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## MARIA ZNAMIEROWSKA--PRÜFFER: AN ETHNOLOGIST AND MUSEOLOGIST

## **Hubert Czachowski**

Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer Ethnographic Museum in Toruń

Abstract: Born in Kybartai, Lithuania, on 13 May 1898, in the 1930s Maria Znamierowska studied ethnology at the Stephen Batory University (USB) in Vilnius under Prof. Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreutz and Prof. Kazimierz Moszyński. She began working at the University Ethnographic Museum established by Prof. Ehrenkreutz; apart from the collection of material culture, the Museum researched into and collected records of oral and musical folklore. M. Znamierowska organized exhibitions on folk construction, and investigated folk fishery, the topic she dealt with in her MA thesis and doctoral dissertation. In 1925, she married the zoologist and entomologist Prof. Jan Prüffer.

Following WW II, Znamierowska-Prüffer and a group of USB professors came to Toruń, where she was employed as lecturer at the Chair of Ethnology and Ethnography of the Nicolaus Copernicus University (UMK). She made attempts to establish an ethnographic museum resembling the Vilnius one at her Chair, however, she was only able to set up an ethnographic section at the Toruń City Museum (1946–1958). Having received Professor's title in 1955, in

1959 she launched a separate Ethnographic Museum in Toruń, additionally establishing an ethnographic park by the museum. Her most important exhibition: 'Traditional Folk Fishery in Poland', was mounted in 1963.

Committed to creating open-air museums in Poland, M. Znamierowska-Prüffer also released publications on ethnographic museology. Having headed the Toruń institution for 13 years, she left the Museum boasting the collection of 15.000 exhibits and an ample Folklore Archive. In 1958-1963, she headed UMK's Chair of Ethnography, however giving museology lectures until 1988. She participated in numerous ethnology and museology conferences around Europe. An active member of the Polish Folklore Association, she held various positions in its structures until 1978, when she became its honorary member. Retired, she continued her in-field research, and worked on her last publication meant to recapitulate all her research into fishery (1988). She died in Toruń in 1990, and was buried there. The Toruń Ethnographic Museum has been named after her since 1990.

**Keywords:** Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer (1898–1990), ethnology, museology, Ethnographic Museum in Vilnius, Ethnographic Museum in Toruń, fishery, folklore, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), open-air museum.

Of the recollections of all the individuals who knew Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer what stands out is the image of a person who is extraordinary, certainly not commonplace, and extremely passionate. It is impossible to overestimate the role she played in Polish ethnographic museology. And this not only because following WW II she created an independent Ethnographic Museum in Toruń, but also because she contributed to the development of the theory of museology, that related to open-air museum as well. Furthermore, she was ethnography professor who successfully combined academic work with museum work.

Recalling her was important for historical reasons, but also because many of her important ideas continue topical and worth reading anew.

Born on 13 May 1898 in Kybartai, Lithuania, where her father Stanisław was an official of the customs chamber, she began her education in 1907 attending the Commercial School in Lipawa where she took her final exams in 1915. Following this, because of the war, life made the Znamierowskis move abroad, to Russia and Romania. At that time Maria attended lectures at the Philology Department of Female Courses in Kiev. In 1919, the Znamierowski family

ended up in Radzymin. Maria started working at an orphanage in Pruszków under Maryna Falska, while Janusz Korczak himself became a great authority for her, which he remained throughout all her life. In 1921, she began studying at the Liberal Arts Department at Stephen Bathory University (USB) in Vilnius, to later begin studies at the Mathematical-Natural Department of the University. In 1925, she married Prof. Jan Prüffer heading the Chair of Zoology at USB. Finally, in 1926, she decided to return to the Liberal Arts Department in order to study ethnology created two years before. The one who founded and headed the faculty was Prof. Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreutz. She had a great impact on the academic development of Znamierowska-Prüffer who turned towards museology.

What mattered a lot in ethnology studies run by Prof. Ehrenkreutz was the University Ethnographic Museum,<sup>2</sup> operating as an Ethnology Unit, while understood as the laboratory of culture in which students, not only on the ground of book materials, could train in morphology of culture products and phenomena.<sup>3</sup> This was to help become acquainted with and understand works of culture and their proper placement in the whole of the structure of the researched community through getting to know its function, but also its proper sense as histories of their own becoming and shaping.<sup>4</sup> The task of a similarly conceived ethnological



1. Maria Znamierowska, Photo 1915

museum, apart from colleting artefacts, also included research into music, dance, and folk literature. Their results could be collected in specialized museum archives. What strikes today is the modern character of this proposal, which can be read as precursory in view of the tendencies contemporarily formulated as part of anthropology of things or research into Intangible Cultural Heritage. Already during her studies, Znamierowska-Prüffer became the first employee of the USB Ethnographic Museum in Vilnius, following the whole career from an assistant to a custodian. Her role was also to develop the concepts of her mentor,<sup>5</sup> if only through the idea to create a museum construction display in the open air as a complementary part of the pavilion exhibition so that the public could see a given culture both in a diachronic and synchronic version.<sup>6</sup> From that moment onwards the protection of folk architecture became a priority for Prüffer. However, as her main investigation focus she chose folk fishery. In the late 1920s she conducted infield research which led to her MA thesis titled Fishery of the Trockie Lakes published in 1930.7 This was the research topic that apart from studies on museology she remained faithful to until the end of her life.

In the mid-1930s, Prof. Kazimierz Moszyński, who had come from Cracow, became the Head of the Ethnology Institute at USB. He is the second individual who substantially impacted the research activity of Znamierowska-Prüffer.8 She gained excellent education in ethnographic museology, quickly acquiring the reputation of an outstanding specialist in the domain. She also contributed to enriching her expertise through numerous trips across Europe. In 1925-38, she visited France, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, and Germany: everywhere she had a chance to see how museology ideas were implemented. Znamierowska-Prüffer had the greatest contribution both to the research works, and plans for the future of the University Museum. She mounted exhibitions, developed collections, and actively participated in the works of the Museum Association in Poland and in its congresses, obviously also the one held in Vilnius in 1934. She strongly emphasized how important it is, in order to understand the whole of culture, and the relations of its particular parts and occurring changes, to investigate folk culture and its academic documentation. Jan Bujak wrote that the Vilnius Museum from the very beginning and in every aspect complied with all the requirements for a modern academic institution, substantially ahead of all the achievements in this respect,9 Had it not been for the outbreak of WW II, the Museum would have become a model institution in this part of Europe, and certainly the main institution of the type in Poland.

In 1936, Prüffer won the position of lecturer at the USB Ethnology Department, and she conducted intense in-field research into traditional fishery in north-eastern Poland, covering the whole of Vilnius, Novogrodek, and Białystok Voivodeships, while preparing a doctoral dissertation under Prof. Moszyński. In December 1939, she was conferred the doctoral degree on the grounds of the dissertation titled *Fishery Bones. Attempt at Classifying Bones for North-Eastern Poland*, so several days before the Stephen Bathory University was closed down by the Lithuanian authorities on 15 December.

During WW II Znamierowska-Prüffer was doing all she could to protect the museum collections, that is why up



2. Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer at the Ethnographic Museum of the Stephen Batory University in Vilnius, the 1930s

to 1942 she continued working at the Museum, which as of 1941 was subordinated to the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. After the German occupation ended in 1944, she resumed work, first at the Conservation Office of the Republic of Lithuania, and later at the Vilnius Museum of Art.

After the war, when Vilnius had been for good incorporated into the Soviet Lithuania, Znamierowska-Prüffer arrived there with a group of USB professors from Toruń, where a new university was to be founded. As of November 1945, she was appointed lecturer at the Chair of Ethnology and Ethnography of the Nicolaus Copernicus University (UMK), headed by Prof. Bożena Stelmachowska. From the very beginning, Prüffer eagerly started organizing a Vilnius-modelled ethnographic museum there. Regrettably, her idea was not shared by other individuals. After this failed attempt, while still at UMK, she managed to create an ethnographic section within the City Museum in Toruń. Even at that stage, however, she was making attempts at creating an independent ethnographic museum. 10 Thanks to her museology experience, as well as extensive go-getting energy, as soon as in 1948, the first permanent exhibition on folk culture of Pomerania and Kuyavia was mounted, this anticipated by numerous in-field researches and collecting trips. Worth mentioning at this point is the fact that the area had not been covered by any ethnographic and museological research prior to WW II, so the exhibition being actually the first one dedicated to this region, was to a great extent made up of the exhibits acquired after the war.

The years of the existence of the Ethnographic Department<sup>11</sup> (1946-58) was the time when multiple undertakings were conducted: from completing the staff and co-workers, 12 through intense in-field research and the development of the collections, to creating exhibitions. The record of the in--field trips over the period is impressive, and demonstrates the incredible organizational skills of Prüffer who managed, despite the time being challenging, to arrange benefits from other institutions for the purpose. Conducting the research from the Podlasie Region, through Masuria, Kashubia, Kuyavia, up to Western Pomerania, they succeeded in extending the collections to over 5.000 items. In her thinking on the ethnographic idea and mission, Prüffer always echoed the broad modern concept of the Vilnius Museum: already at that stage documenting of verbal and musical folklore was begun. As an educated ethnologist, she understood that apart from collecting material objects, in ethnography the simultaneous documenting of material objects testifying to so-called spiritual culture (today we would speak of intangible culture) was necessary, so that a given culture can be known as a whole, and not through artefacts out of the context. By 1958, almost 3.000 records of verbal folklore, and over 700 of musical recordings had been collected. In the early 1950s, Prüffer prepared her post-doctoral dissertation, following which in 1955, she was conferred professor's title. Her book Spiky Fishing Tools in Poland and in Neighbouring Countries was published two years later.<sup>13</sup>

The tireless fight to establish an independent ethnographic museum finally yielded effects in 1959, when Prüffer launched her dream institution: the Ethnographic Museum in Toruń in the building of the former Arsenal, close to Torun's Old Town. The fact that it became an independent institution allowed her as its Director to extend the staff, this in turn leading to more research conducted by Toruń ethnographers. Apart from adapting the Arsenal edifice to house exhibition rooms, collection storage spaces, and workshops, she also began the construction of the so-called new edifice meant to house e.g. library, exhibition room, auditorium, and administrative premises, which was created in 1962. She energetically started working on the creation of the ethnographic park by the museum meant to feature folk construction display. This concept, echoing the Vilnius solution, was implemented in 1969 when the Kuyavia homestead, the first of the planned, was opened.14

In the early 1960s, two permanent exhibitions were prepared under Director Prüffer's guidance: 'Material Culture of Northern Poland' (1960), and its continuation: 'Folk Art and Craftsmanship in Northern Poland' (1956). In 1963, the most important exhibition mounted by Prüffer was accomplished, namely 'Traditional Folk Fishery in Poland'. The exhibition was of clearly evolutionist character, this visible first of all in its arrangement: from the simplest, most primitive tools to developed fishery economy. Both in her exhibition implementations and in research studies Znamierowska-Prüffer echoed Kazimierz Moszyński's critical evolutionism.

In 1946, Znamierowska-Prüffer became member of the Main Board of the Polish Folk Society (PTL), and also through the Society she tried to have an impact on the activity of ethnographic museums throughout Poland, becoming the leading expert in the domain. She shared her expertise and experience through special consultation groups established by the Ministry of Culture and Art: in the Consultation Team at the Board of Museums and Monument Protection (from 1964), and in the Section of Museums and Cultural Goods Protection, as well as in the Consultation Team for Open-air Museum Type (from 1965). Among others, she prepared projects of inventories, scientific catalogue cards, and documentation records, widely applied in ethnographic museums, for the Ministry of Culture and Art. 15 Moreover, of major impact are her publications related to the situation of ethnographic museology in Poland. 16 Prüffer also made a great contribution to the development of such institutions, as e.g. the museums in: Kluki, Szczecin, Gdynia, Białystok. 17 Upon her departure for Switzerland, she undertook activities meant to preserve the collections of the Museum in Rapperswil. 18 Strongly committed to creating openair museums in Poland, she prepared proposals for their organization, which was aimed at the protection of the monuments of the vanishing folk culture. 19 She also appreciated all the initiatives of private and regional collectors as precious actions meant to preserve cultural heritage, thus supporting the most important goals of museums.

Let us now see how M. Znamierowska-Prüffer understood the tasks of museum and its function, both in the context of a scientific discipline, as with reference to its social role. She was of the opinion that museums were first of all research units which should enjoy the same rights as scientific institutes and universities, <sup>20</sup> while work for a museum should

be equivalent to that of university lecturers.<sup>21</sup> She pointed out to the need to teach museologists a broader outlook on cultural phenomena, to reveal the interdependence of phenomena in different spheres of culture.<sup>22</sup> With such an attitude, it is not surprising that under her leadership museum staff prepared monographic works which proved to be valuable publications.<sup>23</sup> Prüffer continued to call to raise the academic level, deepen the methodology of the research conducted by museums, and to develop new methodological questions.<sup>24</sup> This is how she perceived the most important goal of their activity, namely the cognitive goal that social and educational activity faced. The latter, to be purposeful and conducted properly, should have solid academic grounds. Instead, she perceived the social role of museum in a broad dissipating of knowledge of folk culture. It was this attitude clearly visible already in her Vilnius activity that she and her staff later developed. Just to illustrate this point let us remember that already as an acknowledged professor, she eagerly travelled to country schools to give ethnographic talks.

Under the post-WW II situation when the war-inflicted material losses were enormous Prüffer was of the opinion that museologists mainly faced the hard collecting and documentation work. An ethnographer of Modernist inclination, she could anticipate the research difficulties in the migration of people caused by the shift of state borders and clashing of different cultural forms, this occurring in the wake of WW II, which, in her view, required great caution when elements of folk culture were qualified.<sup>25</sup> She was aware that advancing civilizational changes on the one hand constituted a difficulty in documenting traditional folk culture, on the other they brought new challenges to ethnology and the operation of ethnographic museums. This period of the clash of varied cultural forms was for ethnographers a challenge, since the valid paradigm of those days was the search of 'true' folk culture untarnished by other influences. It was not obvious at the time that ethnographic research had to extend to the contemporary phenomena of culture and go beyond the exclusive interest in peasant and rural culture. As it turns out, in this respect, too, her intuition was correct. She did not hesitate to reach for culture documentation also in towns, writing when still in Vilnius that the countryside directly touched on Vilnius and in all directions from the city there were areas precious as for research. 26 In the Ethnographic Museum in Toruń she created the inventory section called varia, in which she entered all the items which in her understanding of the time were beyond the traditional folk culture. However, the very fact of their collecting demonstrates the researcher's openness to the change of definitions, ranges, and topics.

Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer was Director of the Toruń Ethnographic Museum for 13 years. She left behind the Museum boasting over 15.000 exhibits and an extensive Folklore Archive. She combined the work at the Museum with the academic one at UMK, where in 1958–63 she headed the Chair of Ethnography; furthermore, in 1965–88, she lectured on museology at the Post-graduate Ethnography Study which educated many museologists, including staff of open-air museums who transferred her concepts to their respective institutions. Very active in the Polish Folklore Society (PTL), she was member of its Main Board in 1946–78, and its Deputy President for two terms of office. Moreover, she was President

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3. An interview with a fisherman, Dębina, Sławno County, Photo 1968



4. Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer in the course of the open-air museum survey, Toruń 1966



5. Prof. Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday: she is being congratulated by Alfred Arendt, President of the Society of Friends of the Ethnographic Museum in Toruń, Ewa Arszyńska visible in the background, Toruń 1988

(Fot. 1 – M. Jampolski; 3, 4 – Z. Zgierun; 5 – A. Grodzicki; all photographs come from the Archives of the Ethnographic Museum in Toruń)

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of the Toruń PTL branch, while in 1978 becoming its honorary member. From 1972, she was member of ICOM Poland. Still retired, she continued working and publishing her works. She conducted in-field research in Kashubia, the Vistula Bay, and participated in the team research of the Ethnographic Museum in Toruń in the Valley of the Lower Vistula. At the same time she was also working on her last ample publication that summed up her research into fishery, and which was published in 1988.<sup>27</sup>

Her enormous contribution to the development and promotion of museology and ethnology yielded her numerous awards, e.g. Golden Cross of Merit, Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, Medal of the

National Education Commission, Oskar Kolberg Medal and Award, and Medal of Nicolaus Copernicus University for the 'Contribution to the University's development'.

Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer died in Toruń on 20 August 1990, and it was at Toruń's St George's Cemetery that she was buried. While commemorating 40 years of the Toruń Ethnographic Museum, on 15 December 1990, the institution was given her name, and a commemorative plaque was set in the building. The Museum Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer had created was also enriched with her library, as well as all her legacy containing e.g. correspondence with a number of leading ethnologists and museologists.<sup>28</sup>.

## **Endnotes**

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- <sup>2</sup> To połączenie muzeów z ośrodkami akademickimi było stosowane m.in. w Niemczech, zob. C. Baudouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreutz, *O potrzebach etnologji* w Polsce, w: Nauka Polska. Jej potrzeby, organizacja i rozwój, t. 10, Wydawnictwo Kasy im. Mianowskiego, Warszawa 1929, s. 256.
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- <sup>4</sup> Ibidem, s. 87.
- <sup>5</sup> M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, *Muzeum etnograficzne U.S.B. w Wilnie i jego przyszłość*, Nakładem Muzeum Etnograficznego U.S.B. w Wilnie, Lwów-Wilno 1932 (odbitka z kwartalnika etnograficznego "Lud" 1932, serja II, t. XI.).
- <sup>6</sup> Eadem, Muzeum na wolnem powietrzu w Wilnie, Biblioteczka "Włóczęgi" Wilno 1934, nr 2.
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- <sup>9</sup> J. Bujak, Muzealnictwo etnograficzne w Polsce (do roku 1939), "Zeszyty Naukowe UJ. Prace Etnograficzne" 1975, z. 8, s. 80-81.
- <sup>10</sup> M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, Pomorskie muzeum ludoznawcze, Instytut Bałtycki, Wydział Pomorzoznawczy, "Komunikaty Działu Informacji Naukowej" 1946, nr 5(19), s. 1-4.
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- <sup>12</sup> Poza 2 osobami zatrudnionymi Marią Polakiewicz i Kaliną Skłodowską-Antonowicz, Prüfferowa potrafiła zebrać grupę osób współpracujących. Dla niektórych z nich postarała się nawet o skromne wynagrodzenie z funduszy pozamuzealnych.
- 13 M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, Rybackie narzędzia kolne w Polsce i krajach sąsiednich, "Studia Societatis Scientiarum Torunensis" 1957.
- <sup>14</sup> Zob. M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, R. Tubaja, *Przymuzealny skansen toruński i inne muzea skansenowskie realizowane i planowane w województwie bydgoskim*, w: *Muzea skansenowskie w Polsce*, "Biblioteka Muzeum Rolnictwa w Szreniawie" 1972, t. II, s.195-231. W latach następnych park etnograficzny był rozwijany najpierw wg pierwotnej koncepcji, potem uzupełniany o dalsze obiekty w latach 90. XX w.
- <sup>15</sup> A. Trapszyc, Badania nad rybołówstwem i zajęciami wodnymi w Muzeum Etnograficznym Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie i w Muzeum Etnograficznym w Toruniu, w: Przeszłość etnologii polskiej w jej teraźniejszości, Z. Jasiewicz, T. Karwicka (red.), Komitet Nauk Etnologicznych PAN, Poznań 2001, s. 151.
- <sup>16</sup> M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, *Muzea i działy etnograficzne w Polsce*, "Lud" 1959, t. 44, s. 351-390; eadem, *La muséographie ethnographique polonaise et le transformations sociales actuelles*, "Narodopisný Üstav Moravskeho Muzea" 1961, s. 1-9; eadem, *Ethnographic Muzeum collections in Poland*, "Lud" 1964-1965, t. 50, s. 701-742; eadem, *Les museés ethnographic*, "Museum" 1966, vol. 19, no 2, s. 107-116; eadem, *Current development trends in Polish Ethnographic Collections*, w: *Poland at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Scienes*, W. Dynowski et al. (ed), Instytut Historii Kultury Materialnej PAN, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1968, s. 81-87; eadem, *Polskie muzealnictwo etnograficzne w okresie 25-lecia PR*, "Lud" 1969, t. 53, s. 419-452; eadem, *Ethnomuseology and its problems*, "Ethnologis European" 1970, vol. 4, s. 203-206.
- <sup>17</sup> R. Tubaja, Wkład Marii Znamierowskiej-Prüfferowej w poznawanie, dokumentowanie i ochronę zabytków kultury ludowej Pomorza, w: W kręgu badaczy kultury Kaszub i Pomorza XIX i XX wieku, J. Borzyszkowski (red.), IX Konferencja Kaszubsko-Pomorska, Słupsk-Gdańsk 2008, s. 172-192.
- <sup>18</sup> M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, *Organizacja Działu Etnograficznego w Muzeum w Rapperswilu*, "Lud" 1947, t. 6, s. 445-450.
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- <sup>20</sup> M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, *Problemy muzeów etnograficznych*, Zagadnienia oświatowe w muzealnictwie, "Biblioteka Muzealnictwa i Ochrony Zabytków" 1963, seria B, t. VI, s. 43-52; eadem, *Current development trends....*, s. 83; eadem, *Polskie muzealnictwo...*, s. 425.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Eadem, *Problemy muzeów...*, s. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibidem, s. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Np. R. Lange, Taniec Iudowy w pracach Muzeum Etnograficznego w Toruniu, Muzeum Etnograficzne w Toruniu, Toruń 1960; M. Fryczowa, Tradycyjne budownictwo Iudowe Kujaw, Muzeum Etnograficzne w Toruniu, Toruń 1961; N. Szunke, Etnograficzne zbiory muzealne w Polsce w świetle wymogów konserwatorskich, Muzeum Etnograficzne w Toruniu, Toruń 1965; B. Szychowska-Boebel, Lecznictwo Iudowe na Kujawach, Muzeum Etnograficzne w Toruniu, Toruń 1972.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, *Polskie muzealnictwo...*, s. 424.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Eadem, *Problemy muzeów...*, s. 44. Ten temat poruszyła już w referacie w 1947 r. na Zjeździe Polskiego Towarzystwa Ludoznawczego omawiając dwie fale osadnicze na terenie Pomorza z lat 1920-1925 i 1945-1947, por. R. Tubaja, *Wkład Marii Znamierowskiej-Prüfferowej ...*, s. 117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa, Muzeum etnograficzne U.S.B. ..., s. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Eadem, *Tradycyjne rybołówstwo ludowe w Polsce na tle zbiorów i badań terenowych Muzeum Etnograficznego w Toruniu*, Muzeum Etnograficzne w Toruniu, Toruń 1988.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Zob. artykuły w "Roczniku Muzeum Etnograficznego w Toruniu" 2007, t. III: H. Muzalewska-Alexandrowicz, *Korespondencja Cezarii Baudouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreutz-Jędrzejewiczowej z Marią Znamierowską-Prüfferową. Przyczynek do historii etnologii Polskiej*, s. 119-142; J. Jakubowska, *Informacja o listach Kazimierza Moszyńskiego do Marii Znamierowskiej-Prüfferowej znajdujących się w Archiwum Muzeum Etnograficznego w Toruniu*, s. 143-160.