seems to reflect all the history of Europe, showing its humanized version thorough the lens of achievements and tragedies of ordinary people. And oral history is believed to be very important in this case.

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