

Introduction

<https://doi.org/10.19195/2084-4107.14.2>

The phenomenon of the mountains as an area influenced by humans relates to their climatic, geomorphological, and environmental distinctiveness. Unlike other areas exploited and settled by humans, the mountains have almost from the very beginning been inaccessible and this has hindered their exploitation and domestication. A preliminary stage of these processes means overcoming the fears they generate and developing various attitudes towards them, attitudes stemming from emotional and rational — intellectual response to them. This is associated with vast spheres of metaphysical experience, which in the past were the basis of various aspects of a religious interpretation of the mountains. On the other hand exploration and development of these areas became possible thanks to people venturing into the mountains, initially through exploration, which with the emergence of aestheticising attitudes to nature and landscape, civilisational progress and economic development was transformed into tourism and climbing — mountaineering and trekking. Thus the history of making the mountains familiar became an important chapter in the history of human thought and creative endeavour.

A separate chapter in the history of domestication and appropriation of the mountains is their economic exploitation linked to their natural assets and fossil resources. Its escalation in the mountains was associated with a growing anthropogenic impact. In other words, the growing presence of the mountains in literature, art, the economy, and thus in social imagination from the mid-eighteenth century onwards became — primarily in European culture (other cultures had their own distinct paradigm here) — a genuine factor of change in the attitude towards the mountains, shifting from hostility and fear to fascination and affirmation. This radical change of attitudes was followed by many new phenomena in European and then world culture, phenomena associated with numerous forms of human activity in the mountains. In the late Middle Ages the mountains attracted attention because of their economic potential in connection with the discovery of strategic raw materials (silver, copper and other metals, later uranium ores and coal) and in the late modern period — owing to the development of tourism and tourism industry, which became a major source of income for various stakeholders. As a result, in the regional context they became a space of unique economic or social arrangements and consequently — of interests and conflicts. This gave rise and is still giving rise to tension and appropriation, especially of political, ethnic/national, cultural, economic, collective, and ecological nature. The appropriation of the mountains by actors and advocates of various interests and social groups — for example, by internalisation of the mountains in supraregional territorial and social discourses — happens not only in the mountains, but also elsewhere.

That is why the articles, notes, and sketches collected in the present, fourteenth volume of *Góry – Literatura – Kultura* seek largely to initiate a discussion focused on a slightly provocative question: “Who do the mountains belong to?”. The authors, representing various Polish and foreign research centres, have attempted to examine the complicated processes of the exploration, domestication, and finally appropriation of the mountains by various groups whose professional, artistic, sports-related, social, economic or political activities have been and still are linked to them. It should be noted that work on the present volume took place during the difficult period of a global pandemic linked to the spread of a hitherto unknown virus labelled SARS-CoV-2. In order to prevent the virus from spreading, during the first stage of the fight against the pandemic the authorities drastically restricted access for most social groups – not just in Europe – to all natural enclaves, including those in the mountains, popular tourist trails, and all kinds of tourist infrastructure located nearby. In this period participants in modern mountain tourism began to manifest their needs associated with their right to enjoy nature twice as strongly, expressing them in a variety of ways, especially via various online fora. Many of them were particularly expressive in giving vent to their longing for “their mountains”, rocks, hiking and biking trails etc. In this context the question “Who do the mountains belong to?” acquired a different, completely new meaning.

In presenting to our readers the current volume of *Góry – Literatura – Kultura*, we have taken the liberty of including in the “Notes” section a “chronicle of the epidemic” reflecting the activity of the Laboratory of Humanistic Research into the Mountains members during the so-called first lockdown, which forced not only lovers of mountains and mountaineering to stay at home. We hope that 2021 will be the year in which the world will be able to overcome the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic and that, as a result, the mountains will remain a space open to all, and that the basic source of creative inspiration provided by the mountains will be a real-life, not virtual encounter with them.

Wrocław, December 2020

Ewa Grzęda