

György KARSAI, Gábor KLANICZAY, David MOVRIN, Elżbieta OLECHOWSKA (eds.), *Classics and Communism. Greek and Latin behind the Iron Curtain*, Ljubljana–Budapest–Warsaw 2013: Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts; Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Studies; Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw, VIII + 576 pp., ISBN 978-961-237-601-7, €29.90.

“Classicists will be certain never to forget the remark of Thucydides 1.22: What has happened already is likely to happen again, ‘according to human nature’. The solidarity of all branches of knowledge could help us to create a novelty that would prevent the future from looking too much like a reflection of the past”. The above quotation concludes the last chapter in the *Classics and Communism* [= *C&C*], written by A. HURST. With these words the author wants to overcome Thucydides’ pessimistic statement, hoping that the lesson of the past will prevent the future from similar damage caused by the communism in our part of the world. It is a pity that we cannot quote Vergil here (*Aen.* I 203): “forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit”. Unfortunately, *non iuvabit*.

The reader of the *C&C* gets a book which is the result of the cooperation of classicists from the area of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Countries. “The idea for this book”, as we read on the last page, “came from ‘*Gnôthi seauton!* Classics and Communism. The History of the Studies on Antiquity in the Context of the Local Classical Tradition in the Socialist Countries 1944/45–1989/90’, a Focus Group Project at the Colloquium Budapest in 2009–2010, convened by Jerzy Axer, György Karsay, and Gábor Klaniczay, and supported by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung”.

The main part of the book consists of three chapters from the geographical area of the Soviet Union, fifteen chapters from the Socialist Countries, and one chapter by A. HURST: “The Fondation Hardt and Classical Philology in the Socialist Countries”. There follow the “Documents” (150 pages), “About the Authors”, and “Index”.

Fifteen chapters are the result of the above mentioned initiative taken in Budapest in 2010, while three chapters were written earlier. Usually each of the authors first presents the situation of classical philology in their country before the war, during the war, and after the war up to the collapse of the Soviet Block. The formal systems in which classical philology and related disciplines functioned, the curricula of teaching classical languages in high schools, the programmes of classical studies, the research, the access to foreign literature, foreign conferences, and the possibilities for travelling abroad are more or less presented in detail. However, the greatest achievement of the authors is their presentation of people, their responses to the political and ideological reality, to the threats to the foundations of European civilization and culture, the role of ancient Greece and Rome in all this, and the main threat of the complete elimination of antiquity from social life. With great appreciation for the classicists of that difficult era, one can say that despite being conscious of the threat, the vast majority of them did their best to control the damage caused to the classics by communism. There were few exceptions, and those who collaborated with the new regime were conscious of their isolation. It is interesting that some prominent scholars of this minority were not party members, though they did the research and taught students in accordance with the spirit of Marxism. There were also shameful examples of collaboration with the secret police, connected with reports and denunciations. In the light of accessible materials, it seems that such persons were really few.

Soviet Russia¹

Olga BUDARAGINA devotes her paper to Olga M. FREIDENBERG, and Aristid I. DOVATUR, two outstanding scholars from the Department of Classics in Leningrad. The latter was sentenced to ten years in labour camps. It is interesting that BUDARAGINA could not get personal files of

¹ All subheadings are taken from the *C&C*.

either scholar, as they are still sealed as secret. Alexander GAVRILOV presents a scholar and poet in a chapter entitled “Jakov M. Borovskij: Poet of Latin in the Soviet Union”. He was born in tsarist Russia, lived out the whole period of the Soviet Union, and died some years after its collapse. GAVRILOV shows in an interesting way how some philologists, in spite of everything, could survive in the Soviet Union without losing face. Dmitri PANCHENKO, in his paper “Classics and Cultural Resistance to the Soviet Regime”, recalls two excellent researchers who were uncompromising and worth admiring: Sergei AVERINTSEV (1937–2004) and Alexander ZAICEV (1926–2000), both of whom were involved in the political opposition to the Stalinist regime and spent years in prison. The author also mentions the journal “Metrodorus”, edited by a group of young philologists in 1979–1982 without official permission – something which was quite unusual in the Soviet Union.

Central Europe

Cornelia ISLER-KERÉNYI remembers her father, Károly KERÉNYI, a Hungarian scholar, philologist, and mythologist, who found himself in Switzerland in 1943, and remained there for good. Obviously, his *curriculum vitae* and career would have looked quite different if he had lived in Hungary. In fact, it was much better for his research that he chose to live in exile. But above all, in Switzerland he was able to conduct his research in accordance with his beliefs, which were far from Marxism. The title of the chapter by Péter HAJDU “The Classics and the Party Line: The Case of Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel” is meaningful enough. We read that he was “a key figure in classical studies during the Communist era in Hungary, both from the view point of his scholarly achievement and his influence on academic life”, although he “had no real chance of assuming a position in the academic world before World War II”. Let us add that there were more such scholars in other countries, and in different disciplines. TRENCSENYI-WALDAPFEL can be treated as an example.

György KARASAL describes in detail the case of János SARKADY, another Hungarian classical philologist who collaborated with the security police. The author is writing about a person well known to himself, so he prefers to quote the documents connected with SARKADY’s activity.

Josef MOURAL writes an essay on Jan PATOČKA, a Czech philosopher “with strong leanings towards classical studies”. The content of MOURAL’s paper is briefly summarised in the initial sentence: “This chapter describes the story of his becoming a dissident hero and martyr – one of the first three spokesmen of Charter 77 – who died in March 1977 exhausted by unscrupulous police interrogation”. In the extensive text the author shows the figure of a dissident against the background of the Czech intelligentsia of that time. Ludmila BUZÁSSYOVÁ brings the history of classical philology in Slovakia at the Comenius University in Bratislava after World War II closer, and against such a background she presents professor Miloslav OKÁL, a great scholar with a large number of publications, and with many hopes and disappointments. The case of OKÁL reveals one of the methods used by the communists for moving aside a significant but inconvenient scholar: reorganizing a unit in the scholarly institution.

David MOVŘIN, in his paper “The Anatomy of a Revolution: Classics of the University of Ljubljana after 1948”, recalls the political atmosphere in communist Yugoslavia, and its dissimilarity to that in other communist countries after Yugoslavia became independent from Moscow. Unfortunately, the situation there was still far from normal. The content of the chapter is expressed by its subheadings: “The Purging of the University”, “The Labyrinth of Academic Survival”, “Classics between University and Resistance”, “A Handful of Omnipotents”. From behind them emerges the gloomy reality at the University of Ljubljana and in Slovenia, being at that time part of Yugoslavia.

The chapter by Nijole JUCHNEVICIENE, “Classical Philology in Early Soviet Lithuania: between the European Tradition and Reality”, depicts the political, social, and cultural situation in the country which after World War II lost its independence and was incorporated into the Soviet Union as one of its republics. Despite that, owing to the attitude of society towards the Soviet reality, the Lithuanians took the opportunity given by *kairos* and recuperated their lost freedom. JUCHNEVICIENE shows classical philology in that context and the continued efforts of the classicists to save as much as possible. “One of their major successes”, as we read, “was to bring Latin back into the so-called humanities schools in 1967”.

The situation of the classics in Poland is presented by three authors: Jerzy AXER, Elżbieta OLECHOWSKA, and Witold WOŁODKIEWICZ. Jerzy AXER, in his informative paper entitled “Kazimierz Kumaniecki and the Evolution of Classical Studies in the People’s Republic of Poland” points out at the very beginning: “The situation of classical philology in Poland was exceptional compared to the situation in other countries of the Soviet Bloc: better than in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, not to mention the Soviet Union itself”. Further, he explains: “Polish classical scholars can serve as a good example of how Solidarity among community, a strong sense of mission, and the emergence of firm leadership enabled such a community to offer resistance, in practice quite effectively, while discouraging repressive action”. In that context AXER brings back the figure of Kazimierz KUMANIECKI, a professor of the University of Warsaw, his teacher and master, who for three decades after the war was a leader and strategist in classical studies. What AXER writes on KUMANIECKI is a result of his personal and direct experience over many years. When drawing the picture of KUMANIECKI’s activities and personal features, the author goes back to the long tradition of intellectual opposition in Poland, rooted in the 120-year history of a nation without a state. The subheadings point out the extensive coverage of the topic: “Historical Background”, “The German Occupation”, “Early Post-War Years”, “Following the Soviet Model”, “The Weight of Classics under Communism”, “Kazimierz Kumaniecki – a Spokesperson”, “Family Background and Early Career”, “Kumaniecki and the Secret Police”, “Resistance through Academic Excellence”, “The Tradition of Polish Classical Studies”, “The Importance of Cicero”, “Kumaniecki’s Political Realism”, “The Legacy”, “Latin Tradition in Poland”, “Post-Communist Reality”. Under the last subheading: “Bibliographical Note”, there is a long chronological list of publications about the life and works of KUMANIECKI. With his chapter AXER pays homage to the leader of Polish classical philologists, and at the same time the text briefly presents the history of classical philology in Poland with a reflection on its future. It also touches on a lot of Polish intellectuals during the war and postwar years. KUMANIECKI was an example of a Polish intellectual who, with some leading writers and intellectuals, turned to the Prime Minister at a crucial moment and demanded more creative freedom and less censorship in the famous Letter of Thirty-Four (1964). With his merits for the classicists in Poland, he can be compared to the tower (*pyrgon*) from an elegy by Callinus, towards which the rest of the fighters turn their eyes.

At the same time at the University of Warsaw professor Bronisław BILIŃSKI was active, but, unfortunately, in a quite different way. Elżbieta OLECHOWSKA presents his case in the chapter under the significant title: “Bronisław Biliński, a Bolshevnik without a Party Card”. He called himself this, while Poles said ironically of such people: “positive non-party members”. BILIŃSKI was more than “positive”. Nevertheless, OLECHOWSKA tries to show his case in a most objective way. BILIŃSKI was the first in Poland to begin scholarly investigation in the spirit of Marxism. He started with Hesiod, showing the aspect of labour in opposition to Homer and his heroes. Fortunately, owing to KUMANIECKI’s strong personality “the Bolshevnik” left the University in 1956.

Witold WOŁODKIEWICZ, in his chapter: “Rafał Taubenschlag and Roman Law in Poland during Real Socialism”, describes the difficult situation of the studies of Roman Law in Poland, and the positive role in this field of TAUBENSCHLAG (1881–1958). He was one of the founders of the “Journal of Juristic Papyrology”. At the same time, the chapter describes in short the history of Roman Law in postwar Poland, the attitudes of people and their efforts to make use of all opportunities to continue research, and to teach students.

In the German Democratic Republic, one of the leading classicists was Johannes IRMSCHER (1920–2000), known in other European countries and also in Poland, a participant in many conferences and in academic celebrations. Isolde STARK revealed him to be a collaborator with the GDR secret police (Stasi) in her paper of 1997². The authoress agreed to republish this paper in English

² I. STARK, *Die inoffizielle Tätigkeit von Johannes Irscher für die Staatssicherheit der DDR*, Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte V 1998, pp. 46–71.

in the *C&C* under the title: “Johannes Irsmscher’s Unofficial Activity for the State Security of the German Democratic Republic”. STARK’s chapter contains passages from reports and denunciations of people and institutions. The reader is particularly stirred by the denunciations of people, their views and beliefs, and private lives. IRMSCHER was very active as an agent working for the Stasi when he was abroad, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Balkans

David MOVRIN, in his chapter “Yugoslavia in 1959 and its *gratiae plenum*: Greek, Latin, and the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties (Cominform)”, reveals the complicated history of postwar Yugoslavia. Right after the war classical philologists were treated as “a remnant of the ancien régime to be done away with as soon as possible.” Fortunately, the situation changed after the “Clash of the Titans. Tito–Stalin Split” (one of the subheadings). The article as a whole is a piece of the post-war history of Yugoslavia; knowledge of this is necessary to understand the fate of classical philology and its scholars. The text is enriched with extensive quotations from various documents.

The paper by Milena JOVANOVIĆ refers to Serbia: “Classics in Serbia 1944–1945: The Case of Veselin Čajkanović”. The period mentioned in the above title, as the authoress writes, means the most cruel “red terror” and “purges” with all the consequences of them. ČAJKANOVIĆ (1881–1946), a classical philologist and popularizer of antiquity, was expelled from the University of Belgrad because of supposed collaboration with the Germans during the war. He was, as JOVANOVIĆ writes, one of the victims of the Court of Honour.

Nikolas GOCHEV’s chapter: “Living with the Ancients: Vasilka Tapkova-Zaimowa, a Biography with a Commentary”, is based on an interview with TAPKOVA published in 2007. The author presents the history of the life of classicists among the Bulgarian intelligentsia. With Tapkova as an example, he presents the reality of researchers in academic institutions in Bulgaria, the mutual relations between scholars as well as between Party members and non-members, the possibilities of scholarly work, etc.

Alexander BARNEA, in his chapter “Dionisie M. Pippidi and the Society for Classical Studies in Romania”, describes the story of an interview with PIPPIDI (1905–1993) conducted in 1982. The interview was to be included in a volume of self-portraits by the professors who taught at the University of Belgrad. At that time, however, only the dictator Ceaușescu and his wife could be publicly honoured. Eventually, the interview was published in the late nineties. BARNEA briefly presents PIPPIDI, the history of her life before the war and in postwar Romania. In BARNEA’s paper, PIPPIDI presents some facts concerning classical philology from her point of view, and the history of the Society for Classical Studies in Romania.

A Crack in the Curtain

The chapter: “The Fondation Hardt and Classical Philology in the Socialist Countries” by André HURST concludes the texts in the *C&C*. The author reflects on the classical philologists of this well known institution which was a kind of asylum for scholars from behind the Iron Curtain. His paper is, *mutatis mutandis*, a kind of satyr drama after the many tragedies that were played on the scene of execrable Communism.

The “Documents” include numerous documents and photos in black and white. At the very end of the book there are notes “About the Authors”, and a useful “Index”.

C&C should not only be read in Europe. The older generation will do it differently than the younger one, but both of them should realize that classical philology has something in it which troubles tyrants. However, will there still be classical philology which could trouble future tyrants, if its condition goes in the direction we often see it in present?

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